

Responses of Early Childhood teachers to Curriculum change in South Africa

by

Mary Gertrude Clasquin-Johnson

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Supervisor: Dr C.E.M. Amsterdam
Co-supervisor: Dr N.C. Phatudi

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Summary

In 2001 White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development announced that a year-long Reception Year (Grade R) programme would gradually be phased in at primary schools. In addition, the Report on the Nationwide Audit of ECD Provisioning noted that the overwhelming majority of ECE teachers are inadequately trained. Despite the teachers' lack of capacity, the national Department of Education introduced the official curriculum, the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), into Grade R classes in 2004. Prior to 2004, there was no official curriculum for Grade R. Instead, teachers designed their own curricula. The NCS, by its very imposition, is an example of radical curriculum change. I undertook a qualitative study from Grade R teachers' perspectives in order to illuminate how nine ECE teachers in Gauteng, South Africa are responding to this curriculum change.

My findings are consistent with the four main responses discussed in the literature, and on which I based my conceptual framework, namely ignore, resist, adopt and adapt. The Grade R teachers in my study viewed the NCS as developmentally inappropriate for their five-year-old learners. Although they manifested all four responses, they mainly resisted, adopted or adapted curriculum change. Their response could best be typified as "reluctant compliance". After six years of implementation, ignoring it completely is no longer a realistic option. In addition, they either reinterpreted their traditional practices as already compliant with the NCS or they implemented formal academic activities to develop school readiness skills. The Grade R teachers in my study had one outstanding characteristic in common – they are passionate about their work. Overall, the teachers reported that the NCS has detracted from their enjoyment of their work. In most cases, the Grade R teachers noted that they would pursue Foundation Phase posts because of the absence of a career path for Grade R teachers. Instructional leadership should be developed to support Grade R teachers to implement the NCS appropriately. Once this is in place, Grade R teachers need to be convinced of how the NCS could be implemented in developmentally and culturally appropriate ways and how this could benefit their learners.

Keywords

curriculum change, Early Childhood Education, Grade R, instructional leadership, National Curriculum Statement, playful learning, professional development, reception year, school readiness, teachers



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Declaration

I, Mary Gertrude Clasquin-Johnson hereby declare that this PhD thesis: Responses of Early Childhood teachers to Curriculum change in South Africa is my original work and that all the sources I consulted have been acknowledged.

M Clasquin-Johnson

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Dedication

I dedicate this PhD thesis to my mother, Francisca Johnson. Although retired she remains a leader in the ECE field in South Africa. I am proud to be following in her footsteps.



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I consider myself truly blessed to be counted among the 19 teachers my family has produced. They continue to spur me on to be the best teacher that I can be.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AS	Assessment Standard
AECYC	Association for the Education and Care of Young Children
B.Ed.	Bachelor's Degree in Education
CAP	Contextually Appropriate Practice
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CPDT	Continuing Professional Development for Teachers
DAP	Developmentally Appropriate Practice
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DBSA	Development Bank of Southern Africa
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECERS	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale
ECERS-R	Revised Edition of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale
EFA	Education for All
ELRC	Education Labour Relations Council
ETDP SETA	Education Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority
FET	Further Education and Training
FET NVC	Further Education and Training Certificate National Vocational Certificate
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association / International Football Federation
FFL	Foundations for Learning Campaign
GER	Gross Enrollment Rate
GCE	Global Campaign for Education
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
Grade R	The Reception Year, a year-long programme preceding Grade 1
HDE	Higher Diploma in Education
HoD	Head of Department
IDASA	Institute for Democracy in Southern Africa
LA	Learning Area



LO	Learning Outcome
LP	Learning Programme
NAEYC	National Association for the Education and Care of Young Children
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NELDS	National Early Learning and Development Standards
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation
NDoE	National Department of Education
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NVC	National Vocational Certificate
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
REQV	Relative Education Qualification Value
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SAIDE	South African Institute for Distance Education
SAOU/SATU	Suid Afrikaanse Onderwysers Unie / South African Teachers' Union
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SGB	School Governing Body
SGB for ECD	Standards Generating Body for Early Childhood Development
SKVAs	Skills, Knowledge, Values and Attitudes
THRASS™	Teaching Handwriting Reading and Spelling Skills
TIMMS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
UNISA	University of South Africa
UP	University of Pretoria
USA	United States of America
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand
WQDA	Weft Qualitative Data Analysis