Re-imaging support for beginner teachers in relation to initial teacher education policy in South Africa

Dorothy E. Esau (iD)
Department of SP/FET, Faculty of Education, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Wellington, South Africa
esaud@cput.ac.za
Rouaan Maarman (iD)
Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Education, University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa

Findings from a recent study highlight beginner teacher's perceptions about the nature of support they had received to enhance their competencies (Esau, 2017). Against this backdrop, with this article we aim at problematising support for beginner teachers in relation to the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa of 2006. This teacher education policy stipulates principles that require of a novice teacher to assume specific roles and responsibilities which they find difficult to fulfil. The findings reveal that compliance with this policy is inhibited by the fact that teachers feel ill-prepared and unsupported on entering the teaching profession. Investigating the nature of support of beginner teachers, therefore, provides an opportunity to re-imagine both teacher education and context. In this article we highlight the risk evaluations of beginner teachers using Amartye Sen's Capability Approach (CA).

Keywords: beginner teachers; Capability Approach; competences; education policy; support

Introduction

An extensive global body of research by governments and academics indicates the worrying trend of new teachers who are poorly prepared to teach (Department of Education [DoE], 2009; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, many attempts have been made to redress the unequal distribution of resources and funding to those who need it the most, yet the quality training and preparedness of teachers still remains a challenge. To this extent, Taylor (2019:263–282), in a comprehensive study about the preparedness of beginner teachers to enter the teaching profession, bemoans "the weak disciplinary knowledge resources held by the majority of South African teachers." Even though the debate continues as to which organ in the education landscape is in actual fact responsible for ill-preparedness of teachers, the question remains whether the support that teachers receive on entering the teaching profession is adequate to sustain their growth and development to meet the growing needs of the diverse learning community. In addition, research has proven that the above is often exacerbated by the effects of low transparency in high-level decision-making and lack of accountability in policy implementation. This, consequently, leads to inferior working conditions and inadequate support for teachers (Holborn, 2013).

Literature Review

A comprehensive overview of the literature focused on the demands of teacher education policy in relation to the realities faced by newly qualified teachers in their new work environment; the importance of support to enhance their capabilities and how the tenets of the CA can be used to understand the capabilities of beginner teachers.

Novice teachers, also referred to as beginner teachers, neophytes, and pre-service teachers are depicted in many studies that focus on teachers who have difficulties dealing with their tasks at work. For the purposes of this study, the term "beginner teacher" is defined as a graduate teacher with less than 5 years of teaching experience.

Policy vs practice

"Policy is text and action, words and deeds; it is what is enacted as well as what is intended" (Ball, 1994:10). This view of policy is an important springboard for the ways we might think about policy problematisation. In particular, Ball, Maguire, Braun and Hoskins' (2011) notion of enactment signals the ways that policy interacts with thinking and practice as they reiterate that policies can be interpreted differently, given varying resources and circumstances.

The seven principles underpinning the National Policy Framework (NPF), as expressed in the Norms and Standards for Educators (DoE, Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2000), are outlined as follows: a teacher is required to be: a specialist in a particular learning area, subject or phase; a specialist in teaching, learning and assessment; a curriculum developer; a leader, administrator and manager; a scholar and lifelong learner; and a professional who plays a role in community development, citizenship education, and pastoral care.

The adaptation and compliance of these requirements pose a problem when teachers have not been consulted in the formulation of policy. In Lewin, Samuel and Sayed (2003), Jansen (1997) states that every education policy document contains powerful images of the idealised teacher. Jansen adds that "whether explicit

or implied, whether conscious or unconscious, policymakers hold preferred and cherished images about the end-user of an education policy, that is, about the teacher" and in his view, "policy is often conveyed through drastic role changes for the teacher without addressing the practitioner directly" (Jansen, 1997:8). To this extent, policymakers are urged to critically assess who the policy is aimed at; how policy relates to practice and what the implications will be for teaching and learning.

Increased teacher workload

Teachers in South African public schools are faced with high levels of stress due to increased workloads as a result of overcrowded classrooms, inadequate support and low morale. In addition to this, teachers are often negatively impacted by the fact that they are expected to do work which is over and above the work that teachers are expected to do. A recent report revealed that teachers spent the majority of their time doing tasks which were not directly related to their jobs, such as filling the role of school psychologist and nursing aides. The report also revealed that they would actually prefer to spend time on tasks that would benefit teaching and learning directly (Weston, 2014). In schooling, far-reaching finance equity mechanisms have been put in place, yet increased fiscal inputs are not translating into performance outcomes. Questions persist about whether the current equity approach is adequate, and whether differential redistribution has taken place. Through an analysis of large data sets, policy and quantitative review, we examine four major themes which cut across the schooling sector. These include fee-free schooling; private inputs into public education; the relationship between social equity and education equity; and equitable funding models and approaches. It is argued that differential redistribution must define the equity approach of the country and in the context of limited fiscal resources, new approaches are proposed to ensure that a pro-poor strategy is achieved.

In 2013, it was reported that there were "42 KwaZulu-Natal schools with more than 90 learners in a classroom, 254 schools at which the classroom average was 60 learners and 934 schools with an average of 55" (Mathevula & Uwizeyimana, 2014:1092). With alarming conditions such as these, there can be little meaningful teaching and learning taking place. Education statistics (Department of Basic Education, RSA, 2016) also reported that from 2013 to 2015, the number of learners increased by 2.8% nationally, while the number of educators and schools decreased by 2.1% and 0.1%, respectively. KwaZulu-Natal was the only province that experienced a significant drop in the number of learners and educators. In this and other provinces in the country, principals are under immense pressure from communities to accept children even amidst parents' knowledge that classrooms are overcrowded. Harley and Wedekind (2004) state that the acceptable teacher-learner ratio should be 1:25 and 1:35 and not 1:55 or 1:65 as is currently the case.

Lack of resources

The extensive financial equity mechanisms put in place by the South African government are seemingly not translating into performance outcomes as the current equity approach and differential redistribution is clearly not working. At the backdrop of this, the structure of no-fee schools and other funding models are widely examined (Motala & Carel 2019). It is argued that differential redistribution must define the equity approach of the country and in the context of limited fiscal resources, new approaches are proposed to ensure that a pro-poor strategy is achieved. Teachers end up being the victims of poor planning by policymakers (Holborn, 2013).

Many public schools in previously disadvantaged communities in South Africa are facing enormous problems with regard to the provision of basic resources, such as proper classroom structures, teaching apparatus, textbooks, stationery, printing facilities and in many cases, water and sanitation. Rural schools are mostly the hardest hit, as they face unique challenges and some of the worst barriers to effective education such as abject poverty, a total lack of resources, underqualified teachers, and multi-grade teaching. To this effect, teachers in township schools feel like conditions still remain the same as it used to be pre-1994 (Sedibe, 2011).

Deteriorating discipline of learners

A recent study highlights the lack of discipline in the classroom as one of the biggest concerns for beginner teachers (Esau, 2017). Learners' and teachers' well-being are threatened by crime and violence in schools. According to Berger (2003), learners' discipline has deteriorated so drastically and that instances of learner-on-teacher and learner-on-learner violence have increased to such an extent that learners and teachers have been fatally injured. Learning and teaching in South Africa can unfortunately not continue unabated as schools in impoverished communities are rampant with incidents of gangster activities, vandalism, burglaries, rape and murders on school grounds (Berger, 2003).

Low levels of education among parents and guardians

International studies have shown that the lack of education of parents in impoverished communities have a huge impact on how they perceive their

involvement in schools (Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004). Because of the socio-economic conditions of parents in these communities, parents are forced to work long hours and, therefore, find it difficult to make a contribution to the education of their children or sadly, because they themselves never reached the level of education their children are at. Another reason cited for the non-involvement of parents in their children's schooling is that parents are too afraid to challenge the status quo of the school because they fear that their children might become victims to abuse by teachers or learners. Some go as far as to think that their child might fail. In such cases, parents end up accepting decisions taken by schools even though they might be in disagreement (Mncube, 2007). This is the reason why, in many cases, school governing bodies (SGBs) merely rubber-stamp decisions taken by previously white-dominated SGBs at former white schools. "Parents often feel that a *'good'* parent is one who does not ask too many questions and does not involve himself or herself in professional matters of the school" (Mncube, 2005:17).

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

For the purposes of this study, Sen's Capabilities Approach (CA) is used as it can be linked to the achievement of quality outcomes such as suggested by the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ). Sen (1997) developed the concept of *functionings* which can be defined as those valuable activities and situations that make up a person's well-being. He also refers to it as that which a person ultimately manages to be and to do, such as being well-fed or literate. Sen further broadens his scope of *functionings* to internal and external factors. This approach, therefore, underlines the importance of the impact of policy (external factors) on the competence of teachers (internal factors) and suggests that reality for each person is defined by him or herself but is directly linked to external factors, such as policy. An additional tenet of the CA is the notion of agency (the fact that a person takes responsibility for the outcomes). This leads us to the importance of allowing the voices and opinions of beginner teachers to be heard as this will determine whether they will be able to realise their true potential as competent teachers.

The CA further provides a way to conceptualise and evaluate both individual and social well-being, poverty, and inequality, and asks us to consider how free beginner teachers are to participate in decision-making about their own competences and whether there is equality in such freedom. The CA, therefore, provides a framework which is sensitive to the diverse social settings of beginner teachers and suggests how beginner teachers should be afforded the freedom to take ownership of their level of competence, while being supported by policy. Sen's CA underscores the importance that all development interventions should enable beginner teachers to develop the necessary skills to take responsibility for and to effectively manage their new roles and responsibilities (Maarman, 2009).

Methodology

In support of the aim of this study, a qualitative research design was used in line with the phenomenology research methodology as it endeavours to understand and re-imagine the phenomenon of support for beginner teachers and has, therefore, successfully supported the collection and analysis of the data.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this investigation was to establish beginner teachers' experiences of the support that they had received to enhance their competences as teaching professionals, as set out in the NPF. Teacher development should take centre stage as beginner teachers' preparedness to teach in the public school system in South Africa remains a matter of national concern.

The objectives of the study were:
1) To establish how beginner teachers relate to teacher education policy;
2) To identify the challenges inhibiting compliance to the NPF's principles; and
3) To identify the nature of current support to guide beginner teachers to fulfil their roles and responsibilities as teaching professionals.

Research Design

Data were collected from interviews with six beginner teachers at three public high schools situated in three different education districts in the Western Cape. For the purposes of this article, beginner teachers are considered to be teaching for fewer than 5 years.

Participants

From the Western Cape Education Department's eight education districts, 49 circuits and over 500 public high schools, it was not possible to include all high schools in the province in the study. Purposive selection of six beginner teachers (two each) from three high schools in the Western Cape was done for the interview process. The selection of participants was not based on gender, race, age, religion, social background or physical abilities, but rather on the education district in which the school was situated. This benefitted the study in that it revealed varied perceptions of beginner teachers, which was based on their unique circumstances, namely the availability of teaching and learning resources, societal circumstances, and opportunities at the schools. To dispel concerns that might have been raised about the fact that the small number of

participants might influence the contextual factors of the teachers' perceptions, De Vos (2002, in Esau, 2017) reports that purposive selection is based entirely on the judgment of the researcher as it is composed of elements that contain the most characteristics representative of the typical attributes of the entire population. These characteristics include the identification and selection of participants who are either knowledgeable and/or experienced with a phenomenon of interest, and their availability, and willingness to participate and communicate effectively (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, which will best enable the research questions to be answered. The research approach, method, instruments of data collection, selection of participants, validity and reliability of instruments and data analysis were duly considered for the purposes of the study.

Ethical Considerations

The University of the Western Cape's (UWC) Research Policy (2009) was strictly observed throughout the entire research process. The entire research process was explained to all participants and permission to undertake the study was obtained from participants and the appropriate authorities, which include the Ethics Committee of the UWC; the Western Cape Education Department and school principals.

Data Analyses

Interviews conducted with the six beginner teachers were used as the main data collecting instrument. The qualitative data gathered from these interview responses, expressions, grammar and wording were recorded and analysed by means of themes, which emerged from the data. An outline of the themes was then developed, during which gaps were identified for further studies and included in the general recommendations and suggestions for further studies.

The interviews were guided by and based on the reviewed literature that provided a great deal of information on how beginner teachers perceived the development of their capability sets against the NPF policy document.

On the range of questions related to the most pressing challenges they faced with on a daily basis, four of the participants reported that they found most aspects of teaching and learning problematic, but that it was mostly due to the fact that they had not been trained in the subject that they had to teach. Two of the five respondents felt that although this might be due to a shortage of teachers in that specific learning area, the burden of the problem should not be shifted onto them. The general feeling was that although teaching these

unfamiliar subjects could benefit them in the long term with regard to teaching experience in a wider array of subjects, they also felt that on the short term, they were not only doing the learners an injustice but that their work ethic, integrity and professionalism were at stake.

When asked about their perceptions of their competences, five of the six beginner teachers reported that, instead of receiving support to enhance their capabilities, they are overburdened with time-consuming exercises that did nothing other but add to their already heavy workloads. To this effect, the dilemma of an ever-increasing workload is a huge problem for beginner teachers. They often feel that they are overburdened with unnecessary administrative and assessment tasks as well as extra-mural duties on top of having to manage their classes. Holborn (2013) posits these as possible reasons for increased teacher absenteeism, abscondments, resignations, and even high disease and death rates among teachers.

With regard to the issue of policy, all the respondents reported that, despite the fact that the NPF was meant to serve as descriptive rather than prescriptive, they felt that they were normally not consulted in the initial stages of the policy formation but are "judged" against it during evaluations and processes of appraisals.

The themes that emerged from the data were outlined as follows:
- challenges of beginner teachers to meet competences;
- impact of teacher education policy; and
- the existence and quality of school support programmes to enhance beginner teachers' capability sets and the effectiveness thereof.

Findings

A list of themes containing key elements of what transpired from the study were drawn up. From there, an outline was developed for presenting the results of the study. Gaps that were revealed during the study were identified and recommendations for further action are made. The main findings are presented as follows (Esau, 2017).

Challenges of Beginner Teachers in Relation to the Development of Their Competences
- Beginner teachers felt ill-prepared to cope with all the challenges in and around the classroom.
- Most of the respondents lacked classrooms management skills.
- Some respondents mentioned that they found it difficult to deal with learners with socio-behavioural problems which lead to weak academic performance.
- Violence in and around the classroom, and inappropriate sexual behaviour towards teachers were cited as some of the frightening realities beginner teachers were confronted with in the classroom on a daily basis.
- Beginner teachers felt that they were not trained and able to act as social workers or psychologists and that schools should appoint these.

The Impact of Teacher Education Policy on Beginner Teachers

- Most respondents felt that the "top-down" policy process was not the right approach.
- Some respondents mentioned that required competences required of beginner teachers were unrealistic without appropriate support.
- Most respondents felt that the policy did not sufficiently relate to the contextual realities that existed in South African schools.
- Most respondents felt that the ideals of the NPF were unachievable in relation to the training and capacities of their staff, the working conditions and the lack of teaching and learning resources.

Beginner Teachers' Need for School Support and Mentoring

- Most respondents had not followed an induction programme.
- All respondents felt that they were not introduced to and informed about important issues pertaining to the specific schools' culture, assessment procedures, code of conduct for learners and teachers, management structures, and other general administrative requirements.
- Most respondents were desperate for support.
- Some mentioned that as much as they would want to attend workshops arranged by the schools and the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), they are simply too exhausted after a days' work in the class and that the training was often irrelevant to their needs.

The above findings reveal that the competences of beginner teachers as outlined in teacher education policy, limit novice teachers' "*freedoms*" and "*functionings*." Hence, beginner teachers felt that they would never achieve competence as teaching professionals. This makes the re-imagining support efforts for beginner teachers all the more relevant and necessary. To this degree, the CA serves as a sound theoretical basis on which to build a capability-based mentoring model of support. The rationale behind utilising this approach is, firstly, because it will directly impact the capability sets or competences of the novice teachers in a positive manner. This is referred to in the approach as the valued "functioning" (i.e. the required competences according to teacher education policy). Secondly, the beginner teacher will feel a sense of individual freedom as the CA allows for "freedoms" of the individual, which implies that the process of mentoring should assist them in attaining a feeling of accomplishment and competence as a teacher, regardless of whether they choose the valued functioning or not and which will eventually lead to a sense of accountability and agency.

Discussion

Good teaching thrives where policymakers are sensitively and sympathetically tuned into the needs and demands of the very people who are expected to comply, implement and adhere to the policies. Policies need to be implemented to improve the status quo, as not to inhibit teachers' work, but to enhance it. An education system where we allow for the "*sink or swim*" and "*learn by trial and error*" notion cannot become the norm. Education authorities should rather create conditions where novice teachers' capabilities are enhanced and where they feel supported. If the exodus of novices is of particular concern and interest to education authorities, the needs of beginner teachers should earnestly be prioritised.

In light of the above, it has become crucial that teachers acquire the knowledge, skills, and eventually the confidence to work with learners with social behavioural problems. Ultimately, most teachers would like to reach that euphoric state in their classrooms where they can establish and maintain a pleasant learning environment in which students behave civilised and responsibly and where the teacher is able to teach without disruption. Unfortunately, this is mostly not the case. In the end, the teacher's knowledge about social behavioural problems and his or her approach to learner discipline will determine the extent to which the teacher is empowered in the classroom.

A teacher's lack of confidence in his or her classroom management skills can be a major deterrent to his or her ability to be an effective educator. In fact, statistics show that more than 58% of first-year teachers wish that they had gained more practical training before beginning their first year of teaching. This number increases to 61% immediately following their first year. Even teachers who choose to work with learners with emotional and behavioural disorders and those at risk of developing such disorders report difficulty in managing learners' behaviour efficiently (Borman, 2013). Implementing effective classroom management strategies is more than just a superficial collection of interesting mannerisms used to create an impression. Grasha (1996) notes that the integration of teaching and learning styles is best viewed as a pervasive quality that plays an important role in several aspects of teaching. Personal qualities guide and direct the selection of instructional processes. Thus, strategy becomes the mechanism responsible for how we convey the substance of our disciplines. To this extent, Grasha (1996) reflects on the teacher's presence and the nature and quality of the encounter with students. The efficacy with which we apply teaching strategies as teachers has two effects on learners. It may facilitate or hinder their ability to acquire content and skills and it influences the learning styles our students adopt.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this article we highlight the challenges that beginner teachers face daily and provides recommendations for appropriate and sufficient

support in order to acquire the competences as set out in the current initial teacher education policy. Considering the above, it is clear that beginner teachers generally feel neither highly motivated nor well equipped to teach during their initial year(s) because of a lack of induction, guidance and mentorship in relation to the new school programme and their new role as teacher.

The implications of this research are varied as most of the respondents mentioned areas in which they experienced challenges and others where they had experienced huge successes during their first year(s). Some teachers reported teaching practices, such as classroom management and individualising instruction, as both a strength and challenge. This may indicate that with more deliberate teacher preparation programmes in place, it would be possible to equip novice teachers in order for them to cope on a higher level with the skills they require to be successful on the whole during their first years of teaching. A deliberate support programme will also make it possible for novice teachers to articulate and reflect on areas in which they are struggling.

Beginner teachers also identified the areas in which they would have preferred more support and development as induction into the school programme and protocol, the school's code of conduct, administrative tasks of teaching and learning, assessment practices, classroom management, and dealing with social behavioural challenges of learners. Any form of teacher preparation needs to be of reasonable duration, providing enough time and opportunity for self-study, reflection, and involved engagement with the full spectrum of the educational process, i.e., engagement with learners, the school ethos, classroom and pedagogic activities, theoretical study, and administrative duties.

A well-structured support programme will not prepare novices to face all the challenges they meet in schools, but research has shown that it does aid them in growing socially, personally, and professionally. Therefore, teachers should never be regarded or referred to as finished products. Feiman-Nemser (2003) stresses that the misperception of assuming that teachers learn enough during training, should be debunked. A structured and deliberate programme of support will teach beginner teachers the skills and approaches that are bound to the contexts in which they find themselves, in other words, it should prepare them for the realities of the classroom in context, which is often totally different from the ones experienced during their training. These traumatic experiences and realities often unfold before novices and destroy the false impressions acquired during teacher training. This underlines the need for a smooth introduction of novices into the profession.

Nash (2010) suggests that although teacher education and development is a continuous process, schools should have initial induction programmes for novice teachers which include meetings, workshops, classroom observations, evaluation of the process, and reflective sessions. These processes expose novices to new learning and transformed cognitive processes. The acquisition of skills and knowledge is inadvertently brought about by the recurrent and continuous nature of induction. It does not only guide novices to become part of the competent and experienced teacher corps but it also socialises them more quickly into the culture of the school as a learning community (Arends & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2000). Novice teachers need to be prepared to make the transition from being a student to becoming a teacher as this has proven to be more difficult than it seems (Sadker, Zittleman & Sadker, 2012). Having an efficient induction process in place will provide the support that novice teachers need to get through this difficult and confusing time.

Policy design to make provision for the development of beginner teachers in the form of mentoring should include, among others, induction, career advancement, classroom management, and diversity management. The beginner teacher will get support by means of targeted development activities, an experienced and informed second opinion, gaining insight into own performance, identifying personal development needs and opportunities, and learning from the experience of the mentor. Not only will the mentee benefit from this kind of initiative but the mentor will experience enhanced self-esteem, better fulfilment of own developmental needs, organisational recognition, and an extension of influence in and on the organisation. As a bonus, the relationship may bring exposure to new ideas, other perspectives and intellectual stimulation.

In teacher education policy, capabilities are described as the "overall" objectives or "requirements" for being a teacher. This draws attention to the "intrinsic value" of teaching as a career. It also draws attention to the "instrumental value" and is used as a tool or assessment indicator. This is supposedly meant to improve standards, and it draws on people's assumptions about teachers, however unjust it may be, as is the case with the negative public opinion about teachers. In view of these, teachers need to be positively affirmed, motivated and empowered continuously in an attempt not to lose faith in their capabilities and values.

Judging from the evidence from this study, it becomes clear that novice teachers find themselves in a difficult predicament at their initial stages of teaching. Whitaker (2000) notes that it is important to give beginner teachers the best possible start in the teaching profession since their input is vital for

promoting learning in others. This entails thorough preparation and induction into the school community, and whole and deliberate efforts to alleviate the factors inhibiting effective teaching and learning. If this does not take place, it might have an adverse impact on teaching and learning.

If we want to restore the dignity of teaching as a profession, then there is no doubt that teachers should be adequately prepared as professionals. Teaching in the global and South African context is becoming more demanding on teachers; society has higher expectations for teachers, and novices can only meet these expectations and demands when they are provided with the necessary support to become ready. This implies that to produce committed, competent, effective and confident teachers who can execute their tasks as teachers efficiently, we need a programme comprising well trained, committed professionals for whom the professional development process is a continuous quest for excellence in teaching. Teacher preparation as a developmental process requires intuition, imagination, and improvisation (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007). Its main objectives should be the aspirant employee's efficient performance of duties and application of characteristics and attitudes suitable for the ever increasing demands in the world of work. Implementing a deliberate and focused school support programme, incorporated alongside an existing in-service training model of a higher learning institution, could change aspirant teachers' attitudes, modify their classroom management skills and behaviour, and improve their students' learning. Any process of training should assist the student in realising his or her individual goal within the parameters and boundaries stipulated for a specific discipline or career. It should cost-effectively and efficiently facilitate opportunities for the acquisition and development of job-related skills and knowledge.

It is suggested that, rather than passively accepting and suffering the impact of policy change, teaching communities should start reconstructing policy, adopting strategies such as curriculum and syllabus innovation, or even modifying and reinterpreting policy to suit individual experiences and interests. In the face of personal demands and challenges, such strategies might bring about a more positive outlook and widely contribute to education transformation and the quality of future teachers in South African schools, which in turn will balance out the disjuncture between policy expectations and support in teacher training and development.

Authors' Contributions
Both authors contributed equally on all aspects of the manuscript.

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