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## **Teachers' social capital as a resource for curriculum development: lessons learnt in the implementation of a Child-Friendly Schools programme**

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This paper reports on lessons learnt in the use of teachers' social capital as a resource for curriculum development, in the implementation of the Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) programme in South Africa. The researchers in this study were amongst the trainers. The study followed a qualitative research approach, where a descriptive research design was adopted. Twenty teachers (two groups, of ten each) were recruited to form part of the study through a purposive sampling strategy. Data was collected through two methods: interviews and observations. The data collected was explicated using Hycner's (1999) model of data analysis. Data transcripts were re-read until categories and themes emerged. The study found that teachers were enthusiastic about implementing the programme as they participated actively in it through the implementation of CFS principles in their Life Orientation (LO) classrooms. The findings of this study have at least two implications for policy makers and researchers. The first is that the one-day workshops that teachers attend over a weekend appear to be inadequate, and could be used to complement more structured interventions such as that described in this article. The second is that teachers' social capital is critical in the implementation of curriculum development processes for an intervention to be effective.

**Key words:** child-friendly schools; curriculum implementation; curriculum improvement; teachers

### **Introduction**

The need for curriculum improvement, where all the aspects within the school are included (Carl, 2009), is embedded in many quality assurance mechanisms, and on-going professional development efforts (Boud & Hager, 2012). On-going curriculum improvement is important for improving the academic achievement of learners, and for the holistic development of learners. It also serves to develop the competences of teachers. The need to improve both the academic achievement of learners and the competences of teachers is normally evident in interventions that are meant to bring about curriculum change.

Curriculum change and development in most of these interventions would take the form of short workshops, one-day training sessions, or community meetings. This approach appears to be limited in its effectiveness, because it lacks depth and continuity. Du Preez and Roux (2008) argue that such an approach excludes the participation of teachers, who are central in the implementation of any curriculum improvement effort. They argue, as do we, that such an approach affects teacher commitment in the delivery of curriculum improvement efforts. Teacher participation in the implementation of any curriculum development is useful when gauging the success of such a curriculum, especially when they contribute their social capital towards it (Varkey, Peloquin, Reed, Lindor & Harris, 2009).

The present study sought to explain this idea of teachers sharing social capital through the description of teachers' participation in an intervention curriculum programme that infused the CFS principles and approaches in an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) in LO teacher education programme. Our position is informed by a view of curriculum as a process, rather than as mere product.

There are two contrasting conceptions of curriculum. One conceives of curriculum as a product that is complete and ready for use (Coleman, Graham-Jolly & Middlewood, 2003; Stenhouse, 1976; Varkey et al., 2009), where teachers are recipients and implementers of the curriculum, rather than its developers (Stenhouse, 1976). Another view sees curriculum as a process that takes place in classrooms, where teachers take an active role in its design and implementation. In this view, the curriculum refers to more than just the writing of lesson plans, but entails an ongoing process that teachers begin during extended training, and continue with as they work in their own schools and classrooms. The two views of curriculum referred to may be traced back to a debate between the respective authors Tyler and Stenhouse, where Tyler argued that the curriculum was a product, while Stenhouse described it as a process (Hoadley & Jansen, 2012).

This study follows the latter conception, where we sought to discover the role of teachers in the creation of safe and supportive school environments, through the implementation of CFS principles. Studies have shown that when teachers provide social capital in teaching and learning environments, this results in the cascading of the curriculum (Baker-Doyle & Yoon, 2011; Croninger & Lee, 2001).

### **The Social Capital of Teachers**

The notion of social capital evolved from the work of sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu, who explained it as the average of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1983). Central to the notion of

social capital is the idea of contributions by individuals within a social structure (Coleman, 1988). Thus, social capital does not simply refer to a single entity, but to a variety of entities, which have common elements, and facilitate certain actions collectively within that social structure. Such a form of social interaction enables citizens to address societal problems more meaningfully.

Our paper focuses on the contributions made by teachers, collectively in their teaching and learning environments. The teachers in the study implemented the CFS principles they learnt from the ACE in LO programme in their own school settings; working with other teachers. Thus, they drew from their institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition in implementing the curriculum.

Consistent with our stance, Cohen and Hill (2001), as well as Penuel, Sun, Frank and Gallagher (2012), have also considered the notion of social capital on content-focused professional development, and the improvement of teachers' practice. In this way, social capital aids the implementation of reform initiatives (Gamoran, Gunter & William, 2005). For the notion of social capital of teachers to succeed, there is a need for relational trust among the individuals within the school structure.

#### Relational Trust in Schools

The concept of relational trust within the school context emanates from sociological frameworks that explain schools as organisational structures where interactions take place among groups such as teachers and their learners; teachers and parents; and teachers and their peers (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Relational trust among individuals has a bearing on trust in the organisational structure. For teachers in the ACE in LO programme to succeed in the implementation of CFS principles, this kind of trust with other individuals such as school leaders, fellow teachers, learners and the school governing bodies – all of whom effectively represent the parent in their schools – was critical.

#### Context of the Study

South Africa, like many other developing countries such as Thailand, Brazil, Sri Lanka, Sudan (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2009b), and some developed countries like the United States Of America (US) (Hall, 2013), experiences challenges related to the violation of children's rights in schools. While many children are able to access learning environments that are conducive to learning, there are still many learners who are exposed to conditions that are not child-friendly at all (UNICEF, 2009a). This constitutes a violation of children's right to education. Such violation is broadly reported almost daily in the mass media. Newspaper articles and news reports on television

often carry headlines such as: "Children learning under trees" (Macupe, 2012:2). These reports are, to a great extent, evidence that many learners are still exposed to different forms of violence, abuse, negligence and danger. As a result, several interventions are currently being implemented, including the CFS.

As an intervention, the CFS is a response to the call by UNICEF and Common Wealth of Learning (COL) to promote child-friendly schooling. The Department of Educational Studies at the University of Limpopo, South Africa, developed a programme to promote CFS principles through an intensive curriculum development process. In reviewing its ACE in LO programme for in-service teachers, the Department decided to weave the CFS principles, as a binding thread, throughout the modules that constitute the programme for effectiveness and re-enforcement. Teachers registered in the programme were immersed in a curriculum combining the CFS principles, which ran for two years. This was intended to gain their involvement and to strengthen their capacity for implementation.

This decision was taken to ensure that all the teachers registered in the programme became aware of the magnitude of the problem of the violation of the rights of children, and to begin to think meaningfully about the role they might fulfil. It further prompted the teachers to reflect on their own practice, with a view to moving towards more child-friendly practices, and to becoming agents of CFS in their own schools and environments.

Masitsa (2001) also argues that teachers as curriculum implementers are best positioned to change schools for the better. So, creating an awareness of the need for safe and child-friendly school environments amongst teachers, and involving them in the creation of such environments, is likely to yield more effective change and development (Carl, 2009; Wang & Cheng, 2005). We argue, therefore, that the structured ACE in LO programme was a more effective approach for curriculum development, and that the teachers' participation served as a valuable source for curriculum review. It is against this background that this study sought to establish a way in which teachers' social capital as a resource in the curriculum development, contributes towards curriculum improvement.

#### The Child-Friendly School Conceptual Framework

The CFS conceptual framework was developed by UNICEF. It is a response to a lack of progress in achieving the goals of these initiatives. At its heart, CFS approaches are aimed at making schools work better for the welfare of children. They seek to create educational environments that are safe, healthy and which protect children, and which facilitate the delivery of quality education. Furthermore, CFS seeks to foster an environment where children's

rights are protected and advanced, and their voices given adequate space. For that purpose, CFS approaches promote inclusiveness, gender-sensitivity, tolerance, dignity and personal empowerment (Irvine, 2000).

In South Africa, the Department of National Education has worked closely with UNICEF to develop strategies that aimed to make schools better. UNICEF has been supporting the Safe and Caring Child Friendly Schools (SCCFS) for several years now, and by 2010, 820 of the most disadvantaged schools were implementing it. A 2011 evaluation study by Irvine (2000) noted that child-friendly principles have now become fully integrated into the national Caring and Support for Teaching and Learning framework, which will help to ensure the sustainability and scaling up of the SCCFS concept nationwide. Plans are underway for full scale-up in three provinces, with the lowest performance rates in the 2011 Annual National Assessment. The CFS principles are thus the core strategy for improvement through the Education Sector Action Plan 2014 (Department of Basic Education, 2011) and the Schooling 2025 initiative (Department of Basic Education, 2010).

This Action Plan, along with Schooling 2025, aim to make certain that every learner receives quality schooling. To achieve this goal, schools should ensure amongst other things, that learners attend school regularly and that teachers teach effectively. This goal is an admission that although substantial progress has been made towards improving the conditions in schools, much work still remains to be done. Most township and rural schools still face numerous challenges that make them unsafe and unfriendly for children. The main challenge is to turn CFS into a process of teacher education, rather than just a product. It is within this framework that the ACE in LO programme was designed to address some of these challenges.

#### The Advanced Certificate in Education (Life Orientation)

The ACE in LO is an intervention programme that was designed to address the need of LO teachers, most of whom were not trained for the subject during their initial training as teachers. It was designed alongside the guidelines of Norms and Standards for Teachers (Department of Education, 2000). In 2009, the Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Education requested that their LO teachers be enrolled for the programme. Around that time, UNICEF, in collaboration with COL, approached the School of Education through the Department of Education Studies at the University of Limpopo to roll out the CFS programme. The ACE in LO programme was found to be best suited to carry out the project by infusing the CFS

principles in courses. The ACE in LO programme was then restructured so as to integrate the CFS principles of inclusivity, learner-centredness and democratic participation (UNICEF, 2009a).

The CFS characteristics derived from these principles are that school ought to be: rights-based; health-promoting and health-seeking; safe and secured, providing effective teaching; gender-sensitive; and promoting partnerships with their communities. The ACE in LO programme, amongst other issues, required the teachers to know the CFS principles and to understand them, so as to implement them through the teaching of LO, and to relate the outcomes of LO to the CFS principles. However, they did not participate in all the phases of developing the programme, but only in the implementation phase. It is within this context that the teachers were recruited to participate in the present study. The research question that we sought to answer was: how does the resource of teachers' social capital enhance the implementation of curriculum?

### Research Methodology

#### Research Design

In order to best understand how teachers' active participation and social capital enhance curriculum implementation, we followed both an epistemological and the empirical inquiry. The former guided us to deepen our understanding of where curriculum development and implementation stem from, and the latter helped us to ascertain how teachers themselves began to see themselves as agents of changes as they grappled with the infusion of the CFS principles and characteristics in their schools.

To capture the teachers' voice in the implementation of the programme, a qualitative descriptive research design was adopted for use in the study. Further, the design allowed us to explore the teachers' participation in the implementation of the CFS principles and approaches from their own insider perspective. To address our qualitative and exploratory purposes, we made use of this interpretative paradigm at the levels of ontology (multiple curriculum realities), epistemology (interaction with rather than detachment from respondents) and methodology (using idiographic methodology and instruments).

#### Data Collection

In line with the qualitative methodology, we used qualitative data collection methods, general interviews (pre/post-lesson interviews, group interviews) and participant observation; observing the teachers' participation in curriculum development. In addition, we also held informal conversations with school principals during our site visits. We observed 20 schools: seven foundation phase

schools, eight intermediate schools, and five senior phase schools; which were mainly rural, with a few being semi-urban.

The descriptive design guided us through the process of data construction, where focus-group interviews were conducted with two groups of ten participants each. The teachers were sampled through a purposive sampling strategy (on the basis that they taught LO, and were registered in the ACELO programme). We included both male and female participants. We also selected them according to the phases in which they were teaching. Seven were from the foundation phase (Grades One to Three), eight were from the intermediate phase (Grades Four to Six), and five from the senior phase (Grades Seven to Nine). The five teachers from the senior phase were split into the other two phases (three into the foundation phase, and two into the intermediate phase), to make the two groups of ten. The participants in the first group were labelled A to J, and the participants in the second group were labelled AA to JJ.

In addition to the focus group interviews, individual in-depth interviews (pre/post-lesson interviews) were constructed around the six CFS characteristics that emanate from the three principles: learner-centredness; democratic participation; and inclusiveness as themes. The teachers were asked to reflect on their experiences of how they integrated these in their teaching. Interview data was corroborated through participant observations on the school sites. This included the inspection of classrooms, toilets and the school ground. Documents were also analysed. These included the departmental education policies; school policies; CFS training manuals and teachers' reflective journals. These documents allowed us to frame our analysis of data. In addition, the study of these documents allowed us to use CFS principles as a guide to practice, while the inductive approach allowed us to use classroom practice to inform the CFS principles.

This use of multiple methods enabled us to enter the world of teachers to ascertain whether they were moving towards praxis in their implementation of CFS principles. (Huberman, 1993; Zeichner, 1995).

#### Data Explication

We followed Hycner's model (Groenewald, 2004) of data explication as follows: firstly, data from the different sources were classified according to the six characteristics of CFS, which formed themes around which we organised data. Secondly, we delineated units of meaning, by reading the transcripts over and over again by both researchers, which were then given to a peer so as to establish trustworthiness (Bitsch, 2005; Lincoln, 1995). Thirdly, we then clustered these meanings according to the three CFS principles. Fourthly, we

then summarised each individual interview, validated with the respondents, and modified where necessary. Fifth, we then extracted what we regarded as general meanings from all the three major themes, and developed a composite summary as presented in the section below.

#### Findings

##### Findings from Interviews and Informal Conversations

The findings from interviews with teachers are divided into three main domains: the teachers' knowledge of the CFS principles; their interpretations of the CFS principles; and their application of the CFS principles.

##### *Teachers' knowledge of the CFS principles*

On the whole, all the teachers were agreeable, forthcoming and eager to share their understanding of CFS in their responses, and displayed a good knowledge of the CFS principles. They demonstrated a clear understanding of how they work. They could identify the six principles clearly, and could explain what each one of them meant. They were also able to explain the principles in terms of how they related to each other. For example, they were able to see the relationship between the principle of learner-centredness as a base for inclusivity and democratic participation. This is illustrated in teacher DD's explanation of her interaction with her learners, reporting that: *"I make sure my classroom is learner-centred by including all learners and by allowing each one of them to participate"*. The teachers clearly differentiated the meanings of the principles while seeing their relationship.

##### *Teachers' interpretation of the CFS principles*

The teachers' understanding of the CFS principles was further reflected in their interpretation and context within their schools. They also tended to place emphasis on particular principles in some instances. For example, Teacher J repeatedly referred to the importance of democratic participation in the classroom, while teacher BB stressed the inclusivity of learners. This is evidenced where she noted: *"I now go out of my way to encourage each learner to take part in the lesson"*.

Further, they did not isolate what the principles meant from their school and classroom realities. Teacher B had this to say:

*Since I [...] participated in this programme; I [...] initiated some changes in our school. For example, we now consider the opinions of learners when it comes to making choices that affect them. We allow them to choose the colours of their sports gear [for example].*

##### *Teachers' application and practice of the CFS principles*

Regarding the application or implementation of the CFS principles, it was revealed that the teachers

saw themselves as agents of change in their schools. In some cases, they initiated the cascading of the CFS principles and characteristics by sharing ideas and skills through meetings with the rest of the teachers, depending on the support they got from the school leadership. Some of them said that they were seen as knowledgeable resource people by their colleagues, who consulted with them when they encountered certain challenges or problems in the school environment. *"They now call us experts of LO and CFS in the school"*, said teacher EE. They alluded to the fact that their attitude towards learners and towards dealing with problems had changed. In some cases, this was corroborated by the principals when we visited the schools.

Some of the teachers had initiated activities even beyond the school in order to assist learners. An outstanding example was one in which the teacher in the programme had worked with other teachers and organised the building of a two-roomed house for children in their school, who lived under rather difficult conditions. In some cases, the teachers went out of their way to find out why learners arrived late at school and why some of them were not regular in their attendance. The teachers also indicated that in many cases, they found ways of assisting some of their learners to access their social grants and to obtain school uniforms. Teacher BB indicated that, *"the principal and teachers now alerted each other of learners who seem to come to school in a bad shape [sic], and [to] trace whether they come from poor back-grounds."* They also tried to assist learners who were abused in one way or the other by involving those around them and those who could assist them, such as the social workers.

Regarding their practice in the classroom, the teachers indicated that they were conscious of the importance of treating all learners alike, irrespective of their performance in class or their socio-economic background. Some explained how they had arranged for ramps to be built in their schools to assist the disabled learners with their mobility. The teachers also reported that they tried by all means to involve learners in taking decisions on certain issues, like developing classroom rules. Even in their teaching, they said they tried by all means to give every learner a chance to participate freely. According to the teachers, the principle of learner-centeredness was key, and the other two principles of democratic participation and inclusivity served to actualise it. They argued that a learner-centred classroom would be inclusive and would allow learners free participation in classroom activities.

It was possible to ascertain from the informal conversations with the school principals and heads of departments that teachers had approached them and explained the requirements and expectations of the programme. The teachers had also asked for

their support and that of the entire staff. The teachers in the Advanced Certificate in Education Life Orientation (ACELO) programme had brought about invisible and visible change in the schools and classrooms in the form of: advocating for the involvement of learners in some decision making processes; promoting inclusiveness in dealing with learners in the school and in the classrooms; promoting maximum and free participation of learners in school activities and projects; requesting that the South African flag be hoisted in the school yard; the mission and vision statement of the school be displayed at the school entrance; safety and security at the school gate; a school garden, which in some cases involved community members; well-cooked clean food, where a project that had already been in place and was run by the provincial departments of education, which also often involved parents and other members of the community; clean running water; clean toilets; promoting cleanliness in the whole school environment; ramps to accommodate disabled learners and steps built around steep school surfaces for the safety of the learners.

Some of the teachers demonstrated acute leadership skills and showed enthusiasm in introducing and implementing some of the practices related to CFS. Such teachers were regarded as effective teachers by their peers and school principals even before registering for the ACELO programme.

The school leaders however indicated that a few of the teachers in the ACELO programme had not initiated much change and were not active in leading the processes that lead to the effective implementation of the CFS principles and practices.

#### Findings from Observations

We classified observations made at these schools into three areas, those related to the physical environment (security personnel at the entrance and a fence around the school), classroom environments, and teaching and learning processes (those that related to teaching and learning (involvement of learners as well as those that related to the teaching and learning process itself regarding the content that was taught and how it taught).

#### *Physical environments*

The observations made at the school sites revealed that in most of the schools, there was security at the gate in the form of high steel gates, as well as a security guard who controlled access to the school. There was a mission and vision statement displayed at the entrance; some schools had ramps constructed, but others did not have them. Some of the schools were made attractive from the outside, with trees and plants grown at the entrance or around the whole school or in some key areas of the school. In many of the schools we visited, the toilets were

clean and there was water, but in a few cases, the toilets were still not clean.

Some schools had running water, while others bought water or requested the learners to bring water from home. Water was still a problem in some cases, and this affected most of the gardening in these schools. In many of the schools, attempts to plant trees and flowers and to keep the schools clean were evident. All the learners in all the schools visited were wearing a school uniform.

There was transport for all the learners who attended farm schools in the form of buses, but this was not the case with learners in the villages and townships. The feeding scheme was running well in all the schools.

#### *Classroom environments*

We also observed that there was a cordial atmosphere between teachers and learners, and among the learners themselves. For example, in some instances learners knew one another's names, which is a rare occurrence in cases where there is overcrowding. Learners were encouraged to share answers among themselves, which promoted cooperative learning. Other positive features that promoted good learning in these environments included the accessibility of ground rules, which were hung on the classrooms walls (Reutzel & Clarke, 2011), alongside the South African flag and other educational charts (Barber & Badre, 1998). In our view, these features contributed towards the promotion of CFS principles.

#### *Teaching and learning process*

The content taught to the learners in the different phases was at the required level in terms of the prescribed National Curriculum Statement. Many of the lessons we observed involved the learner most of the time. Teacher-centeredness was clearly minimal.

#### *Challenges that teachers experienced in the implementation of CFS principles*

Despite these positive experiences, teachers also cited some challenges they came across in their bid to introduce and implement the CFS principles in their school environments. Teacher G expressed: *"I sacrifice and try my best but no one helps, especially the school leaders."* In some cases, they reported that some of their colleagues were not supportive of their initiatives and this affected the quality of implementation. Some parents, according to the teachers, also posed a challenge, because they did not engage with teachers or come to the school when invited. Some did not offer support to their children even when advised to do so by the school. Another major challenge for the teacher was finding it difficult to get the parents to obtain social grants for their children, or failing to take the

child to the clinic to address a health problem: *"I sent a letter to the parents asking them to take the child to the clinic, but they did not"*, said Teacher A.

#### **Discussion**

This study sought to establish the way in which teachers' social capital contributed in the implementation of CFS. The study used a qualitative research methodology to investigate this notion. Overall, we found that teachers' participation in the implementation of the CFS improved their commitment to curriculum development.

We therefore argue, following Du Preez and Roux (2008), that when teachers are active participants in the implementation, and when the new intervention is integrated in their everyday teaching, this improves its success. In contrast, when curriculum development efforts take place in the form of one-day workshops, and other forms that are short-term, they tend to leave teachers out, and are inadequate.

Our findings are consistent with other studies elsewhere. Martin-Kniep and Uhrmacher (1992), in an article entitled *Teachers as Curriculum Developers*, make use of an analogy of a musical composer and musical conductor. They compare curriculum experts, who develop curriculum materials from a district office, to music composers, and musical conductors to teachers. They argue that when the music composers are also the conductors, they find their work more fulfilling. Such is the case when teachers are active participants in the writing of learning materials adapted to their own settings. In another study by Shawer (2010), which aimed to explore teacher curriculum approaches and the strategies attached to them, it was found that when teachers were active participants in curriculum development, this increased the implementation of new initiatives. This view is also embraced by several other curriculum scholars (Collopy, 2003; Kavanagh, Agan & Sneider, 2005; Kavanagh & Sneider, 2007).

However, contrary to our findings, some studies (Miller-Day, Pettigrew, Hechet, Shin, Graham & Krieger, 2013; Stein, Kaufman & Kisa, 2014) point to constraints (time, institutional, personal, and technical), and respond to student needs (students' abilities to process curriculum content to enhance student engagement with material) as major obstacles to teachers engaging in matters of curriculum development. Also, related to this view, was that teachers were more likely to resort to district-based materials as their source of a lesson plan than to develop their own, based on unique contexts (Stein et al., 2014; Wang & Cheng, 2005). Fogleman, McNeill and Krajcik (2011) found that teachers experienced challenges in adapting an innovative curriculum, specifically around issues of

the amount of time, level of completion, activity structures, and teacher self-efficacy (teacher comfort and student understanding).

Despite the challenges pointed out above, there is overwhelming evidence (Gulston, 2010; Somo, 2007; Steyn, 2008) that the approach we propose in this article, of engaging teachers in a formal programme, is more productive compared to the once-off workshops delivery mode, which normally leaves teachers with shallow knowledge, or even more confused. Our conclusion from this study is that teachers tend to understand and adapt new innovations when they are part of them. However, such a conclusion ought to be arrived at with caution, since our study did not set up appropriate analysis units, classes or schools, but used individual teachers who were part of the programme. Further research into such analyses could provide further insight.

#### Implications of the Study

Our findings have at least three implications: firstly, that on-going professional development of teachers ought to be long-term and school-based, rather than short-term, where teachers are taken to in-service training centres. Secondly, any new innovation ought to be embedded in the curriculum of the schools, where teachers are given support by the service provider for a considerable time. Thirdly, the notion of curriculum as a process ought to be advocated as an expansion of curriculum as a product. There is a need to push for an understanding of curriculum as involving what teachers do with learners, rather than only what the district office instructs should be done. For example, whereas Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) workbooks are welcome by most teachers as providing much needed support, they tend to take away the need for self-efficacy in teachers if they are not actively involved in the curriculum development processes.

#### Conclusion

The process of promoting child-friendly schools through curriculum development and teacher education is a complex one, as it requires of the teacher to understand the principles that underpin the thinking behind the change. It becomes an even bigger challenge for curriculum developers and teachers to ensure that there is practical implementation of what has been conceptualised beyond the theoretical level, and that this implementation is sustainable.

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