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PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATION POLICY CHANGE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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by

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Abstract

South Africa has been in a process of far-reaching restructuring and currently is still experiencing a bombardment of many educational change policies. Education policy for educational change only becomes reality once it is implemented at the micro (classroom) level. Teachers indeed are the key role-players in this implementation phase and are unfortunately, more often than not, the silent voices in this process, ignored and discounted in this stage of educational change. How they experience and understand the policy change, or how the human side of policy change is contextualised, remains a mystery to be explored and explained. Furthermore, despite the growing literature on educational change and policy change, relatively little has been done on the experiences of primary school teachers and policy change in the context of developing countries such as South Africa. Available international literature on teachers' experiences of policy change relates mostly to educational practices that are well-resourced, where teachers are highly qualified, and teacher-student ratios are low. It appears reasonable to assume that teachers' experiences of education policy change in developing South African circumstances would be influenced and constructed by the contexts in which they work.

The broad purpose of this inquiry is to describe and explain primary school teachers' experiences of education policy change in South Africa. The immediate objective is to obtain new, deeper and more complex understandings of the less obvious issues that influence teachers' roles as implementors of education policy change. This study was conducted in an interpretive or qualitative mode. The following key question guided this investigation. *How do primary school teachers experience education policy change?* Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and open-ended questionnaires were utilised in this study. This data was transcribed, and analysed using computer-aided qualitative data software, Atlas.ti. The data was analysed inductively, using open coding and a grounded theory approach. This approach

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facilitated the coding process of the data. The data was interpreted on the basis of the literature, and presented in the last two chapters of this report.

The findings from this inquiry revealed four significant and interdependent themes, with a variety of sub-themes, which appear meaningful in understanding education policy change from the perspectives of teachers. These include the affective domain, emotional responses and contestations, issues relating to discipline and control, outcomes-based education, and lastly matters of values, teacher roles and their view of professionalism. While the contributions of this inquiry are not original in the sense of a prototype, the findings could add to the knowledge base of the complexities of education policy change. Some further questions are raised, which emerged during the inquiry and which might contribute to additional investigations on a wider spectrum and launch some critical debates on education policy change. The inquiry yields some concluding thoughts, which may inform policy change and its implementation.

Keywords:

1. Education policy change
2. Educational change in South Africa
3. Policy implementation
4. Emotions and education policy change
5. Teachers' experiences of policy change
6. Qualitative inquiry
7. Interpretive perspective
8. Computer aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS)
9. Atlas.ti
10. Interviews and focus groups

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List of Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
C2005	Curriculum 2005
CAQDAS	Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
COTEP	Committee on Teacher Education Policy
DoE	Department of Education
ELRC	Education Labour Relations Council
HTML	Hypertext Markup Language
HU	Hermeneutic Unit
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OBA	Outcomes-Based Assessment
OBE	Outcomes-Based Education
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
VISE	Visualisation, Integration, Serendipity and Exploration [Atlas.ti software]