

CHAPTER 6

META-REFLECTION ON THE STUDY PROCESS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I present a meta-reflective discussion on the process of my learning concerning TCPD, on the experience and knowledge created towards the improvement of my own practice as a researcher-mentor (RM) and the shortcomings of the study. I call it a meta-reflection since action research per se is a reflexive process. Given the purpose of this study, ‘exploratory research’ was appropriate to study ‘Exploring Professional Development Interventions for Improving the Teaching Practice of Primary School Teachers’. From the outset of the study process in 2007 the challenge was to find out what fits the school context and the PRs’ learning needs and availability in terms of time and the academic schedule in the class best.

My study was a kind of ‘exploratory research’ since I designed and developed all steps to explore, in classroom settings, an intervention for teacher continuing professional development (TCPD) and for the improvement of my own mentoring practice. The study aimed at investigating TCPD in lower primary education, focusing on learning facilitators in Grades 1 and 2 in Mozambique towards the improvement of my practitioner-researchers’ (PRs’) practice and my own mentoring practice. In Chapter 2 I reviewed the literature on (continuing) professional development of teachers and issues concerned with change in professional development (PD), models of TCPD and quality assurance. My learning at this stage and my experience as primary school teacher jointly informed an understanding of both the design and the data from the questionnaires referred to in Chapter 3 and 4 respectively.

The literature reviewed consistently indicates that teachers should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own CPD by means of analysis of their classroom practices, in terms of what they do to promote learning, a further identification of what has to be improved and design of suitable innovative practices and learning materials for their class, context and individual development. In so doing, the self-directed professional development (SDPD) appears to be the most appropriate model. The SDPD does not exclude the significant role of collaborative work and experience sharing with fellow teachers, or support from internal

and/or external promoters, as SDPD does not mean to leave the teachers on their own. The individual teacher should be able, and most of all, should be responsible for the identification of areas to improve in order to improve her/his learning and the learners' achievement. This is particularly crucial in contexts of developing countries like Mozambique where the professional qualification of the majority of teachers is below the desired level as discussed in Chapter 1. Consequently, there are primary school teachers who do not have substantial pedagogical skills and knowledge that can support effective reflection.

The improvement of teachers' pedagogical practices and my own mentoring practice was the purpose of this participatory action research (PAR). To do so the PRs were encouraged to monitor individual learner achievement critically and use appropriate remedial tasks and learning material. Accordingly, to some extent they identified areas in which they needed more support. From my side, the lesson learnt from the literature reviewed, the examination of the data from the questionnaire and the PRs' reports on the learningshop, the classroom observation and even the observation of the environment at the visited schools significantly improved my understanding with respect to the effective outcomes of in-service professional programmes (INSEP) and, consequently, of the low learner achievement in primary schools.

The emphasis of this PAR is on the pragmatic nature of the research. However, from the previous chapters of this study, apart from pragmatic understanding, the theoretical understanding was also constructed and can be summarised as follows:

- The background exposed in Chapter 1 advocates the need for new and innovative approaches of TCPD with emphasis on SDPD and the disadvantages of a top-down design model. Firstly, the initiative should come from teachers themselves. Secondly, as discussed in Chapter 2, in a SDPD context, teachers positively pay more attention to (a) the purpose of their learning, (b) themselves as persons who need to grow in the teaching profession, (c) the context in which they work and (d) the change that new knowledge will introduce to their culture of teaching.
- In Chapter 3 the PAR design showed that the teachers can apply principles of AR in order to contribute to their professional development (PD), though limited against their professional background and experience.

- The quantitative and qualitative data from the empirical study discussed in Chapter 4 have shown that the respondents are aware of the PD they need to improve their pedagogical skills and living conditions..
- With the increased need for more teachers’ professional qualifications, a significant practical outcome of this PAR is the enhancement of teachers’ responsibility for both their and their learners’ learning.
- My own learning was an important outcome – on the one hand, as a PD facilitator and on the other hand as a RM. As a PD facilitator, my journey of action, observation and reflection has shown the relevance of classroom-based PD to the teachers’ learning and to the facilitators’ practice. I could work in an authentic setting with all implications of the class timetable, the PRs’ availability, the school calendar, the lack of learning material, just to mention some. I also experienced the occasional unenthusiastic attitude towards PD through seminars and irregular visits to school. Apart from the practical outcome, I improved my understanding on transferability of TCPD models from Western or developed countries to developing countries and the factors associated with change as indicated in Chapter 2.

Having introduced the meta-reflection in terms of the outcomes of the study and the theoretical background that informed this PAR, specific areas of the meta-reflection on the study process are provided in the following sections.

6.2 EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

This study was designed within an action research (AR) paradigm (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996). Furthermore, AR was privileged since it is also commonly acknowledged as an approach to personal and professional development to be adopted by practitioners in order to investigate what they do, and to build their own knowledge and theories of the practices carried out (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000; McTaggart, 2005). Participatory Action Research offered the appropriate type of AR, due to the importance given to the PRs in all stages of the study, with particular emphasis on the planning and the search for suitable solutions (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996), the design of the material, the observation sheets and the questionnaire used to

evaluate the intervention. Accordingly, in this PAR, the PRs and I critically reflected on the usual classroom practices and found the situation to be improved in matters such as the PRs' responsibility for pedagogical practice, knowledge and learners' achievement. In addition the research process improved the ability to change my and the PRs' actions and practices, to identify the problems faced, questions that had not been answered and the ways to find a solution (Wadsworth, 1998), and to identify learning disabilities and methods of facilitating learning. This procedure provided substantial information to me and to the PRs. To me it had particular significance in confirming that "transformative learning cannot be taught; it is the learner who experiences transformative learning" (Grabove, 1997:90). This assumption is reflected in the length of this study when compared with the data collected. It was necessary to expand the activities and the PRs freely participated in the study and enjoyed what they were doing.

Apart from the lack of self-confidence to change practices at the beginning of this PAR, they dealt with the issues of "what", "how" and "when" to change. In addition they had to follow a prescribed and overcrowded syllabus while participating in this study. The understanding that similar learning tasks could attain the learning objectives centrally indicated was followed in outline, due to the recommendation to abide by the calendar for the learning content in each grade. Due to the significant participative nature of this study and the great importance given to the real world context in which the PRs worked as referred to by Fullan and Hargreaves (1992), all the above constraints had to be taken into consideration. As argued by Cranton (2002), the accomplishment of steps that characterise the process leading to transformation, such as activating events, critical self-reflection, engaging in discourse behaving, and talking and thinking are important procedures towards transformative learning.

The integration of the classroom practices of my PRs was slow, since they used a research paradigm that was new for them and for me as a researcher and research-mentor (RM). I regarded this slowness as a shortcoming of the research process, mainly with respect to *What* and *How* to innovate. The PRs took long in taking ownership regarding the reflection of their practice with a view to initiating further actions, including the identification of issues to be improved and the appropriate method of facilitating learning and designing learning tasks within the SDPD model. As mentioned by Van Eekelen et al. (2006), SDPD is PD directed and carried out by teachers.. I therefore had to create empathetic relationships and encourage the PRs to ensure their inclusion and participation (Kember, 2000). The PRs' and my

transformative learning and the attempt to design authentic practices required courage, effort and persistence as Grabove (1997) mentions. The PRs and I were engaged in the process of transformative learning. Our learning related to the new knowledge gained from innovative practices and the PAR process itself. Another shortcoming was my inexperience in dealing with large samples and statistical procedures as promoted by STATOMET. I attempted to gather empirical data from teachers in the three geographical regions of Mozambique (Northern, Central and Southern) in order to provide a means for formulating relevant and effective activities to be carried out with the PRs towards our PD. The strength I had was my experience in primary education and facilitator of TCPD, which to some extent I had to ignore in order to avoid bias.

Planning, action, observation and reflection involved in this study improved my knowledge as a RM. From the outset of this PAR I was involved in the PRs' practices; at certain stages of the study I acted as supervisor, where the supervisor and the teacher are jointly responsible for the activities performed. I did so because of the need to fill gaps in the methods of facilitating learning used by the PRs.

At the outset of the study my concern was to identify the tools and/or procedures used by teachers in Grade 1 and 2 to improve pedagogical knowledge and skills. This concern derived from the distrust of the pedagogical support previously provided to the teachers. I do think that successful TCPD should be based on teachers' daily practice. Another concern was related to the view of provider and facilitator of TCPD. For instance, my experience in this PAR is that each teacher should be given certain opportunities such as to:

- be regarded as an individual with particular professional learning needs, aspirations and beliefs about facilitating learning;
- understand the rationale for the CPD programme;
- trace her/his own PD plan as often as possible in terms of her/his strengths and limitations;
- critique and transform her/his practice without administrative pressure;
- be systematically encouraged for SDPD and supported in the personal and professional growth process;
- be periodically appraised and formally rewarded.

The introduction of SDPD was mainly motivated by pedagogical practices and classroom observation by means of learners' learning, learning monitoring and the appropriate remedial tasks, which should improve the class achievement. The PRs were eager to learn and were aware of the need of innovation; however, they faced constraints regarding procedures to support the learners. We would organise new groups in the class in such a way that the low achieving learners were seated with peers who could give support. This procedure was complemented by the design of remedial learning tasks for reading and writing skills.

This could be achieved by learning opportunities provided to teachers concerning the main learning problems learners face and by the production of kits of learning material while in teacher education college and/or during PD programmes. Discussing the nature of the remedial learning tasks with the PRs and paying attention to low achieving learners clearly supported the PRs in their professional development and improved their self-confidence.

With respect to the baseline analysis by means of a questionnaire, the design, the pilot study and the administration itself provided data concerning what teachers think about the PD programmes attended, how they experienced the learning content approached, how they could transfer new insights to their practice and how they felt after attending such programmes. The results and the findings of the questionnaires have informed my mentoring practice and changes in the TCPD field in general.

At the end of the study I was more convinced that, in Mozambique, PD as part of the overall strategy for teacher education should be a priority of the education sector agenda, with emphasis on SDPD. There may be other interventions for SDPD apart from PAR. However, I am of the opinion that this study has the potential to convince providers of TCPD to develop further research in this field and in the AR paradigm.

6.2.1 Evaluation of the Research Methodology

This study focuses on TCPD in primary education with particular emphasis on teachers who facilitate learning in Grades 1 and 2. Through PAR, one of the types of AR, I attempted to improve the PRs' and my own practice. As stated by McNiff and Whitehead (2006), improvement of learning towards the improvement of educational practices and increase in

the existing knowledge and theory are the basic reasons for conducting AR. Therefore PAR was the suitable research design. Using classroom practices as the authentic setting of this study confirms what Kember (2000) argues for, saying that the nature of AR makes it the appropriate method for the improvement of education. AR as a way of investigating “professional experience which links practice and the analysis of practice into a single productive and continuously developing sequence” (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996:14) accommodated the activities performed by the PRs and me. Different ways of investigating were evident. Therefore the research methodology can be described as a process consisting of an overarching AR design, which is executed by means of a mixed-methods approach. It is PAR since a synchronous model (Du Toit, 2008) is followed in which I did AR on my own mentoring practice in tandem with the individual AR process of each PR; the PRs were involved in one another’s and in my AR by acting (participating) as peer assessors, co-learners, critical friends, etc.

6.2.2 Evaluation of the Used Methods

Although all methods I used have provided powerful insight and data, at this stage of my study I stress the valuable contribution of the learningshop on AR, the questionnaires and classroom observation. The learningshop on AR was of crucial importance regarding the need for offering the PRs an opportunity “to have a clear view of the details of the investigation in which will be engaged” (Mills, 2007:43). Despite the limited time they had the learningshop introduced elementary principles of AR that guided the PRs’ participation in AR as they obtained practical outcomes in terms of their pedagogical practice and learners’ achievement and simultaneously created new forms of understanding in relation to the learning facilitation process (Reason & Bradbury, 2001:2). The questionnaire was an adequate method for the sample of this study concerning the respondents from the 135 primary schools in the five selected provinces. In turn classroom observation substantiated the entire process of this PAR since it allowed me to experience CPD and learners’ learning.

The outcome of this baseline study will serve as a point of reference for any professional development intervention I may undertake and include in my lifelong action research-driven professional spiral in future.

6.3 MY JOURNEY TOWARDS THE IMPROVEMENT OF MY PRACTICE AND THE QUALITY OF TEACHERS' CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In recent years I have been involved in TCPD programmes following a cascade model, basically aimed at improving pedagogical skills among primary school teachers in Grades 1 and 2 in order to improve reading and writing skills. This model was named *Courses of School Capacity Building: Systematic, Continuous, Experimental and Reflexive* (CRESCER). The cascade started at the Ministry of Education (MINED). An international consultant working at the MINED designed all TCPD programmes to be used to instruct/teach facilitators at central, regional, provincial and Zones of Pedagogical Influence (ZIP) levels. In turn the ZIPs had the responsibility of facilitating TCPD to teachers from the respective ZIPs. The central team comprised pedagogical technicians from MINED, the National Institute for Development of Education (INDE) and the National Institute of Teachers Upgrading (IAP). This team included lecturers from Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM) and the Pedagogical University (UP). I was one of the lecturers coming from UEM participating in the central team responsible for facilitating the programme at regional level. The regional team included teacher educators and pedagogical technicians from the provinces.

At that time the TCPD model summarised here was the latest model adopted by MINED. Reflection on the practices was the innovative component of the model. This experience was an expansion of a model developed by a consultant and teacher educator at a teacher education college.

I participated in this programme and found that only the consultant took ownership and control of the activities. Neither the pedagogical technicians from INDE nor from IAP whose responsibility was, respectively, to design syllabi, writing textbooks and teachers' guides for primary education and developing material for distance education of primary schools took any control or ownership. There was a unique programme and activities for the entire country, which included the timetable to be followed, the text in the textbooks, the learning material, working group activities and planning and demonstration of learning opportunities. Despite this practice the achievement in primary education and specifically in Grades 1 and 2 did not increase significantly.

From this experience I found that the majority of the participants from the institutions at central level were not comfortable with such a low level of involvement. I began to think of another model of TCPD that would take into consideration effective participation by means of the selection of the content and related learning outcomes and the model of TCPD, and that would promote the idea of teachers being involved in taking ownership of their PD and complementing AR. I decided to explore an intervention that can be used in order to support primary school teachers in Grades 1 and 2 in improving their practices through PAR. At the outset of the study and particularly during the classroom observation the PRs felt scared since previous experiences in this regard had been degrading. Therefore, in this intervention I changed my usual facilitator features: the knowledgeable facilitator who had solutions for all pedagogical problems; the one who knows what all teachers need; the expert who brings a list of “do’s” and “don’ts”. Instead, I decided to start from each PR’s impressions with respect to issues to be improved as the foundations of the professional learning in order to change the role they usually play in TCPD programmes from being passive to becoming self-directed practitioners who would take responsibility for their PD. I developed a new monitoring schedule (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). This strategy can contribute to the improvement of the quality of TCPD programmes.

6.3.1 Monitoring Case Study D towards his Continuing Professional Development

This section includes an elaboration on the case study of one of the PRs out of the group of five participating in this PAR.

Deciding on what case study to choose was a difficult endeavour since each PR of this PAR had particular involvement, disposition and pedagogical knowledge and skills; the PRs were more diverse than homogeneous (Clark, 1992). However, I decided to select PR 4 who in the study was identified as case study D. I chose case study D as he was the eldest teacher in the group. This criterion was included for three reasons. The first reason is that, currently, the concern about professional qualifications and participation in professional development courses or programmes is typical among most teachers (Rodrigues, 2005). Mozambican teachers are no exception. The results from the baseline analysis related to the preferred way to contribute to their own professional development was through attendance of professional development – moving from CFPP level to IMAP/ADPP or from IMAP/ADPP to Higher Education (Table 4.32). The second reason was related to the fact mentioned by Hargreaves

and Fullan (1992) that many young teachers probably have not achieved a level of personal maturity that enables them to work significantly with fellow teachers. The third one is to disagree with Hargreaves and Fullan's (1992) statement which states that teachers in their mid-life span are frequently more cautious concerning change.

The following sub-sections provide the account of PR 4's journey on his continuing professional development. In attempting to match the extracts provided in this chapter with the statements on PR 4's artefacts (see photographs),

6.3.1.1 Practitioner-researcher 4 context

In an attempt to situate PR 4's journey of his continuing professional development and my role as research mentor and TCPD facilitator, I considered his participation in the AR learningshop as the starting point, since the learningshop aimed at familiarising all PRs with the AR paradigm which informs all steps of this study. By that time PR 4 has had more than 26 years of experience in facilitating learning and has been facilitating learning to first-graders for a significant period of his profession. Since 1982 he has also been facilitating learning to Grades 2 up to 5. Throughout his professional experience he attended more than 10 in-service education programmes. He had a large class with 60 learners. One out of the 60 learners is repeating Grade 1. This class size is usual in the lowest grades at the Unidade 18 Primary School and almost in all urban and suburban areas of Mozambique.

As mentioned in Chapter 4 after the learningshop on AR all PRs participated in a discussion about the new experience. Following the discussion in July 21, 2008, PR 4 wrote a short report concerning his learning and impressions. This report is offered in the next pages and the summarised translation of his impressions on the learningshop is presented in Table 4.54. In this report he indicates what he had learned, phrasing his feeling in the following way: *"I obtained experiences related to the management of facilitating learning and learning processes. I had the opportunity to acquire tactics, strategies on how to deal with learning disabilities."* Evolving from the information given by PR 4, I had understood that he will in future apply the knowledge and skills acquired throughout the learningshop regarding the attention to be paid to learners who do not progress appropriately. *"How to deal with learning disabilities"*, which means monitoring learners' learning, was seen as a daily concern after the learningshop. This suggested to me that PR 4 would in future assume ownership and responsibility for this aspect of his pedagogical practice after the learningshop and the PAR.

To develop his self-directed professional development (SDPD) in the context of this PAR, he selected reading and writing skills as the preferred topic saying that, *“In this area what is more interesting is to encourage the learners to read and write effectively.”*

The problem indicated by PR 4, which also was a concern, was *“the large class I have, difficulties on communication, since some learners do not speak nor understand Portuguese. The learners’ socio-economic situation sometimes affects and demoralizes them and has influenced the learning process.”*

6.3.1.2 Practitioner-researcher 4’s concerns and challenges

The main concern indicated by PR 4 and that motivated the cycles performed was the learners’ level of writing and reading skills. In addition he faced difficulties of communication, since some learners did not speak or understand Portuguese. The learners’ social background was also a concern since poverty affected their motivation to learn. They did not have note pads, pencils or erasers to participate actively in the daily learning opportunities.

He was concerned since the learners in Grade 1 had to initiate literacy competences to be completed in Grade 2 and the lack of learning material affected the learners’ progress. Therefore the question that arose was: How can I promote learning in order to allow my learners to acquire writing and reading skills of vowels, diphthongs and some consonants at the end of Grade 1? In order to improve the learners’ level of ability in writing and reading skills his commitment was expressed in the following terms: *“However, I will have all learners reading at least vowels and diphthongs at the end of the academic year”*. To achieve his goals, PR 4 was aware of the challenges he would face in the process of both his professional learning and the learning of the learners attending his classes. He expressed his feeling, saying that *“The challenges I will face with respect to the topic I selected are always to look for resources (learning material), methods to encourage learners on attaining the foreseen learning objective”*.

He only used the blackboard and the learners’ exercise books. Then we produced cards with the letters to be studied as a remedial task. The importance that PR 4 gave to learning material to offer better opportunities to learn clearly demonstrates that he had experienced

transformative learning. From his assumption that all learners could learn through the sole presentation of the letters on both the blackboard and in the exercise book, he came to understand the assumption regarding the role of the learning material. I noticed that my practice had influenced PR 4's practice and, moreover, influenced my mentoring practice. He reported that *“Another challenge was the distribution of learning contents within the syllabus and in the exercise book (or textbook). The time available is too little to care for learners with more difficulties. (...) I need to know my learners better and to maintain periodic and planned contacts with the family in order to know my learners' situation.”*

6.3.1.3 The way towards ownership of his practice

Generating evidence is a crucial stage in AR. Evidence is specific data that can sustain my claim to knowledge (Mcniff & Whitehead, 2006). Accordingly, at this stage of this PAR, from all data throughout the study, in relation to PR 4, I selected specific steps of my mentoring, questions and respective answers from the questionnaire for feedback and assessment, pictures, information from his colleagues and the principal.

Practitioner-researcher 4 saw professional development as the acquisition and/or development of professional knowledge and skills. The suggestion that he is assuming ownership of his professional development is that he states that *“in this investigation I intend to assess myself in order to verify my performance and my learners' learning”*. This statement is part of his impressions given on April 23, 2010 and creates the impression that he assumed the need and importance of the reflection on what he is doing and what and how the learners learn. His comment, *“This will allow me to look for techniques to overcome eventual difficulties among the learners”* clearly shows that PR 4 recognised that improving his practice and learners' learning was his own responsibility. Such responsibility demands effort to look for more effective strategies and innovative practices and learning tasks.

Furthermore, this PAR contributed to PR 4's understanding of the need to investigate professional experience and to ask: How often did you feel the need to investigate and search for more information about issues regarding the facilitation of learning? He answered, *“Every day.”* (Question 12, Table 4.56). The PR did not have investigation skills as a

researcher but I believe that he will be able to formulate questions related to the situation to be improved or problem to be solved.

On August 10, 2010 PR 4 asked a plan of the learning of Portuguese as subject in Grade 1, as learning in this subject used to be the major concern for the teachers. The learning opportunity plan was structured in the way recommended by the school to all teachers. The important aspect was that PR 4 had planned to monitor the learners' activities in order to support the learners, provide feedback and explain the task to those who did not understand or did not know how to execute the learning task.

At this stage I found that PR 4 continued strictly following the textbook. However, the plan showed that he made improvements in supporting individual learners. He planned to go around the class and provide support when needed.

My follow-up and mentoring

Observation

The last time I observed PR 4 was while facilitating learning in two subjects: the first was Portuguese followed by Mathematics. I did not participate in the planning of these learning opportunities. Before the start of the learning opportunities I asked permission from the pedagogical deputy and from PR 4 himself.

Practitioner-researcher 4 used the blackboard to assign to the learners the same learning tasks recommended in the textbook according to the planning at school level. Photo image 7 provides the page from the textbook. I observed that he conducted only individual readings of words and sentences and a significant number of those learners who could not read were encouraged to read. This clearly shows PR 4's taking ownership of his practice, since commitment to individual learner achievement and the way to find solutions for low achieving learners was the frequent issue for his PD. The self-confidence regarding innovative practice by means of ownership is indicated in his answer given in the feedback on the intervention. He pointed out that he would assume ownership of his practice after the intervention when saying, "*I do not see any aspects that might prevent me from paying attention to my learners since I had acquired innovations in my work as a teacher*" (Question 13, Table 4.55). Another example of ownership is that he said, "*I will carry forward and*

look for more knowledge in order to guarantee my work as professional educator.” From this statement I am convinced that he was and still is involved in innovative practice, had taken ownership of his practice and realised the need for being responsible for his own CPD. The reason why I believe this is that according to my observation as mentor most reading activities in Grades 1 and 2 are performed collectively and in PR 4’s class individual reading is the preferred approach.

After the completion of the first learning task (indicated by the number 1 in photo image 7) PR 4 provided a different reading task. He completed the parts of the sentences recommended in the textbook, using different words than those indicated in the learning material. The right-hand side of photo image 9 provides the new reading task provided.

The learners did not perform all the learning tasks proposed for the learning opportunity due to the large number of learning tasks recommended. However, the positive fact is that PR 4 attempted to enhance the quality of the reading by assigning a different task by means of an innovative strategy.

The majority of learners seated in the back had not yet acquired and/or developed reading skills and PR 4 often asked them to read from the blackboard and supported their reading. According to my observation as mentor, the majority of teachers do not take care of the learners who do not appropriately follow the learning process during the learning opportunity. However, PR 4 did. This is evidence that PR monitored the learners’ learning. In addition PR 4 said, *“I often change the learners’ seating in the classroom in order to give more opportunities to those who need my support”*. In Table 4.55, question 14, when asked to add comments and/or opinions about the model of continuing professional development, PR 4 stated, *“The opinion is that it should happen at local level, school, ZIP and district for updating and ideas sharing in order to develop our work as educators.”*

Photo image 7: Page of Portuguese textbook

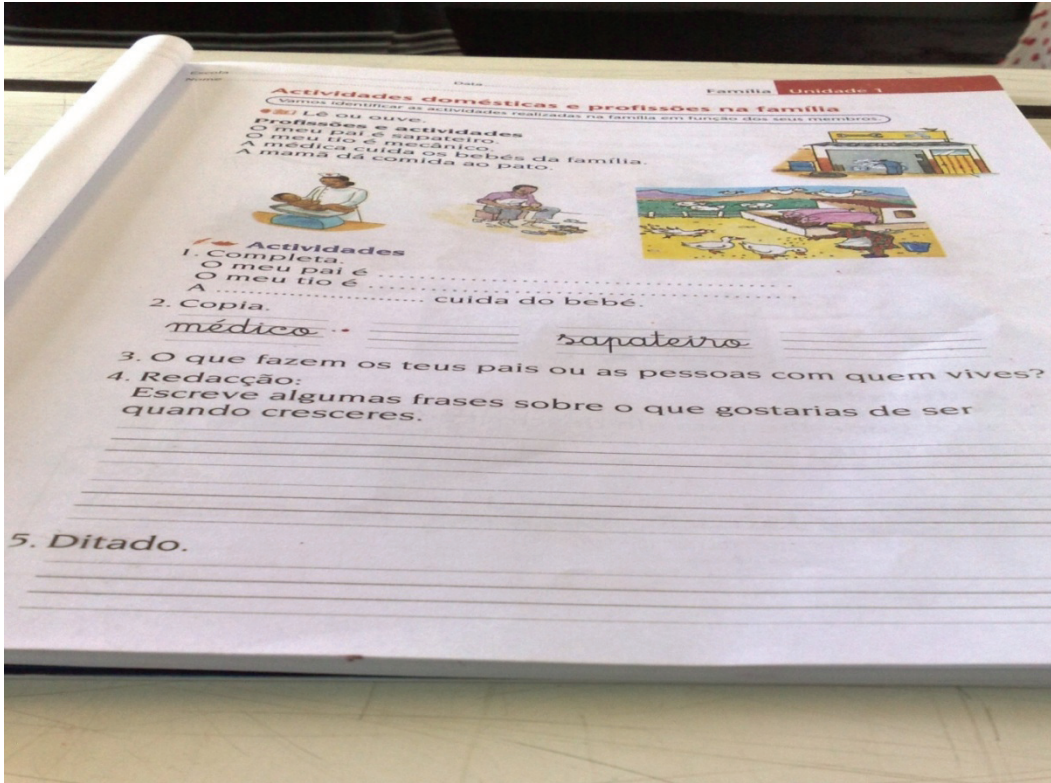


Photo image 8: PR 4 indicating individual learner to read on the blackboard



Photo image 9: Different reading tasks with different words provided by PR 4

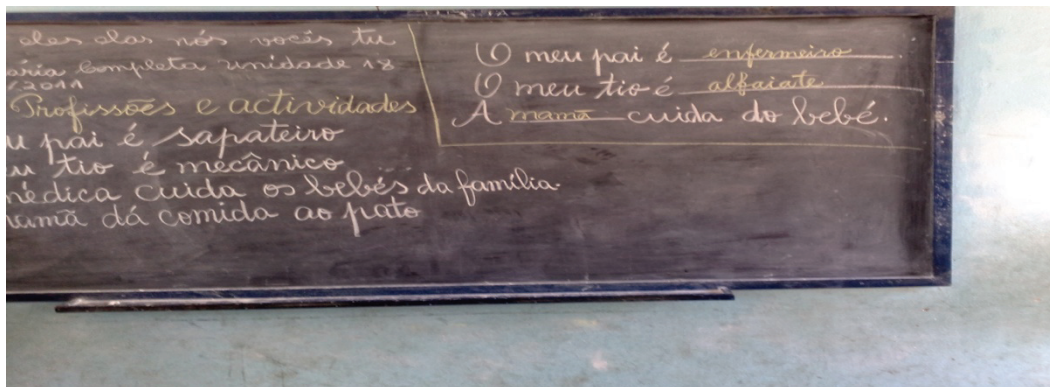


Photo image 10: Page of Mathematics textbook



When facilitating learning in Mathematics, PR 4 started in a different way. To begin with he assigned a learning task that was different from those indicated in the exercise book. This was an innovative strategy and evidenced that PR 4 looked for different ways to promote learning as a form of ownership of his practice. The evidence is substituted in his answer to Question 17 from the questionnaire for mentor-researcher evaluation: Do you feel motivated to continue to take responsibility for your own continuing professional development by investigating your classroom practice? The response of PR 4 was “A lot.”

Reflection

Practitioner-researcher 4 was receptive to my presence in the class despite the fact that we did not plan the learning opportunity to be observed jointly. He knew that I did not have a list of “do’s” and “don’ts”. My intention had never been to follow an instructional approach to

teachers' continuing professional development but rather to facilitate the learning process. The central purpose was to encourage the PRs to find potential areas for innovative practice by reflecting on what they had done with the learners and what they could do better in order to improve their pedagogical practice.

When reflecting on what he and the learners had done during the learning opportunity PR 4 mentioned the need to plan remedial tasks for deep understanding of the multiples of the number ten. He assigned tasks such as the following:

$$10+10 = 20$$

$$20+10 = 30$$

$$30+10 = 40$$

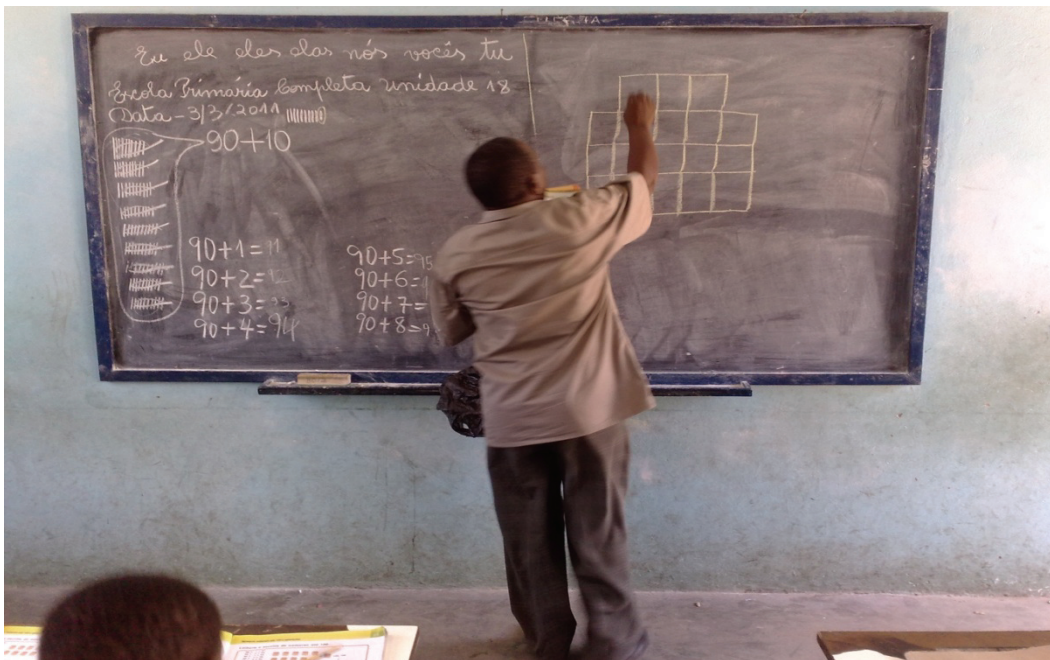
$$40+10 = 50$$

$$50+10 = 60$$

$$\dots$$

Reflection on the learning and practice of PR 4 strengthened my impression that he can design diversified learning tasks, although to some extent, like the majority of the teachers, he still doggedly follows the textbook.

Photo image 11: Practitioner-researcher 4 assigning learning tasks on the blackboard



At the end of this PAR, apart from the questionnaire for PRs' feedback and the mentor-researcher evaluation referred to in Chapter 4, I carried out an assessment process about PR 4's responsibility and ownership of his practice and the validity of SDPD. I also carried out brief telephonic interviews for peer-assessment with two colleagues of the PR group, and an

external assessment by the principal of the school. The interview questions and answers were the following:

Interview 1: My mentoring

- Mentor-researcher: *During the study we jointly planned some learning opportunities. How do you think did those activities improve your professional development?*
- Practitioner-researcher 4: *Those activities improved the methods of facilitating learning I used. The procedures improved my professional knowledge.*
- Mentor-researcher: *Do you think that you could continue taking ownership of your practice and investigate it?*
- Practitioner-researcher 4: *Yes I do, because I saw the positive results of my learners' learning. I can also use my experience at school and ZIP level.*
- Mentor-researcher: *How do you solve learning problems among your learners?*
- Practitioner-researcher 4: *I collect the exercise books from the low achieving learners, I identify the problems and I design the appropriate remedial tasks.*
- Mentor-researcher: *What is your experience in terms of ownership of your practice?*
- Practitioner-researcher 4: *I analyse what my learners and I did in the classroom; I identify the problems and I try to solve the problems with different learning tasks. I also support my colleagues.*

Interview 2 A: Peer assessment and peer mentoring

- Mentor-researcher: *Practitioner-researcher 4 is your colleague at Unidade 18 Primary School and was your co-participant in the study. How do you assess his practice?*
- Practitioner-researcher 3: *Practitioner-researcher 4 is very engaged in putting into practice what we learn. He talks to us about how he solves learning problems by assigning innovative practices.*
- Mentor-researcher: *Does he participate during the planning of the sequence of learning units?*
- Practitioner-researcher 3: *Yes he does. He often reminds the group about time to be allocated to remedial tasks during learning opportunities.*
- Mentor-researcher: *What else would you like to say about PR 4's practice?*
- Practitioner-researcher 3: *Practitioner-researcher 4 is a good learning facilitator and takes leadership in planning learning opportunities in the group.*

Interview 2 B: Peer assessment and peer mentoring

- Mentor-researcher: *Practitioner-researcher 4 is your colleague at Unidade 18 Primary School and was your co-participant in the study. How do you assess his practice?*
- Practitioner-researcher 5: *Practitioner-researcher 4 is good learning facilitator and he always assigns remedial tasks to his learners.*
- Mentor-researcher: *Does he participate during the planning of the sequence of learning units?*
- Practitioner-researcher 5: *Yes he does. He is the first one to refer to the need for regular assignment of remedial tasks.*
- Mentor-researcher: *How did you experience/see his ownership?*
- Practitioner-researcher 5: *He is mentor of our practice. He is always ready to support and guide us in ways to look for innovative approaches.*
- Mentor-researcher: *What else would you like to say about PR 4's practice?*

Practitioner-researcher 5: *I used to ask him about my practice when I did not know how to do.*

Interview 3: External assessment

Mentor-researcher: *How do you assess PR 4's practice?*
Principal: *Actually he is a good teacher. He is very concerned about his learners' learning.*

Mentor-researcher: *Do you think that he could have a mentor role at school level and influence his colleagues?*
Principal: *I think so because he is a very experienced learning facilitator. He likes to assign diversified learning tasks to his learners.*

Mentor-researcher: *Do you think that he will continue paying attention to his CPD?*
Principal: *Yes, I do because he already shows interest in looking for new ways of facilitating learning.*

Mentor-researcher: *Would you like to say anything else about PR 4?*
Principal: *I think that he learnt a lot in your study and he is acting accordingly.*

6.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As argued by McNiff and Whitehead (2009) the ways in which a study provides contributions are named significance, that in turn implies the meaning for the researcher, for the wider community, and yet for the future.

The significance of the different aspects of this PAR arose first of all from my intention to improve my practice as promoter of TCPD and as research mentor (RM) of primary school teachers. Secondly, the significance derives from the central research question which is addressed by this study: *How can teachers in Grades 1 and 2 be supported in terms of improving their practices by taking responsibility for their own professional development?* and the three sub-questions derived from it. The research questions and the literature reviewed guided all stages of the study and, consequently all processes aimed at improving my own and my PRs' professional learning. Hence, throughout the steps of the Comprehensive Cycles A and B the PRs, and I modified our practices and activities to be carried out in the classroom in a participatory approach. Throughout the study I realised that the previous TCPD I had conducted were traditional CPD by means of top-down decision-making (Díaz-Maggioli, 2004). For instance, the programmes were based on transmission which basically characterises models such as the deficit model, cascade model and the coaching/mentoring model. I did not take into consideration what Clark (1992) states by saying that teachers differ in terms of knowledge and skills and they have more differences than similarities. Using top-down designed programmes with little follow-up I facilitated the

CPD of teachers and teacher educators who came from a variety of models of teacher education, different contexts of work and, above all, with different experiences. Now I am convinced that this PAR contributed to the change of my epistemological assumption concerning learning and facilitation of TCPD and promotion of research initiatives. The significant knowledge in these fields was to challenge both my methods of facilitating TCPD and the innovative practice I followed and the scholarly self-monitoring. As a research-mentor of beginner researchers and at the same time participants in this study, I realised that the PRs and I had engaged in a PAR process since we contributed to the improvement of one another's understanding in performing pedagogical activities; in addition it is clear that other educators and interested people will learn from it (McTaggart, 1997). What the PRs and I did with respect to investigating our practices in order to find out what knowledge and skills could contribute to our own CPD and improve our professional skills is likely to influence the future of learning facilitation and the quality of TCPD programmes in Mozambique.

However, I am aware of the limitations of this PAR regarding the nature of AR as a paradigm and participatory type. The PRs and I had only started engaging in a substantive PAR owing the limitation of the context in which we were researching. The PRs were, on the one hand, limited by being obliged to facilitate learning according to a prescribed and compulsory syllabus, textbooks, timetable, insignificant opportunities for change and, on the other hand, the limited pedagogical knowledge and skills to sustain innovative practice and scholarly monitoring of their professional development. To me the limitation was to accommodate the study in the working conditions of the PRs, being a full-time academic and having a new practice as researcher-mentor established.

It is also important to state that in terms of adding value, irrespective of the limitations mentioned, I felt awarded as I have influenced the PRs in applying principles of AR to improve their professional knowledge and skills and have initiated my practice as researcher-mentor. This is also significant since I notice the progress I have made since 1976, when I was first appointed to conduct professional development programmes till now. I fully realise that SDPD programmes are more likely to promote change of practice.

In this study the PRs changed their attitude with respect to their responsibility by looking for solutions to the problems they face when facilitating learning, and ways to overcome learning disabilities. As the study progressed I found that the PRs were more receptive by asking

themselves what they can do more and better instead of blaming the learners, the syllabus and learning material. They attempted to monitor learners' achievement, to introduce diversified remedial tasks to improve learning in the class and, as a result, they had achieved improving learners' performance and said that the remaining teachers from Unidade 18 Primary School should be involved in similar experiences.

The process of my learning throughout and of my practice to sustain my knowledge claim is provided in the following section.

6.3 SUMMARY OF MY KNOWLEDGE CLAIM

Having completed my meta-reflection on this PAR, in this section I attempt to sum up what I found to be the major knowledge regarding practice and theory with respect to my role of promoter of TCPD and research-mentor (RM).

Concerning my role as promoter of TCPD, the SDPD model I used to support the PRs in terms of being responsible for their professional development by reflecting on their practice towards innovation and transformation has been an excellent model for this PAR. Although the PRs had no sufficient pedagogical knowledge and skills, owing to the encouragement, support and follow-up I provided, they were able to take ownership of their practice. In so doing I improved my knowledge about both my own practice as facilitator of TCPD programmes and the practices of the PRs. I could see the complexity of a SDPD in the context of a developing country like Mozambique where teachers' qualifications are still a challenge to be dealt with. The lack of professional qualifications is associated with a lack of resources and weak working conditions. Therefore, at this point of this study, I am convinced that primary school teachers can be responsible for their own continuing professional development (CPD) in accordance with the support provided at school level which will aim to overcome the limitations.

In terms of theoretical knowledge constructed throughout this study I improved my understanding of TCPD and the role that effective initial teacher education and school-based support play. For that purpose, basic pedagogical knowledge and skills that will allow the teachers to look for information that could improve their practice is more likely to motivate

or develop SDPD. In addition it is possible to encourage the teachers to, first of all, reflect on the process of facilitating learning, and then to find ways for SDPD and monitoring individual and/or groups of learners achievement, notwithstanding the low level of professional qualification, the large classes they have and unsatisfactory working conditions. Primary school teachers should use principles of AR to improve their practices. Therefore, TCPD should be approached as an individual teacher's responsibility by promoting SDPD.

Regarding my role of RM I developed the understanding that the time available is an important issue to take into consideration. Therefore the limited time available to do research for a degree is unlikely to produce the desirable AR competences in the PRs. In addition I learned that the possibility of teachers researching their practice is associated with the control they have of curriculum management in terms of time allocated, and learning outcomes versus learning content.

I am convinced that it is possible to promote SDPD at school level if it is supported by the pedagogical deputy. Evolving from this viewpoint I can summarise my knowledge as follows:

Statement 1: The design of a top-down orientated TCPD, based only on the learners' achievement, is a complex task to be carried out at central level, for example by the Ministry of Education (MINED).

Statement 1.1: An individual teacher approach to TCPD is likely to improve classroom practices and promote individual and professional growth.

Statement 1.2: Learning outcomes and tasks identified by the teacher, individually or supported by a fellow teacher/pedagogical deputy/external expert are more probable to be integrated in daily practices.

Statement 1.3: In cases of under-qualified teachers both direct instruction and working groups can be used in order to create knowledge and develop pedagogical skills.

Statement 1.4: Even in cases where the teachers have the same academic and professional qualifications each teacher is a singular case in her/his personal and professional growth.

Statement 2: Self-directed professional development is encouraged by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in an environment of confidence and empathy.

Statement 2.1: Confidence between the TCPD facilitator and the teacher is likely to promote an environment for authentic classroom practice without adjustment that can impress the TCPD facilitator. Scaffolding learning tasks and materials or specific knowledge and/or methods of facilitating learning play an important role if provided in the nick of time.

Statement 2.2: An empathic relationship between the RM and the teacher in which there is co-responsibility for the design and development of the AR project is more likely to promote a receptive attitude towards the less tidy nature of AR. This lack of rigorous order will be seen as normal either by the RM or by the teacher.

Statement 3: Action Research as systematic inquiry is likely to pursue a regular cyclical, reflective approach when conducted by a teacher-researcher.

Statement 3.1: When investigating classroom practices through AR in cases in which facilitating learning is not the daily researcher's task PAR is likely to provide more authentic data.

Statement 3.2: Substantial pedagogical knowledge and skills are required to guide observation and reflection in order to lead innovation and create knowledge.

From the above statements it is worth mentioning that the introduction of any SDPD model in primary schools appears to be a complex and challenging task. This process should mainly take into consideration teachers' motivation for innovation and change of their classroom practice and support of individual learners. However, the first challenge and difficulty to be faced by TCPD providers will be the provision of appropriate professional development to pedagogical deputies in order to build a pedagogical resource at school level. It is important that the professional development programme encompasses methods of facilitating learning in Grades 1 and 2, and action research and mentorship.



Copy of PR 4's report on the learningshop on action research

Maputo, 21 de julho de 2008

Análise do W realizado após o seminário realizado no mês de Abril, na faculdade de Educação

Constatações seguintes:

- Para mim o seminário foi importante, porque permitiu aumentar o meu nível no Δ do meu W profissional. Acolhi experiências quanto a administração do P.E.A. Tive oportunidade de adquirir técnicas, estratégias de como me encara os alunos que possuem dificuldades mentais, comportamentais. É referir que não tenho assim um sucesso aplausivo devido as condições de W que ocorreu durante o II Trimestre dado q obras de reabilitação da escola, que as vezes tinha que se juntar as turmas dificultando desta feita o controle e operamento dos dados disciplinares por parte de alguns foi maior. Para terminar tenho a louvar o esforço empreendido por Dr. Pieter du Toit em colaboração com a Sr^{te} Cristina Teube, advertindo que este processo seja contínuo e permanente.

Por participante

Boaz Jotam Machaizé



Copy of PR 4's project

Aplicação Prática dos Workshops Desenho da investigação (2)

1. O contexto do meu estudo

Sou professor da 1ª classe, na escola Primária Completa Unidade 18, sita no Bairro do Aeroporto na Cidade de Kaput. Sou docente do ensino primário desde 1982, e tenho leccionado da 1ª a 5ª classe. Neste ano lectivo, a minha turma é constituída por 60 aprendentes. Deste número apenas 1 aluno é repetente.

① O tópico do meu estudo é leitura e escrita. Nesta área o que mais interessa é levar os alunos a saber ler e escrever com eficácia.

② 2. Problema

O problema concreto gestado na turma numerosa. Tenho dificuldades na comunicação dado que algumas crianças não falam nem entendem a Língua Portuguesa. Também as condições socioeconómicas que por vezes desmoldam o aluno no processo de ensino e aprendizagem.

Uma possível solução para resolver este problema é necessário primeiro fazer o trabalho na turma, que é o acompanhamento da aprendizagem dos aprendentes. Se alguns aprendentes precisarem de mais atenção, procurarei contactar a família ou encarregado de educação para juntos qualificar o ponto de situação e arranjar as formas do problema.



PR 4's project (continued)

3. Objectivo

O Objectivo do meu estudo é investigar a minha prática pedagógica, na forma que lecciono de modo a melhorar a minha prática e aprendizagens do meus aprendentes.
* Escolhi este tópico porque é a chave para a aprendizagem nas classes subsequentes. O trabalho vai contar com a participação do meu colega e do meu aprendente.

4. Pergunta de pesquisa.

A pergunta que eu vou orientar neste estudo é a seguinte:
② Como é que hei de orientar o processo de ensino e aprendizagem de modo a permitir que, no fim da 1ª classe os aprendentes aprendam a ler e escrever vogais, os ditongos e algumas consoantes.

5. Desafios

① O desafio que espero encontrar face a este tópico é de sempre procurar meios, métodos de levar os alunos a atingir o objectivo esperado. Outro desafio é a distribuição do conteúdo no programa e no caderno de exercícios do aluno, assim como a dosificação na aula.
O tempo (e) disponível é muito reduzido para atender os aprendentes com mais dificuldades.
Contudo, até ao fim do ano, eu terei
③ todos aprendentes a ler pelo menos as vogais e ditongos.



PR 4's project (continued)

⑤ Preciso de conhecer melhor os meus aprendentes e manter sempre contactos periódicos planificados com as famílias para me inteirar da situação dos meus educandos e dar-lhes informações sobre a situação pedagógica, comportamental e de mais aspectos de interesse e ligados ao processo de ensino e aprendizagem.

Neste estudo, pretendo auto-avaliar-me para poder ver e melhorar o meu desempenho e ver a assimilação dos conteúdos por parte dos meus aprendentes, permitindo-me assim procurar técnicas de ultrapassar eventuais dificuldades que possam surgir nos alunos.

5. Método

O estudo é uma investigação-ação na observação da minha prática e das actividades dos meus aprendentes.

BOAZ JOATATO MACHAIEB

6.4 CONCLUSION

As a conclusion to the meta-reflection provided in this chapter I can state that this study contributes to the improvement of the understanding of TCPD through a Self-directed Professional Development model embedded in an AR paradigm applying a PAR type of AR. Consequently, the study demonstrates the potential characteristics of a TCPD programme in primary schools, involving PRs holding the medium level of professional qualification in Mozambique. The final results and positive consequence reflected in this meta-reflection are the attention that PRs pay to individual learners and the awareness of providing remedial tasks to low achieving learners.

In terms of a scholarly perspective this study contributes to the improvement of the importance of a Self-directed Professional Development (SDPD) model due to the opportunity given to each PR to participate in problematising her/his practice and searching for probable solutions. This participation is of great importance in order to overcome teachers' limitations and to engage the pedagogical deputy as facilitator within the school. Another contribution is in the sense of avoiding top-down decision-making programmes used in traditional professional development.

Throughout the study I reflected on the quality of TCPD programmes I had promoted or facilitated and on what the teachers had actually learned and put into practice. As a consequence of the changes I had introduced in my monitoring procedures at the end of the intervention I felt that I had improved my practice as promoter of TCPD and research mentor, and had influenced the PRs' practice.