

TEACHER AGENCY AND THE NEW CURRICULUM REFORMS IN  
SOUTH AFRICA

By

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research report, being submitted for the award of the degree of **MASTERS IN EDUCATION (MED)** at the University of Pretoria, is my independent work and it has not been previously submitted for a degree or any other examination at this or any other university.

**THOKO POPPY MAHLANGU**

.....

On this ..... day of .....

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all who really love me, especially my parents, brothers, sisters and cousins. Secondly, I dedicate this work to the two teachers from the Nkangala Region in Mpumalanga whom without their positive contributions, this study could not have been a success. These teachers have never forgotten that “THE HUMAN MIND IS THEIR FUNDAMENTAL RESOURCE” - John F. Kennedy

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## SUMMARY

Teaching is a profession that has a practical component that relies on the skilful application of knowledge. For the past ten years (1996 - 2005) and with the advent of Curriculum 2005, major changes have taken place in the underlying philosophy of education in South Africa. Curriculum 2005, which replaced the old traditional curriculum, encourages teachers to become more innovative and an emphasis is placed on the acquisition of skills, the application of knowledge and problem solving. In this study, the researcher considers teacher agency within the South African context. Teacher agency needs to be the priority of the National Department of Education. By teacher agency, the researcher refers to teachers having initiative, being innovative and also becoming responsible for their actions. Furthermore, this study also considers the influence of some educational structures on the exercising of teacher-agency. By structures, the researcher means both human and non-human structures, like circuits, district managers or documents in the form of circulars or policies.

This study presents work on the life histories of two South African teachers. These teachers are an example of those teachers who, despite all forms of problematic structures, managed to pave their way into the exercising of teacher agency. The key concepts that were used to guide this study are: Empowerment, Autonomy and Ownership.

Besides using the concepts mentioned above, the researcher also adopted Brubaker's 1994 concept of "Non-Victim", which also addresses a situation of a positive attitude of agency in difficult situations.

**KEYWORDS:** TEACHER, AGENCY, CURRICULUM, EMPOWERMENT, AUTONOMY, OWNERSHIP, STRUCTURES, NON-VICTIM, CREATIVE, INNOVATIVE, INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT, REFORM, IDENTITY

## OPSOMMING

Onderwys is 'n professie met 'n praktiese komponent wat op die vaardige toepassing van kennis vertrou. Vir die afgelope tien jaar (1996-2005) en met die aanvang van Kurrikulum 2005, het groot veranderinge in die onderliggende filosofie van onderwys in Suid-Afrika plaasgevind. Kurrikulum 2005, wat die ou tradisionele kurrikulum vervang, moedig onderwysers aan om meer innoverend te word. Die klem word geplaas op die verwerwing van vaardighede, die toepassing van kennis en probleemoplossing. In hierdie studie bestudeer die navorser onderwyser-agentuur binne die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks. Onderwyser-agentuur behoort 'n prioriteit van die Nasionale Department van Onderwys te wees. Met onderwyser-agentuur verwys die navorser na onderwysers wat initiatief neem, innoverend is en verantwoordelikheid vir hulle aksies neem. Die studie bestudeer ook die invloed van sekere opvoedkundige strukture op die uitvoering van onderwyser-agentuur. Strukture verwys na beide menslike en nie-menslike strukture soos ringe, streeksbestuurders of dokumente in die vorm van omsendbriewe of beleid.

Hierdie studie bestudeer die lewensgeskiedenis van twee Suid-Afrikaanse onderwyseresse. Hierdie onderwyseresse dien as voorbeeld van onderwysers wat, ten spyte van alle vorme van problematiese strukture, daarin geslaag het om hulle weg na onderwyser-agentuur te baan. Die sleutelkonsepte wat gebruik is om hierdie studie te lei, is Bemagtiging, Outonomieit en Eienaarskap.

Aanvullend tot bogenoemde konsepte, het die navorser ook Brubaker se 1994 konsep van "Nie-slagoffer" toegepas, wat ook 'n situasie van positiewe benadering in moeilike situasies aanspreek.

**SLEUTELWOORDE:** ONDERWYSER, AGENTSKAP, KURRIKULUM, BEMAGTIGING, OUTONOMITEIT, EIENAARSKAP, STRUKTURE, NIE-SLAGOFFER, KREATIEF, INNOVEREND, INTELLEKTUELE GESPREKVOERING, HERVORMING, IDENTITEIT.

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