

The Impact of Change and Evaluation on Educational Reforms: A South African Case Study

Angeline Setlhako¹ and Vuyisile Msila²

PO Box 392, College of Education, University of South Africa, UNISA, 0003 South Africa
E-mail: ¹<setlhma@unisa.ac.za>, ²<msilavt@unisa.ac.za>

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ABSTRACT South Africa needs to sustain and enhance the more positive aspects of educational change and innovations. Meaningful changes can never be sustained unless proper evaluations are instituted to support these innovations. Effective evaluations in education help in supporting the theory of change and the challenge in evaluation research is usually the lack in planning research that would inform educational outcomes. This case study explores the results from a Secondary School Intervention Programme's (SSIP) evaluation research. Utilising 20 participants that included educators, learners and department of education officials the study employed Carol Weiss's the theory of change, the researchers investigated the effects of this programme in bringing about effective learner outcomes. The researchers found that each of the steps in Secondary School Intervention Programme's plan need to be revisited in order to sustain long term, meaningful educational reforms and learner achievement.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Stronge (2012) writes about the crucial nature of evaluation in improving outcomes. He opines that evaluation can be 'tight' or prescriptive in that it defines common purposes and expectations. "At the same time, it's 'loose' in that it provides flexibility, thereby allowing for creativity and individual teacher initiative" (Stronge 2012:1). The main goal in teacher evaluation should be the enhancement of positive learner growth. Schooling systems need evaluations that can help teachers learn as they enhance student learning. Danielson (2011:35) argues that an effective system of teacher evaluation must answer four questions: *How good is good enough? Good enough at what? How do we know? and Who should decide?* Danielson also argues that evaluation is crucial in ensuring teacher quality and promoting professional development. Experts who stress evaluation concur about how it can improve schools in general. Brown and De Monte (2013) underscore that good teaching should be supporting students in learning how to think, solve problems and expand their knowledge. Furthermore, these authors point out that teachers need improved opportunities to be able to improve learner achievement.

This paper explores evaluation of a South African project that is meant to improve learners' performance in grade 12. Grade 12 (usually referred to as matric) is the twelfth and the last year of schooling and this is where the learners write an examination set by external examiners.

The project that is evaluated here is referred to as the Secondary School Intervention Project (SSIP). The senior certificate or grade 12 (matric) continues to be used as a yardstick to measure the success of secondary schools in South Africa. In many failing schools the poor results elicit stress upon the principal and staff. Arguably, many historically Black African schools continue to produce poor results and this is a cause for concern not only from parents and community but from government. Government has tried to redress the past imbalances in education and is still continuing to do so. However, the effects of apartheid still continue to influence the operations of many schools situated in Black African townships. In the past, the government introduced various catch-up programmes for matrics; winter schools, spring school and various other "catch-up camps" especially for struggling schools. However, this paper focuses only on the SSIP. Evaluation of this project was conducted in one district situated in Gauteng Province.

It is important to understand that evaluation is not merely an accumulation and summary of data and information about a project or programme, but should be considered as a type of research geared towards monitoring and improving programmes or services. Literature on evaluation of programmes explicates that evaluation serves two general purposes. Firstly, it helps to determine the merit of a programme; whether it does work or not as well as its worth, whether it is needed or it has to be discontinued (Shink-

field 2007; Babbie and Mouton 2009). Secondly, it documents the accomplishments of a programme. In other instances evaluation is conducted for the purpose of learning, thus the findings of an investigation are used to improve various processes in an organisation.

As pointed out above, this paper reports on the findings of an evaluation conducted on the SSIP. It wanted to explore how the SSIP achieved its set goals. The main question asked in this study was: What can we learn from the experiences of one district's experiment with the Secondary School Intervention Programme?

Secondary questions posed were the following:

- ♦ What should meaningful change in student learning entail?
- ♦ What should be the principal role of teachers in effecting learner success?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the paper are as follows:

- ♦ Understand what the SSIP stands for;
- ♦ To investigate whether there are any gaps in the SSIP;
- ♦ To explore the role of teachers and learners; and
- ♦ To evaluate the overall operations of the SSIP.

The discussion will however, start by expounding on the SSIP and briefly explicating what the programme entails.

The SSIP in Brief

The Secondary School Improvement Programme (SSIP) was first implemented in 2002 as a result of a high number of failure rates in a significant number of secondary schools across the country. Out of a total of 30 397 learners who failed matric in 2009, two out of three came from the schools targeted by the SSIP (GDE 2012). On the 9th of March 2013 the Gauteng Minister of Education, Ms. Creecy announced the expansion of the Secondary School Improvement Programme to over 300 000 secondary school learners. The South African Government Information (2013) quoted the minister as saying: "SSIP is symbolic of the Gauteng Department of Education's determination to lift the quality of education in schools and to see improved levels of achievement, particularly in those schools which

have struggled to consistently achieve the benchmarks we have set for the province."

The unequal distribution of resources and other debilitating aspects such as poverty in predominantly Black African schools have been found to affect the performance of learners. These lead to the poor performance in these schools. In addition, the minister of education in Gauteng stated that in order to sustain the improvement of the learners' performance in matric, it was imperative to ensure that learners who are currently in Grades 10 and 11 in the same underperforming schools are also provided additional support (GDE Report 2010). While the SSIP is run across the Gauteng Province, the focus of this evaluation is on one district in Tshwane. Tshwane is a district in Pretoria, an area in the north of the city of Johannesburg.

The minister of education announced in 2010 that the programme would run over a four year period while the department increases the capacity of the underperforming schools and educators to improve learner performance. The SSIP provides learners in underperforming schools with additional lessons. Learners in underperforming schools in one locality are clustered and bussed to a common venue so that different schools can conveniently be served under a single venue. All the examination subjects are offered at the SSIP venues. These include Mathematics, Mathematics Literacy, Accounting, Physical Science, Life Sciences and English (First Additional Language).

Initially, the programme's main purpose was to provide extra tuition to the grade 12 learners. However, the education authorities agreed that for the purpose of sustainability and continuity, the programme should include learners from grades 10 through to 11 of selected schools. The tutors selected to facilitate learning in the programme are regarded as effective teachers in their subjects of specialisation. They are selected from a list of teachers who are deemed as producing good results by their districts. This implies that effective teachers will be those who have sustained satisfactory results over the past three to five years, between 80% and 100% in matric in their subjects of specialisation. Thus, their selection is based on evidence of competence and on availability (GDE Memo 15 March 2010). They work with the learners for an average period of approximately 45 days a year. In evaluating this programme the researchers em-

ployed theories they came across during their desk research. A theorist who was found to be relevant for the purposes of this study was Carol Weiss and the next section explores her theory briefly.

Carol H. Weiss and Evaluation

Hanberger (2012) cites several authors including Weiss who state that monitoring and evaluation are crucial in today's society. Moreover, these authors support democratic governance and promote accountability as well as programme improvement. Weiss (1972:4) defines the purpose of evaluation as a process "to measure the effects of a programme against the goals it set out to accomplish as a means of contributing to subsequent decision making about the programme and improving future programming". Her interest in evaluation was always to examine the goals that the programme itself promulgated. Evaluation needs to influence decision making as it ensures that it will be able to improve future programmes. Weiss' theory (1972b) has also been influenced by the political situation as all programmes tend to be influenced by a certain political atmosphere. The political context affects the work of evaluators; evaluators are pressured by political influences. In fact, Weiss and Alkin (2004: 29) contend that there are three principal ways in which politics encroach on programme education:

- (i) *Programmes are created and maintained by political forces;*
- (ii) *Higher echelons of government, which make decisions about programmes are embedded in politics; and*
- (iii) *The very act of evaluation has political connotations.*

Weiss (1998) is aware of the challenges of evaluation. Sometimes it might not be easy for an evaluator to have appropriate tools and techniques to understand fully what is going on. Furthermore, Weiss (1998:5) argues:

Theory-based evaluation is one approach that has a great deal of promise. But trying to use theory-based evaluation is difficult when programmes do not have any explicit- or even implicit-theories, when programmes are amorphous, or when they shift significantly over time... Evaluators cannot rely solely on their expertise in research methodology any longer. They have to understand the programme field.

The above shows the need to plan for evaluation thoroughly. Weiss stresses the need for evaluators to understand a programme and how it works well. This author speaks of what she calls evaluation appreciation. She argues that for practitioners to conduct good evaluation they need to understand what evaluation is all about as well as what it takes to conduct a good study. Furthermore, they need to know what to do with evaluation results. Hanberger (2012) highlights that there is interplay between evaluation and governance. He also points out that all evaluation systems are crucial for democratic governance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers conducted this preliminary qualitative study over 12 months. Six SSIP centres were purposefully selected in one district in the Gauteng Province. Brink (2000) points out that purposive sampling sometimes referred to as judgemental sampling or theoretical sampling is a type of non-probability sampling. It is based on the judgement of the researcher regarding the participants that are typical or representative of the topic being studied. Going into the field the researchers wanted to interview and observe people who are knowledgeable about the SSIP. Initially the researchers did not know how many participants they needed and kept on sampling continuously until data saturation occurred. At the end though three centre managers, nine educators, six learners and two departments of education officials were interviewed. Therefore, there were 20 participants for the evaluation of this programme.

Observations

Teaching was observed in all the three centres under study. The researchers used an observation schedule. The researchers were non-participant observers and did not plan to appraise the teachers at the end of the lessons that were observed. During the classes the researchers observed modes of delivery, materials used, learners' participation, the climate in the learning site as well as any interesting aspects that arose during the lesson. The researchers were also mainly interested in looking at perceived best practices during the lessons.

The centres were each visited on Saturdays mainly. Visiting one centre per day, the researchers were able to have enough time of recording the observed incidents. On school holidays the lessons were held in a “camp-like” environment and classes held in tents erected on open field. Some of the classes though, took place in selected centres or schools during the course of the year.

Interviews

Twenty participants were interviewed during the course of this study. In addition to two departmental officials linked to the programme other participants were as illustrated in Table 1, from each of the three centres:

Table 1: Characteristics of participants from each centre

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Interview Sessions</i>
3 Teachers	Teaching	X ¹ 3
1 Centre manager	Managing	X 3
2 Learners	Learning	X 3

X¹ refers to the number of times that the interviews took place

The nature of questions asked to all participants largely included how they perceived the SSIP. The teachers were asked how they saw their role and whether or not they were making any difference. The teachers were also asked about their selection; how they were selected and what motivated them to be in the programme. The departmental officials were asked about their vision and the role of the district officials in the improvement of the matrices. The learners were each asked questions about their perceptions of the programme and the impact SSIP was making in their studies. All the questions were semi-structured.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Tutors

The tutors selected to facilitate learning did not appear to practice anything differently from what they are used to in the classroom. In the classrooms observed much of what was happening was

teacher- centred with the teacher “imparting essential knowledge” to the learners. Most of

the time, the learners were passive and listened attentively. It was also clear in the various sessions that the sessions were examination focused and results driven. Learners’ involvement was lacking in the sessions as teachers appeared to be emphasising certain sections in the various subjects. This however, made sense when the tutors explained that their brief was to improve the matric results and ensure that many learners would pass. Therefore, critical thinking was not among the main objectives of the tutors.

The selection of the tutors was also an interesting aspect. Some of the tutors in these centres were selected because of their expertise in their schools as well as their previous years’ results produced. However, it was interesting to find one tutor who stated that she was not teaching grade 12 at her school but was selected to be one of the tutors in the programme. Selection was supposed to happen among grade 12 teachers.

Teacher Practice and Development in SSIP

One of the crucial points stated by one of the participants was the aspect of “waste of money” and resources in the SSIP. This participant added that instead of developing and training more teachers only a handful of matrices is “empowered” for examinations through the SSIP. Of course, the paradox in this is that teachers are not using innovative ways of teaching but are there to prepare the learners for examinations. Two things can be learnt from this experience; learners might not be getting any better teaching because if they have been used to this kind of rote learning at their schools – they will find the SSIP centres providing the same. Teachers might also find themselves short-changing the learners as they try to “teach to the test”.

The SSIP misses an opportunity to do what Bill Gates refers to as the need to “revolutionise teaching” (Youth Incorporated 2013). The government needs to celebrate the pockets of success and promote excellence in teaching. More money needs to be invested in developing and rewarding excellent teaching. The SSIP misses an opportunity of selecting the best practices and ensuring that the effective teachers teach other teachers. When the latter happens, skills would be invested in schools rather than in a programme with a limited vision; where skills are

not widely and judiciously distributed. There are a few aspects that are not happening in the SSIP that should be taking place. Firstly, the programme is not changing teacher attitudes; it fails to sustain teacher change or even make teachers to be agents of change. Teacher excellence is also not emphasised by the programme.

Changing Teacher Attitudes and Values

Another crucial aspect needed to improve any system of education is to start with teachers in schools. Educational reforms need to start with teachers who some authors refer to as street-level bureaucrats (McLaughlin 1987). New policies that require introducing changes need teacher inputs. McLaughlin (1987:174) cited Lipsky who stated that policy is transformed as individuals interpret and respond to it. That which is delivered through policy depends on the individual at the end of the line or “the street level bureaucrat”. Teachers are the ones who have to eventually implement new policies. Policymakers should then regard the teachers’ input seriously. Frequently, when new policies do not work out in practice, many people blame the teachers. Technocrats may assume that their policies are very good but maintain that when these fail it is due to the lack of the teachers’ competence (Tyack and Cuban 1995).

Policies that seek to develop teachers should start with teachers. However, “in most cases, that end is the improvement of student learning. Professional development programmes are systematic efforts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students” (Guskey 2002: 381). All conscientious teachers would like to enhance their skills to better their learners’ achievement. Yet, some teachers in the study intimated that they were in the programme because of monetary gain. They hardly displayed any enthusiasm to change the life of the learners in a meaningful way. The learners were in earnest being solely prepared for the examinations. On the one hand the latter may be the “strength” of the programme in that some learners might pass because they were prepared well for the examinations, however, on the other, the learners might miss the chance of understanding effective learning.

The programme was instilling a sense of apathy; that teaching is burdensome rather than a

service to learners. The changing of teacher values and attitudes is not achieved in the SSIP. Guskey (2002) points out that models used by professional teacher development leaders do not change the attitudes and beliefs of teachers, especially those from underperforming schools. The SSIP should have been an opportunity where effective teachers learn about best practices. When teachers are able to change their learners’ practice for the better, they are able to become part of a meaningful change. Guskey (2002: 384) states:

Attitudes and beliefs about teaching in general are also largely derived from classroom experience. Teachers who have been consistently unsuccessful in helping students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds to attain a high standard of learning, for example, are likely to believe these students are incapable of academic excellence. If however, these teachers try new instructional strategy, and succeed in helping such students learn, their beliefs are likely to change.

In the programme it was clear that the teachers did not really believe that many learners would perform better. Many of these learners come from disadvantaged backgrounds and were in the programme because of poor performance. The teachers’ experience in their own schools was enough to convince them that few will make it with decent grades of 40% and above.

Teachers as Agents of Change

One aspects that the SSIP as a flagship programme should be aiming at is to make teachers involved ambassadors for change; agents of change. Fullan (1993) talks of the need for teachers to have a personal vision, an increased commitment and most of all, to perceive teaching as a practice that is a moral profession. Fullan explains the moral purpose is close to change agency; moral purpose implies making a difference – concerns about improvements. The teachers in the study did not display this moral purpose. Under pressure to deliver “instant success” they come to the programme to teach to the test. These are challenges to teachers as agents of change especially in a country with South Africa’s history of divided education system. Richardson (2004: 4) points out that a lot of unfreezing and unlearning is required- “for somehow the whole mental map that teachers fall back on at times of

stress, with its continua of more able/less able and cooperative/challenging has to be examined and altered". The only way that meaningful change will happen in education is when teachers magnify their role as change agents. The first step towards this is to unfreeze and unlearn much. This requires re-education and complete overhaul of belief system and values. The teacher participants did not show this necessary zeal in the study. Many were merely reproducing their usual practice in their schools.

Teacher Excellence

Excellent and effective teachers will enhance learner success. Committed, effective teachers inspire learners to do more. Learners can see this commitment and internalise these values over time. The SSIP coordinators were also supposed to select the best teachers although one would tend to question this after interviewing the teachers. Some did not reflect this commitment as they appeared to be in the programme "just to make extra cash". There is much potential in the programme to develop excellent teachers, however, the manner in which it is administered denies the development of such teachers.

Learner Experience in the SSIP

Learner attendance in the programme is an interesting feature to focus on. During the months of April and June attendance in some centres is very poor. However, in October, just before the examinations the centres accommodate more learners who are eager to learn about examination strategies. The challenge in the study though was to determine learner motivation during class because the classes are more teacher-centred with teachers employing the telling method. The emphasis was more on how to answer questions and what questions to expect. The teaching did not seem to probe in the readiness of the learners especially those who rarely receive effective teaching in their schools.

As pointed out above, one hundred percent of the learners in the programme come from disadvantaged backgrounds, with less social and cultural capital. They come from schools with few or no resources and they have been stuck in these schools since primary schools. Therefore, the SSIP can be arguably being said to be dealing with the at-risk youth whose families are trapped in these less resourced schools. Years after the dismantling of apartheid historically

Black African schools continue to struggle; the inequalities between these schools and former White schools are still huge. Many able Black African parents leave the historically Black African schools to bus their children to former white schools in their backyards or neighbourhoods to bus their children to former white schools. The latter might be an indication of how the spectre of apartheid still looms large in the current education system. The post-apartheid government is still trying to redress the past imbalances although there are still schools that do not have the basic facilities such as toilets and science laboratories.

Timeaus et al. (2011) point out that among others, many teachers in previously Black African schools are products of teacher colleges where they were given poor training during apartheid era. This challenge makes it difficult to establish the professional skills needed for the education system and to equip teachers with effective techniques to perform high quality work. "African students' performance levels are lower than other racial groups in part because of their socio-economic background" (Timeaus et al. 2011). The quality of schools determines the chances of its learners. The quality of education the learners receive has an effect on their chances in life and poor quality education is a poverty trap (Youth Group 2011). The SSIP facilitators teach a majority of such at-risk learners.

The learners interviewed praised the SSIP emphasising its value as it helped them in preparing for the matric examinations. The learner participants stated that the facilitators in the learning centres "were better because they answered the previous examination question papers". Yet one cannot look far as to why the learners appeared satisfied with the delivery and teaching in the programme. They were used to the kind of teaching at their schools. The SSIP learning centres endorsed that style of teaching and learning. The teacher-centred approaches stress rote learning that the learners are used to in their own schools. The challenge for many learners as learnt during class observations, was how they would struggle breaking the poverty cycle. While a reasonable number from the group could pass the examinations; the challenge was what they would do with that certificate. Passing an examination is one thing and doing something with that achievement is another. There is much literature that sheds light on the underpreparedness of learners who go to higher education institutions after grade 12 in South Afri-

ca. One would wonder whether the SSIP is not unintentionally contributing to this vicious cycle.

The SSIP Another Lost Opportunity?

Arguably, the SSIP is a very well intentioned programme that should have been long introduced in South Africa, but not in its present form. Its goals should not be only to improve the examination performance of learners as it currently does. It should be looking at improving and empowering a large number of teachers. There will not be any need for centres if the same money can be invested in preparing effective teachers who in turn will teach others in schools. The SSIP should begin by empowering a large number of teachers instead of selecting a few who do not do things differently. But continue to teach to the test. The programme should be developing teachers who know the essentials of effective teaching. Cruickshank and Haefele (2001) support the latter view as a crucial benchmark for developing effective pedagogy. These authors write about ten variations of effective teachers that could be looked for when teachers are developed. Teachers who have the following qualities are supposed to be regarded effective teachers (Cruickshank 2001:29):

- ♦ *ideal* - these teachers meet standards set by school principals and other authorities;
- ♦ *analytic* - they use observation techniques to record how well they are meeting their instructional intentions;
- ♦ *effective* - teachers bring higher learner achievement;
- ♦ *dutiful* - teachers perform assigned teaching duties well;
- ♦ *competent* - teachers pass tests that indicate that they have certain attributes;
- ♦ *experts* - teachers have much knowledge and can do more in less time;
- ♦ *reflective* - teachers examine the art of science of teaching to become thoughtful practitioners;
- ♦ *satisfying* - teachers please learners, parents or caregivers, colleagues, supervisors and administrators;
- ♦ *diversity* - responsive- teachers are sensitive to all learners; and
- ♦ *respected* - teachers possess and demonstrate qualities regarded as virtues.

These are some of the qualities that the SSIP should be developing in teachers who will be able to develop their peers. In this way the learn-

ers can be exposed to good teaching at their schools all year round. It is critical that South Africa needs to develop more effective teachers and this is the only way that learner achievement can be attained. The country does not need only passes in matric. It needs learners who will be critical and self-reliant. It needs learners who will be able to help boost the economy of the country. The post-apartheid South African education wants to produce a critical learner taught by a critical educator. The policy document points out that the system of education should be different to that underpinned by apartheid education. "The curriculum seeks to create a life-long learner who is confident and independent, literate, numerate, multi-skilled, compassionate, with a respect for the environment and the ability to participate in society as a critical and active citizen". The SSIP loses this chance of inculcating these values as laid out in the policy. Instead it (unintentionally) affirms rote learning strategies. Craig et al. (1998: xi) argue:

When teachers are actively involved and empowered in the reform of their own schools, curriculum, pedagogy, and classrooms, even those with minimal levels of formal education and training, are capable of dramatically changing their teaching behaviour, the classroom environment, and improving the achievement of their students

CONCLUSION

The SSIP as pointed out above should be among the solutions that South Africa has always needed over the years. In fact, South Africa has a number of programmes that have a potential to bring about panaceas for some of the endemic challenges in education. However, where we lack is effective evaluation that seeks to improve these initiatives. The evaluation above was a budget constrained study and one can assume that with enough budget even more effective evaluations can be conducted. Evaluations of this nature should look at possibilities such as improving teacher quality in order to improve learner achievement. Teacher development is an ongoing lifelong process. The SSIP should be a programme that makes effective teachers champions in the change process. This programme needs creative teachers who would show how teachers can teach differently, with learners' aspirations in mind. Below, the paper closes by looking at recommendations drawn after the study's completion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Whilst the researchers acknowledge the potential of the SSIP, they drew four recommendations from this study. Firstly, there would be no necessity for a project such as the SSIP if the money invested in this programme is rather invested in the professional development of teachers. A sample of teachers from schools can be selected for professional training. They would need to be exposed to best practices that should be used in schools. When these conscientious teachers complete their training they should go back to their respective schools to train their colleagues. This is far reaching and is more cost effective than spending money on a few matrics who will leave schools after this intervention. It will make sense to invest more in teachers than in a programme that only focuses on results than critical thinking.

Secondly, if the SSIP has to continue, there needs to be more thinking invested in the programme. Learners should not leave school without an emphasis in critical learning skills. Maybe because of what it is supposed to accomplish (raising the matric pass rate) the SSIP hardly helps in the enhancement of critical thinking. Many learners might pass with good grades but they might not succeed in life post-matric, due to the lack of critical thinking skills.

Thirdly, the department of education needs to understand that effective teaching and good education is not only required at secondary schools only. The SSIP clearly shows that the professional development of teachers is expected in secondary schools only. However, effective education needs to start from primary schools. There should be professional development of teachers and improvement of learning in all schools. Primary school learners who get effective teaching are likely to make good secondary school learners.

Lastly, there should be more programme evaluations in programmes such as the SSIP. Many times various government departments will have flagship programmes that are meant to improve service delivery. All these are well-intentioned and have clear goals. However, the weak aspect in these is the absence of evaluation. Few programmes will be improved without the necessary evaluation. As seen in the discussion of

Weiss's work above, programme evaluation helps in anchoring a project in future.

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