

Teaching Physical Education: The Challenge for Further Education and Training Life Orientation Teachers in a Rural Area

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this inquiry was to explore and describe the implementation of the Physical Education (PE) outcome by Life Orientation teachers in the Further Education and Training (FET)¹ phase in rural schools in the Mpumalanga Province. The researchers adopted a qualitative approach in order to explore and describe each of the contexts in which the PE outcome was taught. The paper included a case study of three schools, as well as a survey of all 25 schools in the district, which is the focus of this paper. The findings discovered a non-alignment of the implementation of the PE outcome to the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). As a result, implementing the PE outcome was extremely difficult for these Life Orientation teachers. While conducting the study, the researchers were able to identify the numerous problems facing the Life Orientation teachers implementing the PE outcome in these rural schools.

INTRODUCTION

The democratic elections of 1994 marked a turning point for both, the country itself and for the people living in South Africa. The adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996, Act 108) provided the basis for curriculum transformation and development in South Africa. A new Learning Area, Life Orientation, which addresses knowledge, values, attitudes and skills about the self, the environment, responsible citizenship, a healthy and productive life, social engagement, recreation and physical activity as well as career choices was developed and implemented by the Department of Education in 2003. Of particular interest to the researchers, was the positioning of Physical Education (PE) as one of the outcomes in this new Learning Area. The PE outcome envisaged by the Department of Education promoted the holistic development of the individual, which, in turn, would enable the learner to make a meaningful contribution to society.

As PE specialists who believe in the value and worth of PE, especially in its new guise within the Life Orientation Learning Area, the researchers noted, with concern, the fact that many

schools had not managed to implement this outcome successfully. Several schools, especially in the rural areas, did not have teachers with adequate subject knowledge, nor did they have sufficient facilities, equipment or support structure to enable them to teach the outcome effectively. As a result, the effective implementation of the outcome appeared to be severely compromised. Beekman (2007), in a situation analysis done in a rural area in Mpumalanga Province, confirmed this observation when the Life Orientation teachers and curriculum implementer¹ stated their problems with regards to the implementation of the PE outcome in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase. Although the new curriculum was only introduced in Grade 10 in 2006, Grade 11 in 2007 and came into effect in Grade 12 in 2008, there were already noticeable gaps developing between the policy and the process of implementing it. It was with this understanding of the tension that existed between what the Life Orientation teachers know and what they were expected to know, as well as the discrepancy between resources and support required for effective implementation that made the researchers choose to investigate the problems facing Life Orientation teachers implement-

ing the PE outcome. The purpose of this inquiry was to explore and describe the implementation of the PE outcome by Life Orientation teachers in the FET phase in rural schools in Mpumalanga Province.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Fullan's (2001) description of factors affecting the implementation of innovative curricula. McGraw (1994), cited in Saunders et al. (2006) made the statement: *Programme implementation can be influenced by many factors, including the implementers' level of motivation and skill, access to resources, and other unanticipated factors and barriers*. The three main implementation categories that guided Fullan's theory in this study were: the characteristics of change, local factors and external factors.

Fullan (2001) referred to the characteristics of change being the need, the clarity, the complexity and the quality or practicality of the change envisaged. The first factor in this category recommends that the need for change must be emphasized. It is important that all the role players understand and embrace the importance of the PE outcome in order to support the processes that will ensure the envisioned goals are achieved.

The second factor referred to how clear the change is to the implementers. Clarity, as Banya (1993) refers to it, speaks of the lucidity of program documents and is essential to the successful implementation of these programs. The clarity of the goals and the means to achieve these goals are crucial. The goals are clearly described in the NCS and are common to all South African schools. The Assessment Standards (ASS) of the FET PE programs are comprehensive and the means of implementing these standards have been clearly structured. The DoE has developed Learning Programme Guidelines and Subject Assessment Guidelines for the teachers in the field and there are guidelines for both, teacher as well as learners for each of the grades in the FET phase. Although the program design may be clear to the policymakers and specialists in the field, it might not be as clear to all the implementers.

The third factor, complexity, referred to the difficulty and extent of change required of the individuals responsible for implementation (Fullan 2001).

His opinion is that the point teachers started would determine the level of complexity. The changes envisaged would not be too complex if the teacher was a PE specialist, as they would only need to adapt the content of their current program, as well as the teaching and assessment strategies used to meet the policy requirements. On the other hand, the complexity would be almost insurmountable for the Life Orientation teacher who has no knowledge, skills or experience in the field of PE, but is now expected to teach this aspect of the curriculum.

The fourth factor associated with the characteristics of the change is the quality and practicality of the program. This is, in essence, the ease with which the new curriculum can be effectively implemented. The quality of the resource materials available to the teachers to assist them with the delivery of their PE programs is vital. There is still the problem of superficial implementation when new materials are in use, and even new practices in evidence, without the deeper understanding required for substantial and sustained implementation (Fullan 2001). Many of the teachers may be forced to rely on the policy documents and resource materials available due to a lack of PE knowledge and experience, which might mean ineffective implementation. For the PE outcome to meet curriculum expectations, teacher training, high quality resource materials, provision of facilities and equipment as well as support structures must be in place.

Fullan's (2001) second category related to implementation looks at the setting in which the teachers operate, and the planned and unplanned events and activities that might occur. These factors are district, community, principal and teacher. Chen (2005) commented that a program needs to continually interact with its environment in order to obtain the resources and support necessary for its survival. In this sense, the types of support received from the local environment refer to, amongst others, finances, equipment, facilities, staff and administrative support and professional development. This support can come from any source within the school environment. Fullan's (2001) third category, external factors, looks at the school or school district in the context of the broader society and includes the government and other agencies. These generally looked at the extraneous events and developments at the local, pro-

vincial or national level in education, which could affect the success and possible continuation of the program.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers selected the qualitative paradigm in order to explore each of the contexts in which the PE outcome was taught. Thomas, Nelson and Silverman (2005) commented that qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning of an experience to the participants in a specific setting and how the different components are combined to form a whole. Doing qualitative research enabled the researchers to obtain a comprehensive picture of the many interdependent aspects affecting the implementation of the PE outcome by the Life Orientation teachers in the rural schools.

The research involved conducting a case study of three secondary schools in the area. Questionnaires were completed by the participants at the school, with an aim of understanding the current state of the PE programs in the district. The researchers were given the opportunity to carry out a survey with teachers from 25 different schools in the district. For the purpose of this paper, only the results of the survey will be discussed.

The questionnaire responses from the survey provided a clear overview of the situation regarding the implementation of the PE outcome in that particular rural area. The researchers were given time to work through the questionnaires with the teachers in order to clarify any questions that they did not fully understand. This opened an opportunity to engage in dialogue with the teachers throughout the process, which proved to be a very positive interaction. As each question was explained, many of the teachers automatically responded verbally, prompting a number of informal discussions taking place after each question was asked. The researchers did not attempt to direct the conversation, but rather just listened to the various comments being made. Notes were made on the discussions that took place.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Table 1 is a summary of the survey findings and these findings are explained under the same headings in the discussion that follows:

The Program

The findings determined a non-alignment of the implementation of the PE outcome to the NCS. Teachers were not able to meet the assessment standards, nor could they employ effective assessment strategies. The discussion on the program indicated that, although the teachers were making every attempt to deliver a worthwhile program, the way the PE outcome was interpreted and implemented indicated that the Life Orientation teachers were inclined to interpret the PE outcome in terms of their own experiences, which in most cases was far removed from the intended curriculum. The way Life Orientation is defined, depicted, assigned meaning, and described, is an expression of how this learning area is understood (Rooth 2005).

Characteristics of Change

Although the teachers believed in the value of the PE outcome, it became evident that majority of them did not fully comprehend the reasons for the position PE holds within the Life Orientation Learning Area. Van Deventer (2004), as cited in Rooth (2005) observed that physical education specialists are not appointed at schools, which results in teachers, who have no training in physical education, being required to teach Life Orientation. The Life Orientation teachers' lack both, PE knowledge as well as experience in this subject exacerbated the complexity of the implementation, as they lacked understanding of the meaning of the assessment standards and did not know how to measure the attainment of these standards in an effective manner. Implementing the PE standards was extremely difficult for the teachers. Fullan (1992) commented: *Complexity arises from the degree of differences from existing practice due to the fact that the teachers have no PE training or prior teaching experience in the field, implementing the outcome as stipulated in the NCS was a daunting task.*

Zafar (2005) as cited in Rooth (2005) pointed to the need for education policies to be backed by the required resources to achieve their outcomes. The lack of facilities and equipment necessary to support the implementation of the PE programs in these rural schools was evident. Not only were there inadequate facilities and equipment, but also Learning and Teaching Sup-

Table 1: A summary of the survey findings

<i>The Programme</i>		
PE is taught: • Yes: 18 • No: 7	PE is timetabled: • Yes: 12 • No: 6	
<i>Characteristics of Change</i>		
Need for physical education:		
• Teachers: • Important: 24 • Not important: 1	School: • Important: 20 • Not important: 2 • Unclear/no answers: 3	
Clarity of the curriculum and complexity of implementation:		
Policy clear and simple: • Yes: 8 • No: 16 • No answer: 1	Assessment standards understandable • Yes: 7 • No: 18	Assessment requirements understandable • Yes: 7 • No: 18
Quality/practicality of implementation:		
Adequate facilities: • Yes: 0 • No: 25	Adequate equipment: • Yes: 0 • No: 24 • No answer: 1	Class size: The majority of the teachers' responses indicated that their class sizes were between 51 – 60 learners per class.
<i>Local Characteristics</i>		
District support: • Yes: 4 • No: 20 • No answer: 1	School support: • Yes: 5 • No: 19 • No answer: 1	
Teacher is qualified: • Yes: 1 • No: 24	Teacher has had some training: • Yes: 2 • No: 23	Teacher has some PE experience: • Yes: 6 • No: 18 • No answer: 1
<i>External Support</i>		
Adequate support received:		
• Yes: 2 • No: 22 • No answer: 1		

port Materials (LTSM) available were inadequate. Rooth (2005) noted that adequate and relevant learning support material and equipment for teaching Life Orientation would greatly enhance the ability to teach this subject. This would seem to be the case with the implementation of the PE outcome in the rural schools studied, where the

resources available did not meet the needs of the Life Orientation teachers responsible for the implementation of the PE programs at their schools. Class sizes also made teaching very difficult. Rooth (2005) made the observation that for effective learning to take place, smaller classes are necessary.

Local Characteristics

Teachers did not feel that the district offered them adequate support and believed that the district could assist them further in improving their implementation of the PE outcome. McLaughlin (1975) as cited in Banya (1993) noted that the amount of interest, commitment, and support at all levels of the system has a major influence on the prospects of successfully implementing these programs. For the teachers responsible for the implementation of the PE outcome, material, professional and advisory support from the district is needed. Fullan in Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) observed that communities could also serve as an active support system for teachers in these schools. The teachers had not considered the possible role that the community could play. Rooth (2005) came to the same conclusion in her study and emphasized the supportive roles of clinics, communities as well as NGOs. She only focused on other support structures very briefly.

Fullan (1992) remarked that principals need to be knowledgeable about innovation goals and its expected uses in order to understand the needs, progress and problems teachers experience when implementing this curriculum. The teachers felt that the school was not doing much to support their implementation of the new PE curriculum, and felt alone and isolated in their endeavors. The schools had all made the changes to organizational structures by ensuring Life Orientation was timetabled. However, they did not take cognizance of the fact that teaching PE would require further training of existing staff members. The teachers received no professional or financial support that would support their efforts to implement an effective PE program at the schools studied.

It was evident that the teachers appointed to implement PE in Life Orientation did not have the knowledge or the skills required to implement the program effectively, nor did they understand the potential of the program sufficiently, although they were all motivated and willing to develop their understanding. Smit (2003) highlighted the importance of the teachers by saying essentially, how policy is viewed, understood and experienced, only becomes real once teachers attempt to implement the policy. The teachers' lack of specialized skills and knowledge compromised the programs offered and this

influenced what was planned, presented and assessed. The resulting PE programs fell short of the requirements, did not meet the needs and interests of the learners and had little relevance for all involved.

External Factors

Teachers felt that they had not received adequate guidance, support and resources necessary from outside agencies to implement the PE outcome successfully.

CONCLUSION

To meet the purpose and scope as envisaged by the NCS, the Life Orientation teacher would need to have an in-depth understanding of the many facets making up the Learning Area. Although PE is only one outcome, it is allocated fifty percent of Life Orientation contact time in the FET phase and is compulsory for all learners from Grades R through 12 in all schools. All Life Orientation teachers should thus, be trained and assessed in a comprehensive Physical Education program. This would ensure that all future Life Orientation teachers would be qualified to teach the PE outcome successfully, as well as understand the numerous other fields of specialization making up the Learning Area. The current debate raised by the University of Johannesburg (UJ) Life Orientation Forum, on the difficulties facing the Life Orientation teacher being required to be an expert in a wide range of specialized subject fields must be intensified. The concerns voiced, regarding the lack of qualified Life Orientation specialists who have the qualification in the myriad of subject specializations required by this complex Learning Area, must be addressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above discussion, the researchers recommended that a comprehensive Physical Education program be implemented in all the secondary schools and be monitored by Life Orientation experts.

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