Converting Teachers into agents of information literacy: the case of school librarian training in South Africa

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Outline

- Aim, methods, theoretical framework of the study
- Background to S.A. education & challenges
- Research questions
- Profile of teachers & the course intervention
- Findings + interpretation
- Concluding remarks
Aim of study; methods; theory

- Slice of a larger mainly qualitative study: investigates the competency of teachers in education in the Western Cape Province
- Presentation focus: education as a means to changing teachers’ beliefs about learning & teaching en route to becoming school librarians
- Data gathering methods: triangulated data from a questionnaire; interviews; journals; and portfolio artefacts
- Theoretical framework: constructivism + inquiry-based learning + Kulhthau’s ISP approach
Background to education
Education

- 1997: 1st curriculum for all South Africans
- Curriculum taxing; challenges manifold
- Radical departure from transmission education
- Curriculum implies schools have access to a range of info resources, but 80% do not have school libraries in the Western Cape Province
Predicaments in education

1. Poor, rural children have a low chance of succeeding at school;
2. Quality of education is unequal resulting in disadvantage based on social class and race;
3. Language: children not learning to read even in home language;
4. Poor teacher attendance, chronic lateness & unpreparedness to teach in class influence learner outcomes negatively;
5. Weak school leadership affects curriculum, time management, and more
6. Teacher knowledge of subject inadequate;
7. Teachers display a negative attitude to the profession. They are passive & tend to suffer from a victim mentality or “dependency culture”
8. Type one school: the “failing” schools
9. Teachers have limited understanding of benefits of & reading: utilitarian emphasis on reading skills
Research questions
To what extent can a course intervention shift teachers’ beliefs about learning and teaching?
What were teachers' attitudes towards information sourcing and using information from different sources?

What were teachers' initial views about research projects & how did their views change after the intervention?
School Librarianship Programme

Starting & administering

Classification & indexing

Cataloguing

Information sources

Information literacy education

Children’s & youth literature

School library management

ICT applications in school libraries
School Librarianship Programme

- Starting & administering
- Classification & indexing
- Cataloguing
- Information sources
- Children’s & youth literature
- ICT applications in school libraries
- School library management
- Information literacy education
# Profile of teachers & schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volunteering teachers: Ave age 45 years</th>
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<tr>
<td>Primary schools</td>
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<td>High schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Library Advisor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home language: Afrikaans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home language: Xhosa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home language: English</td>
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## Profile of teachers & schools

<table>
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<tr>
<th>School</th>
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<tr>
<td>Public</td>
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<td>12 of 28 (43%)</td>
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<td>: 20-25 work stations</td>
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<td>25 schools</td>
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<td>Bet 3 &amp; 25 computers</td>
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<td>Teachers’ access to ICTs at home</td>
<td>19 8 Mix of rural &amp; urban</td>
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<td>20 of 29 (71%): quintiles 1 &amp; 2 (poorest schools)</td>
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Education Course

- Concepts: constructivism, MI, Bloom’s taxonomy, cognition, scaffolding, process learning, asking good questions
- Related terms to practical ways of making explicit in the classroom.
- Motivational techniques as strategies in learning through projects (after Small & Arnone)
- Plagiarism stoppers: how to turn research projects into more engaging assignments (after Loetscher).
- Bloom’s taxonomy in terms of the skills & attitudes required by research projects.
Major assignment = Emphasis on implementing through a guided research project in the classroom.

- Schools w/o libraries: develop working relationship with public libraries.
- Models to plan a research project.
- Locate, adapt and translate templates & tools such as note-taking, mind mapping, and time management.
Assumptions

- Basic computer literacy taken for granted.
- Internet literacy assumed.
- All teachers members of EDULIS.
- As teachers implementing a curriculum inferring 🧠, they were themselves information literate.
Findings + Interpretation
Never make assumptions!

I taught Stripe how to whistle.

I don't hear him whistling.

I said I taught him. I didn't say he learned it.
Assumptions were wrong!

- If you provide a facility, it does not mean it will be used! So, despite:
  - labs at most schools not all teachers had basic computer literacy;
  - having completed courses requiring access to the Internet, literacy still weak.
  - Members of EDULIS, most did not use service.

The national curriculum assumes all teachers are info literate! They are not.
Teachers’ views about research projects, a vehicle for education

- Teachers queried as a role of the school librarian
- Research projects: a curriculum mystery
  - Teachers’ inadequate preparation
  - In-service training superficial/gloss over projects
  - Lack of know-how perpetuated mediocrity
In my years (as a teacher & during pre-service teacher training) we did not do projects. We were always teaching and telling. We were not trained to teach projects. We were expected to give the children the knowledge.
We (teachers) were negligent before. We ourselves did not do research. We would give them the task, say go to the library, and then we would see it at the end again. Usually the children just copied from each other. I never thought why learners cheated and plagiarized or how I could prevent it. I realise that sometimes you (the teacher) just give a mark.
Grade 3 teacher

I just gave them (the children) a topic and they had to do the research themselves. I didn’t care where they got their information from. I just expected them to be able to do it. They did not do very well because they really didn’t know what I wanted. Also, the questions I gave them, those who went to the computer, just copied and pasted everything. I would mark it because I didn’t know it was wrong. I didn’t know about plagiarism. Then I would just mark ’very good’.
I like giving interesting (for me at least – is it interesting for them?) assignments, but I have failed in the following through of it. I realise now that I expected way too much of my Grade 7 social science learners. Maybe that is why more than half did not hand in their assignments. I have expected them to read many different books (that I brought to school via block loan) & to synthesize the info without giving them a framework. I take it for granted that they know how to sift and collate information from different sources. I thought they could do it because they enjoyed reading the books and researching the information. They must have been totally overwhelmed! I feel awful now. I did ask them if they had been taught how to take notes & they said, no. So I gave them a brief overview of it, but I did not do enough. I assumed because they were quiet in class and reading the books that they were managing ok. Obviously they were not. I should have kept tabs on them & assessed them on an ongoing basis. All that is expected of them is to use textbooks & fill in forms. That makes it easier to mark, but what is the point of it? – The learner has the required number of pieces of work in their portfolios – but a lot of it is meaningless, ‘busy’ work
Change after the course intervention
Use IL model to guide learning process & assessment

Inquiry Model

Planning
- Identify a topic area for inquiry
- Identify possible information sources
- Identify audience and presentation format
  - Establish evaluation criteria
  - Outline a plan for inquiry

Retrieving
- Develop an information retrieval plan
- Locate and collect resources
- Select relevant information
- Evaluate information
- Review and revise the plan for inquiry

Processing
- Establish a focus for inquiry
- Choose pertinent information
- Record information
- Make connections and inferences
- Review and revise the plan for inquiry

Creating
- Organize information
- Create a product
- Think about the audience
- Revise and edit
- Review and revise the plan for inquiry

Sharing
- Communicate with the audience
- Present new understandings
- Demonstrate appropriate audience behaviour

Evaluating
- Evaluate the product
- Evaluate the inquiry process and inquiry plan
- Review and revise personal inquiry model
- Transfer learning to new situations/beyond school

Reflecting on the Process
Overcoming their demons – using the Web to broaden access to information.
Planning the project thoroughly
Scaffolding the learning
Using motivational techniques

Learners taking notes whilst watching a DVD
Connecting with resource providers, overcoming complacency

Learners with a public librarian
Teachers as agents of change

No illusion that a single course can change beliefs of all participants. Rather saw gradations of change.

Havelock’s change continuum recognising nuanced change

Level 1  Level 6

No change  Integrated
Adopted most aspects of ILE

Integrated IL into subjects

Curiosity/Interest

Evaluating/reflecting on IL.

Trialling/testing aspects of IL
Selected results

- The nature of change in education is complex. Need enabling environment to promote change;
- Use an IL model as an enabling tool especially for teachers who have little prior experience doing research;
- Teachers have to be taught how to make IL explicit in the classroom as it does not come naturally;
- Reservations to sustaining IL: time constraints access to functioning school libraries & internet; school milieu
Conclusion

- A course that requires authentic assessment may be better than only a summative exam for shifting beliefs.
- Subtle shifts in beliefs are possible after an intervention – the seeds have been planted.
- Conversion is possible but retention is hard under trying conditions.
- Teachers have to be comfortable in the new information landscape first before they can mediate with learners in the classroom.


References


References


