The development of a support programme for foundation phase teachers to facilitate listening and language for numeracy

by

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“...you know, we teachers have never done stories, songs and rhymes in class. We thought all of that in the RNCS - it was for nothing. I feel our children ...their minds were caged in. We have since opened the screws, and the children came flying out like... birds!”

(Participant in a semi-rural context)
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Abstract

TITLE: The development of a support programme for foundation phase teachers to facilitate listening and language for numeracy

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Various assessments and international studies have shown that learners in South African schools experience challenges and perform poorly with respect to literacy and numeracy. To become competitive in the global arena, there is an urgent need to raise the standards of education.

Language is required for all learning, including numeracy and mathematics. Many young learners in South Africa struggle to develop adequate language skills because of an inherent pathology and/or barriers in their learning environment. Learners who do not develop adequate listening and language skills during their early years are most likely to experience difficulty in acquiring literacy and numeracy skills, resulting in poor academic progress. By supporting learners to overcome their developmental delays as early as in the foundation phase, future learning problems may be prevented. To raise education standards, teachers need to heighten their attempts to facilitate literacy and numeracy in the foundation phase.
Teachers currently have to adapt to a new national curriculum statement (NCS) that is based on an outcomes-based education (OBE) approach (Department of Education, 1997:16). Many teachers, especially those in black townships and other previously disadvantaged areas, find this difficult as they have not been sufficiently trained or are not adequately qualified. Educational changes have necessitated the need for high quality staff development and support.

Speech-language therapists (SLTs) working within a collaborative approach in the education context can support the learners who need to acquire listening and language skills, as well as the teachers who have to facilitate these skills.

This study developed a support programme for foundation phase teachers to facilitate listening and language for numeracy. The multifaceted programme consisted of training, mentoring, and practical components, which aimed at developing the participants' competence (foundational, practical, and reflective competence). The programme integrated the principles of adult learning within an OBE approach while taking culture and diversity into consideration. The programme was evaluated within a Logic Model framework.

The research made use of a concurrent, equal status triangulation design where triangulation was obtained by transforming QUAL data into QUAN data to be compared. In the QUAN strand, data were collected from 96 teacher participants (who were selected by using a convenience sampling method) by means of questionnaires, portfolio assignments, attendance registers, and financial statements. Qualitative data were collected from eight focus group discussions (using a nested design with 12 participants at a time) as well as a research diary, testimonials, and various correspondences.

The findings indicated that all the participants have gained knowledge, skills, and
confidence, but to varying degrees. Factors that affected the outcomes included aspects related to time, the choice of venue, age, prior support and qualifications, as well as motivation related to the context. Group learning was identified as a suitable strategy for teacher support in these contexts. Provided that specific factors are considered to increase effectiveness, the outcomes indicated that the programme could be used to support foundation phase teachers in these specific contexts.

Key words: Continued professional development, listening skills, language, programme evaluation, numeracy, mixed methods, adult learning, education, foundation phase teachers, OBE, curriculum.
OPSOMMING

TITEL: The development of a support programme for foundation phase teachers to facilitate listening and language for numeracy

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Siende dat taal- en luistervaardighede binne die spesialisgebied van spraak/taalterapeute val, is dit hulle rol om leerkragte te ondersteun met die fasilitering van sulke vaardighede vanuit ‘n samewerkingsperspektief. Hierdie studie
het ‘n ondersteuningsprogram vir grondslagfase-leerkrags ontwikkel vir die fasilitering van luister- en taalvaardighede, insluitend die taalvaardighede wat leerders benodig om getalsbegrip te ontwikkels.

Leerkrags is in werkswinkels opgelei, waarna hulle die geleentheid gebied is om die strategieë in hulle klaskamers te implementeer met die ondersteuning van ‘n mentor. Die drie komponente het gesamentlik die leerkrags se vaardigheidsvlakke aangespreek deur hulle basiese vakkennis, vaardighede, asook die vermoë om oor hulle werk te besin, te ontwikkels. Die program is gebaseer op die beginsels vir volwassene- en uitkomsgebaseerde onderrig, en het ook die rol van kultuur en diversiteit in ag geneem. Die program is binne die raamwerk van die Logiese Model geëvalueer.

Die empiriese ondersoek het van ‘n gemengde ontwerp gebruik gemaak wat beide kwantitatiewe en kwaliatiewe metodes ingesluit het. Die kwantitatiewe been het 96 leerkrags op grond van hulle beskikbaarheid ingesluit en data is met vraelysopnames, portefeuljes, teenwoordigheidsregisters, en finansiële state ingesamel. Die kwantitatiewe data is uit agt fokusgroepbesprekings, inskrywings in ‘n navorsingsdagboek, getuigskrifte, korrespondensie, en foto’s verkry. Deur die kwalitatiewe data na kwantitatiewe data oor te skakel, kon die resultate van beide tipes navorsing vergelyk word. Met die integrasie van die twee perspektiewe was dit moontlik om die waarde van die program te bepaal en ‘n begrip vir die navorsingsomgewing te ontwikkels.

Die resultate het getoon dat alhoewel al die deelnemers baat gevind het by die program en kennis, vaardighede, en selfvertroue ontwikkels, sommige meer voordeel daaruit getrek het as ander. Dit dui daarop dat ondersteuning meer effektief kon wees indien opleiding vir spesifieke groepe ontwerp word. Die kompleksiteit van die navorsingsomgewing is uitgelig deur faktore te identificeer wat
die uitkomste beïnvloed het, naamlik aspekte verbonde aan tyd, die keuse van die
opleidingslokale, die deelnemers se ouderdomme, vorige opleiding en kwalifikasies,
asook die konteks. Daar is bevind dat effektiewe leer veral in groepsverband
plaasgevind het, asook deur die voltooing van portefeuljes, en dit dus gepaste
opleidingstrategieë was. Deur inagneming van die genoemde faktore tydens die
ondersteuningsproses kan die effektiwiteit van die program verhoog word. Die
studie het bevind dat die program geskik is vir die opleiding van grondslagfase-
leerkragte in hierdie spesifieke kontekste.

Sleutelwoorde: Voortdurende professionele ontwikkeling, luistervaardigdheld,
taalvaardighede, getalsbegrip, grondslagfase-leerkragte, portefeuljes,
programevaluasie, getalsbegrip, gemengde navorsingsmetodes, volwasse leer,
onderwys, uitkomsgebasseerde onderwys, kurrikulum
Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously (in its entirety or in part) been submitted at any university for a degree.

__________________________    _____________________
Signature        Date: February 2010
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List of abbreviations

AS  Assessment standard
BICS  Basic interpersonal communication skills
CALP  Cognitive academic language proficiency
CPD  Continued professional development
ECD  Early childhood development
ELoLT  English as language of learning and teaching
GDE  Gauteng Department of Education
ITOL  Training and occupational learning
INSET  In-service education training
L1  First language (mother tongue)
LO  Learning outcomes
LoLT  Language of learning and teaching
Low SES  Low socio-economic schools
LSE  Learning support educators
NCS  National Curriculum Statement
NGO  Non-governmental organization
NLBs  National Language Bodies
NQF  National Qualification Framework
OBE  Outcomes-based education
PanSALB  Pan South African Language Board
PIRLS  Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PRESET  Pre-service education training
RNCS  Revised National Curriculum Statement
ROI  Return on investment
SACE  South African Council of Educators
SAQA  South African Qualifications Authority
SLT  Speech-language therapist
TIMSS  Third International Mathematics and Science Study