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Unpacking the efficacy of a continuous professional development programme to support teachers to use assessment in no-fee schools

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Abstract

Since the first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa's education system has undergone four curriculum revisions. In each of these iterations, the teachers who were among the first in line to implement change were the Foundation Phase (FP) teachers. However, since then, the low numeracy and literacy levels of primary school learners have been of increasing concern. In this context, in 2017, a series of continuous professional development (CPD) workshops were run with 18 Grade 3 FP teachers from five no-fee primary schools in the Cape Winelands to enhance their use of assessment to improve teaching and learning. This professional development model comprised six monthly workshops, in which the teachers were introduced to various assessment for learning (AfL) techniques and strategies. Each workshop was subsequently supplemented with a classroom support visit by one of the workshop presenters. A few months after the conclusion of the workshops and support visits, the participating teachers, subject advisers, management, and district officials were interviewed about programme efficacy. What emerged was that although all stakeholders saw value in this CPD initiative, the subject advisers and teachers felt that they had particularly benefitted from the programme in terms of the training received, the training model, materials, and follow-up support visits. However, despite the

teachers' enthusiasm, there was a varied level of implementation of AfL practices in classrooms—shaped by the context in which the schools were located and their internal dynamics. Affecting the efficacy of the programme—and thus having implications for sustainability—were extraneous factors such as programme timing, competing priorities, and school dynamics. This suggests that for any such CPD programme to succeed, the various factors that could inhibit programme success need to be noted and circumvented.

Keywords: assessment for learning, CPD, Foundation Phase, professional development, school management support, subject advisors, teacher training

Introduction

After South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, the education system underwent radical reform in curriculum and policy (Department of Education, 1996). To bring teachers up to speed with the changes in curriculum, teacher continuous professional development (CPD) was identified by the national education authority as an imperative. However, many CPD programmes were ineffective due to a variety of factors such as applicability and the model of training. In addition, such programmes were rarely presented in rural areas where the need was greatest.

As UNESCO (2014) has emphasised, "all teachers require continuing support once they reach the classroom to enable them to reflect on teaching practices, to foster motivation and to help them adapt to change" (p. 242). And, the countries that "have achieved the highest and most equal learning outcomes are those that invest the most in both initial and ongoing training, allowing teachers to adapt to new approaches" (UNESCO, 2014, p. 242). Furthermore, providing CPD is sometimes a more cost-effective method of upskilling the existing teaching force, and "regular supervision and ongoing training have the potential to address knowledge gaps and upgrade and reinforce acquired skills" (UNESCO, 2014, p. 242).

In the South African situation, this is particularly relevant. Since 1994, when the country experienced regime change, one key narrative was transformation of the education system at all levels, from curriculum to governance to policy. As teachers were integral to this transformation, much CPD was provided. However, training resulted in mixed levels of success; it variously did not meet teacher needs, was ineffective, or was not linked directly to practice (Chisholm, 2000). And again, where such programmes were introduced, they were largely focused on urban areas and less so on rural areas where the need was greatest.

In this context, three partners—Oxford University, the Centre for International Teacher Education (CITE) based at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), and the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)—initiated an Assessment for Learning in Africa (AFLA) CPD programme focused on developing teachers' pedagogical and assessment skills for numeracy in foundation years. The purpose of the AFLA programme was to empower teachers to use assessment for learning to enhance the learning of mathematics. Specifically, the AFLA CPD programme aimed at developing and enhancing classroom pedagogical practices to address the challenges faced by teachers in impoverished South African schools.

These are schools that are classified as no-fee schools—generally, Quintile 1, 2, or 3 schools (Department of Basic Education, 2015). The programme presupposed that learners were not performing to their full potential because existent pedagogical practices (i.e., the formative assessment strategies applied in the classroom) did not lead to quality outputs of learning.

The AFLA programme was implemented in two provinces, namely the Western Cape and Gauteng. In the Western Cape, the implementation and research was conducted by CITE, located with the South African Research Chair in Teacher Education based at CPUT, in partnership with the Cape Winelands Education District Office (CWED)—both located in the Western Cape. This paper explores the successes and challenges that emerged with the implementation of the model of CPD employed in the AFLA programme by utilising data drawn from the interviews conducted with the various participants and role players who participated in the project. After presenting an argument for a CPD model of longer duration with continued support, a brief overview of the AFLA programme is presented. The views of the various participants and officials are presented regarding the programme model and the content, namely, assessment for learning (AfL), and the factors that impacted on the successful implementation of the programme are explored.

Literature review[1]

According to UNESCO (2014), the education received by most children throughout the world is hugely inadequate and reflects the broader political and economic inequalities in which the children find themselves. UNESCO (2014) contended that many sub-Saharan countries, besides having to bring about change at the pre-service level, also face the dual task of training teachers who have not had any training, and improving the knowledge and skills of underqualified and inadequately trained teachers. It suggests that, despite the enormity of the challenge to train these teachers, such training would be the most cost-effective and efficient means of building a desired teaching core (UNESCO, 2014). This suggests that providing CPD programmes that are both appropriate and effective is an imperative that, as Burns and Lawrie (2015) insisted, cannot wait. More so, this demands CPD programmes that are both practical and sustainable, and take into account the contexts in which such programmes are to be implemented.

Burns and Lawrie, however, pointed out that in their research of "fragile contexts" where teacher professional development has been implemented, "the frequency of professional development is episodic, its quality variable, its duration limited and support or follow-up for teachers almost non-existent" (2015, p. 7). This is supported by descriptions by researchers in some sub-Saharan countries where CPD programmes have taken place. These descriptions range from haphazard (Jiya et al., 2005), to ad hoc (Gathumbi et al., 2013), to piecemeal (Burns & Lawrie, 2015). Mulkeen (2010) added that the CPD provided is skewed away from where it is needed the most. Teachers in rural areas, in particular, have limited opportunities to access CPD (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011; Buckler, 2011; Chikoko, 2008; Penny et al.,

1 This section draws on the edited work of Sayed (2018), *Continuous Professional Development of Teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa: Improving Teaching and Learning.*

2008). Moreover, such opportunities are especially limited in sub-Saharan Africa contexts where CPD plays a crucial role in educational change initiatives such as, for example, where a new curriculum is being implemented. These initiatives generally require "high-quality continuing professional development" (Phorabatho & Mafora, 2013, p. 617) to bring about significant paradigm shifts in teachers' thinking and practice, which their previous training has not equipped them to do (Akyeampong, 2003). Such dramatic shifts cannot be brought about by short-term programmes—which Botswanan teachers admitted to in a 2015 study—especially with regard to important educational change imperatives (Mangope & Mukhopadhyay, 2015).

This finding then effectively negates any argument for a cascade or training-of-trainers model (Bett, 2016; Burns & Lawrie, 2015; Chisholm, 2000; Mulkeen, 2010). This model, employed predominantly during the South African government's system-wide implementation of a new, postapartheid curriculum framework (de Clercq & Phiri, 2013), is considered problematic for a number of reasons. The core is what Gathumbi et al. (2013, p. 7) referred to as the "shallow-coverage of INSET [in-service training] content." In contexts where it is expected that teachers undergo substantial change, professional development programmes that rely heavily on filtered content provided by poorly qualified and poorly trained instructors (Burns & Lawrie, 2015) will not result in the depth and breadth of professional learning that teachers require. This is because, in many cases, cascading requires that selected teachers train other teachers despite having had only limited exposure to the content that they are expected to transmit to other teachers (Hardman et al., 2011).

Effective CPD that would lead to changed practice (and which is sustainable), requires time and ongoing learning opportunities with high levels of support and follow-up (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). This means that for CPD to be effective, it is equally important that such programmes provide sustained learning opportunities over a relatively long period of time—a provision that ensures quality of outcomes through depth and rigour.

Gulamhussein presented three principles relevant to effective, and therefore sustainable, professional development:

1. The duration of professional development must be significant and ongoing to allow time for teachers to learn a new strategy and grapple with the implementation problem.
2. There must be support for a teacher during the implementation stage that addresses the specific challenges of changing classroom practice.
3. Teachers' initial exposure to a concept should not be passive, but rather should engage teachers through varied approaches so they can participate actively in making sense of a new practice. (2013, p. 3)

Given this, it is important to note that whatever the aim, outcomes, knowledge, skills—or whatever the training focus concerns—the training must be built on sound pedagogical decisions and be of value to the participants.

The AFLA Western Cape model of professional development, drawing on the principles of teacher involvement and engaged participation, sought to promote reflective and reflexive practices. The model required that the teachers try out what they had learnt at the workshops, implement it in their classes, then assess and reflect on its implementation. The model employed AfL techniques and strategies as an alternative to the prevailing view that assessment is just about testing (Kanjee & Sayed, 2013). The CPD model used in this initiative thus enabled teachers to learn, practise, and reflect on AfL techniques and strategies with strong support from the AFLA team. In light of the issues raised above regarding the nature and shortcomings of the types of CPD employed in various parts of sub-Saharan Africa, and the principles suggested for effective CPD, the research question that drives this investigation is: "What are the factors facilitating and/or hindering the efficacy of an AfL professional development training model for teachers in the Western Cape?"

Overview of the AFLA CPD programme

The participating teachers and subject advisers engaged in six AFLA workshops that provided them with knowledge, skills, and dispositions for AfL and techniques for enhancing learner interaction in the classroom. The first of the workshops introduced the teachers to various learner engagement/participation techniques and the rest of the workshops covered topics such as learning intentions (LI) and success criteria (SC), higher order questioning and think time, effective feedback, and peer- and self-assessment (Wiliam & Thompson, 2007). Each workshop was designed to expose the participants to an aspect of AfL through interaction, modelling, and discussion, and incorporated a reflection exercise with feedback. The workshops were spaced approximately four weeks apart (see Table 1).

Table 1
The AFLA professional development workshop content and dates

Workshop number	Date	Content covered
1	18 Feb	▪ Overview of the programme ▪ Establishing teacher learning communities ▪ Reflection on assessment practices ▪ Introduction to formative assessment techniques
2	18 Mar	▪ Reflection on the implementation of formative assessment techniques ▪ Introduction to formative assessment ▪ Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success
3	22 Apr	▪ Reflection on implementation ▪ Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success—continued
4	20 May	▪ Reflection on implementation ▪ Engineering effective classroom discussions to elicit evidence of learning
5	5 Aug	▪ Reflection on implementation ▪ Providing feedback that moves learners forward

Workshop number	Date	Content covered
6	9 Sep	▪ Reflection on implementation ▪ Assessment by learners of their peers and their work
Support workshops		
1	8 June	▪ Reflection on implementation ▪ Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success
2	12 June	▪ Reflection on implementation ▪ Engineering effective classroom discussions to elicit evidence of learning
3	20 Oct	▪ Reflection on implementation ▪ Providing feedback that moves learners forward
4	23 Oct	▪ Assessment by learners of their peers and their work

Teachers were given reasonable time between the workshops to practise the techniques and strategies in the classroom, with one lesson attended by a peer who had attended the workshops and gave feedback on the lesson observed. Then a classroom support visit by one of the workshop facilitators and the completion of a teacher's reflection journal would ensue. In addition, the participating schools were required to establish professional learning communities (PLCs) wherein they could exchange ideas and experiences and support each other in terms of the implementation of AfL techniques and strategies.

Consultation with schools and the district office regarding the spacing of the workshop sessions, time, and duration led to agreement on dates of the workshops, timing, venue, support visits, peer-observation and PLCs, but not on the content. The number of sessions and the timing of the sessions were based, as noted, on the successful implementation of a similar programme in Gauteng during 2016 (Kanjee, 2018).

AfL learning support materials used

Given the lack of any relevant texts, specific learning materials in the form of a teacher portfolio were developed for each formative assessment strategy introduced to participants during the workshops (Kanjee & Bhana, 2015). These portfolios, which were adapted for the AFLA project, (i) addressed the reality that English, the language of learning and teaching used for all workshops, was the second language of most teachers,[2] (ii) presented additional information on relevant theory regarding the assessment strategies and techniques presented, (iii) included practical exemplars, vignettes of classroom experiences, tools and templates for teachers to use in their classrooms, which were based on the content and activities specified in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2011),

2 Although the ideal would have been to have the workshops in the mother tongues of the participants, it has to be borne in mind that, despite there being three official languages of instruction in the Western Cape, most workshops are run in English.

(iv) incorporated practical tasks as well as reflection activities for teachers to complete, either during or after workshops, to provide an avenue for recording discussions and outcomes of professional learning community meetings, and (v) were aligned and sequenced to the workshops presented to facilitate teachers to develop and consolidate new theoretical concepts and practical skills. In practice, the portfolios were also intended to serve as a journal and abridged assessment textbook. Participants were required to complete all activities in the portfolio including reporting on their professional learning community meetings, recording their lesson planning and preparation, reflecting on their classroom practices and experiences, and listing any recommendations or challenges that needed to be shared during workshops as they applied their new assessment knowledge and skills.

Methodology

The AFLA Western Cape CPD model, initiated in 2017, was driven by a predetermined set of outcomes and range of activities. The core of this was developed for a similar initiative that had been implemented successfully in the Gauteng province in 2016 (Kanjee, 2018). The outcomes focused on knowledge and understanding of AfL, and the skills to use AfL techniques and strategies in the teaching and learning environment. The model of CPD employed was thus designed to facilitate these outcomes and activities.

This research is a multi-sited case study. The case study approach was selected to gain a rich understanding of the factors that influenced the efficacy of the classroom and AfL practices of participants in their own contexts. Case studies are suitable when the contextual factors of the issues are critical, when a researcher has no control over contextual factors or events (Baxter & Jack, 2008), and when a researcher is integrally involved in the case (Merriam, 2002). Furthermore, as Baxter & Jack (2008) suggested, a characteristic of case studies is the ability to delineate boundaries around the case such as individuals, context, and time. The strength of case study lies in exploring and generating theory, its methodological flexibility, and its ability to provide insight through detailed contextual analysis of similarities and differences (Yin, 2003).

The research was applied to singularities, that is, practising teachers in their natural school settings. It was bound to a cohort of teachers primarily teaching Grade 3 learners in the Foundation Phase (FP), and was a snapshot in time of teacher practices. Given the diversity of constructs, and as responding teachers interact within the same world, a single case study would not have yielded enough diversity to observe emerging patterns; it is important to understand the uniqueness of each teacher's world in each particular case (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The individual research sites, or schools, each represented a separate case. Multiple cases then contributed to the overall purpose of the research.

Sampling approach

This research used purposive sampling of participants, with the sampling frame comprising both the following key parameters:

- Schools within challenging contexts serving mainly marginalised and impoverished learners.
- Schools that offer FP (i.e., first four years of schooling) which in South Africa translates to Grades R to 3.

In partnership with the CWED Office, five no-fee, public primary schools were selected to participate in the CPD programme over two years (2017–2018), with the specific focus on teachers teaching mathematics at Grade 3 level. Four of the five schools were located within a radius of approximately five kilometres of each other. The fifth school was situated in a township approximately 30 kilometres away from the other schools. Two of the schools were classified as Black township schools (serving mainly learners whose home language was isiXhosa) and the remaining three were known as Coloured schools (serving mainly learners whose home language was Afrikaans). It needs to be noted that although South Africa has 11 official languages, there are three official languages of instruction in the Western Cape, namely, English, Afrikaans, and isiXhosa. In the isiXhosa schools, the language of learning and teaching is isiXhosa in the FP and English from Grade 4 onwards (Pluddermann, 2015).

The Grade 3 teachers at the schools were invited to be part of the project. Principals at three of the schools requested that other FP teachers be included. The final sample of teachers was thus a negotiated and voluntary participation of teachers across the schools. The sample size was 18 teachers. Grade 3 teachers formed the core of the sample (i.e., 14 of the 18). The median ages of the teachers were in the 41 to 45-year range with the average age of the teachers being 43 years. All teachers taught in their mother tongue, which matched the language of learning and teaching of the classes taught. All the teachers were women. All the teachers had the minimum of a teacher's qualification, and had taught for at least two years in the FP.

District officials, who included the director, head of curriculum, General Education and Training (GET) coordinator, assessment coordinator, and FP subject advisers were an integral part of the project. The director, head of curriculum, GET coordinator, and assessment coordinator formed part of the CWED management with whom the AFLA team consulted and who provided support to the subject advisers. Nine FP subject advisers were identified by the CWED management to attend all the workshops. Subject advisers were allocated one school each alongside one of the two AFLA programme presenters to provide additional classroom support. In addition, principals were allowed to attend the workshops as observers.

The CPD model required that the teachers and subject advisers attend the workshops, with the teachers participating in the various activities and returning to their schools to practise and reflect on the various strategies they had been exposed to in the workshops. A week or two after each workshop, one of the workshop presenters would do a lesson observation and give support to the teachers. Teachers were also required to observe their colleagues' lessons and discuss them as part of the training.

Instruments used in the programme

The instruments used to collect the data for this project comprised teacher profiles (to determine age, qualifications, and teaching experience) in the form of Google (electronic) forms, school profiles (to determine number of learners, teachers etc.), lesson observation forms (to observe AfL practices in the lessons), and interview schedules (to determine the various participants' views about the CPD programme). However, for the purpose of this paper, only interview data were utilised.

Data collection

Data for this paper were drawn from semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews with the teachers, principals, subject advisers, and district officials, all of which were conducted between three and six months after the completion of the CPD training workshops. All the interviews were done in English but, where necessary, teachers were allowed to switch to Afrikaans. However, a shortcoming in this approach was that the isiXhosa teachers were not afforded a similar concession—although there was no request for it, either. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and transcribed for analysis. The sections of the interviews that were expressed in Afrikaans were translated into English. An independent reviewer was also tasked with doing an appraisal of the learning material employed in the programme.

Analysis

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), which identified common themes based on the research focus and which are reported in this paper. In particular, the analysis sought to assess the efficacy of the CPD programme aimed at the realisation of quality teaching, learning, and assessment in disadvantaged schools and classrooms such as those found in challenging rural contexts.

Trustworthiness of the qualitative data was established through credibility, dependability, and confirmability. The study findings were discussed with researchers and other research students who form part of a professional learning community for research conducted on and about the professional development of teachers.

Ethical clearance

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from CPUT as well as the WCED. All participants were assured of their and their schools' anonymity, and informed that the data obtained would only be used for research purposes. The names of the participants and institutions were changed to protect their identities. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw their contribution at any point before the findings were presented without any fear of repercussion.

Findings

This section presents the findings based on interviews and comments from the various role players in the CPD programme. Given that context is a key factor to programme success and sustainability, this section is localised in the context of participating schools as disadvantaged schools in a rural context in the Western Cape.

An approach to supporting teachers for changing pedagogic practice

The AFLA CPD programme was a move away from traditional, once-off training through its suggestion of action and reflection. A second aspect built into the model was a decisive support component. Then, as the model sought to be developmental and transformative, a third design decision was to include key role players in the training. The model provided for learning, testing, and checking as a scaffolding approach. This allowed participating teachers and subject advisers to determine what, how, and why the model worked so that they could make informed decisions on their own adoption and implementation. The requirements that came after the training sessions proposed an alternative practice from that of traditional training delivered once-off or as one-week holiday training. These design decisions in the CPD model were favourably received, as evidenced by the following comments:

> Whenever you train something, you need to do a follow-up of monitoring . . . whether it is applied. (School manager)

> Yes, but at university it's so ideal; you're not here [in a school]. There's no reality at university so this was reality here. (Teacher)

> The workshops with follow-up classroom support is a winning recipe. (District official)

Programme support included class visits and meetings in between training sessions during the implementation phase. This support appeared to be appreciated by the teachers, school management, subject advisers, and district officials. This CPD was not only about frequency and intensity but also about the quality of support offered, as can be inferred from the comments above.

The CPD model included principals, subject advisers, and district officials. The inclusion of subject advisers in the programme meant that not only would they be au fait with what they observed during their routine school visits, but that they were able to provide additional support when requested by the teachers. This was advantageous for teachers, subject advisers, and education authorities. One district official noted:

> They've [subject advisers] been exposed to the same kind of workshop and same information. When they went for their normal school visits they could talk from the same experience.

The materials used in the implementation of the AFLA programme revealed both applicability and utility value. The programme suite of materials—videos, templates, training guides, and AfL notes—appeared to be ideally suited to further develop the knowledge and skills necessary for quality classroom practices. Given that the AFLA or any other set of relevant materials constitutes a tool, and that no tool is effective in the hands of an unskilled practitioner, a model and materials for pedagogical training at both initial teacher education and CPD levels will always be necessary. Feedback from the teachers and other role players regarding the programme material and the way it was utilised during the workshops included the following:

> The facilitators' explanations were good. Group discussions at the workshops also allowed for teachers to share ideas and further strengthen their understanding of concepts, techniques and strategies. (Subject adviser)

> Workshops [using the AfL materials] were conducted in a very practical manner; with simple and basic strategies to follow in classroom. (School manager)

One of the teachers who claimed to have struggled with the LI and SC, reported that she could then refer to the AfL manual they had been given to gain clarity: "So I went back and I read about it [in the manual]."

An independent reviewer who had been asked to assess the relevance of the workshop material, noted:

> The materials are clearly developed for the purpose of in-service training. At the end of each workshop, teachers are given an exercise to complete, and reflect back on.

> Teachers gain the theoretical knowledge at tertiary institutions but not necessarily the practical experience.

> The dominance of English text and audio-visual material renders it [the materials] satisfactory rather than exemplary—they could have been more tailored to the audience when one considers language in particular.

Going forward, this last is a useful comment when one bears in mind that none of the participants was a first-language English speaker, and the translation of certain terms—like the LI and SC—could have made it easier for the teachers to apply. Thus, given the broad language policy in the South African education system with its 11 official languages, this comment is instructive for the successful implementation of future, similar CPD programmes. In addition, two teachers' comments were significant:

> If I have to sit and read it or watch the video then it takes up time.

> Too much for me, to be honest. I don't have time to read all the notes. I just go through them and later because I got lot of work to do here at school and I got lot of work to be honest, *haai* [Afrikaans exclamation]. I don't read them all really. . . .

> Make it short, minimal, [we] can have it, but short, straight to the point, just have short . . . they [materials] are helpful very helpful.

These comments further point to additional consideration for future implementation of similar CPD programmes where materials could be reduced and made more accessible, especially to participants who are not first-language English speakers. Despite these observations, and although the materials were designed for a Grade 3 initiative, the role players recognised that the content could be shared and applied in all grades and across schools and thus provided valuable support for the participants. Also, the design of the materials and the manner in which they were presented in the workshops promoted the model of action and reflection, specifically its synergy with the model of training workshops with follow-up classroom support. As mentioned earlier, while isiXhosa and Afrikaans were the languages of teaching in the schools, the materials were in English. Nevertheless, the teachers appeared to cope relatively well and the language did not seem to pose any problems for the teachers, although, as noted by the teachers, they would prefer that the materials were fewer, and that their use would not consume so much of their time. However, this does not suggest that the implementation of AfL would cause a disruption in the workload of the teachers, rather, it points to a relook at the kind of paperwork—in the form of the reflection exercises, for example—required from the teachers during the training phase of any such future programme.

Sustainability outcomes of the programme

Sustainability (Han & Weiss, 2005) was a key component of the design of the model of CPD employed. This included ensuring district support and buy-in by working with the subject advisers as front-line staff in the CWED who would continue to support the teachers even after the conclusion of the CPD programme.

District officials expressed the view that there was merit in the training that the teachers had received, and believed that the possibility exists that practices can be sustained on account of its applicability value across the educational setting at schools, and subject adviser capacity to model and support the training. The following quote captures this:

> They [subject advisers] will be able to sustain the practice in the Foundation Phase but it will be about sharing and exploring other possibilities in terms of strategies. It all depends on the school and the way they take it forward. It's not a case of a strategy that can only work for Foundation Phase. . . . It can be shared amongst the other grades as well. (District official)

From comments such as this, it is evident that district officials saw merit in the training in that they saw value in subject adviser participation in the training because the subject advisers could recognise programme implementation while simultaneously supporting and advising teachers when needed. Furthermore, the district officials agreed with the potential to expand the training to the rest of the school. However, as stated elsewhere, this would depend on the school leadership's willingness to do so. On the other hand, given that the participating

teachers, subject advisers, and district officials saw both the potential and advantages of the successful implementation of AfL, it should not be particularly difficult to convince the schools' leadership to implement it throughout the schools—albeit with additional training for the rest of the teaching staff.

The subject advisers believed that the CPD training model had merit, and one noted:

> There is sharing, there's new knowledge. Then you go back and you try it out and then you come back and, you know, the practices you often talk about.

This comment is particularly pertinent in that it not only speaks to the acquisition of new knowledge and pedagogic support but also the sharing of that knowledge with peers, which more strongly reinforces the pedagogic practices. More importantly, this comment speaks to the efficacy of the action and reflection aspect of the model.

However, principals felt that the teachers would need time to familiarise themselves with the AfL techniques and strategies acquired on the CPD programme:

> I think a project [such] as [this, is] that you can't have a short time span. You need a longer period so people can work on it [on] a trial-and-error basis. Does it work or not? (Principal)

This statement reinforces the idea that teachers should support each other in the implementation of the training. Teachers can try out the various techniques and strategies and then discuss their classroom experiences, advising each other on ways to adapt their acquired knowledge to their particular classroom situations.

The school managers also alluded to the initiative being extended to other grades and phases, which aligns with district official sentiments. In both cases, as will be seen with the teachers and the subject advisers too, there was a strong feeling that it should encompass the entire system. In all cases, this was attributed to its applicability value. With this kind of support—from teachers to district officials—and taking into consideration the kind of comments proffered, it could be assumed that this kind of initiative could be met favourably not only in the district but beyond, even throughout the country.

However, human resource retention was highlighted by one principal as a concern for sustainability. Teacher movement across schools is a perpetual challenge. Schools find that much is at risk of loss when teachers migrate. However, the solution is not in retention of teachers at a site but, rather, on retention of skills and knowledge at a site. To this end, a principal was enthusiastic to offer how he believed this could be done:

> I recommend that there should be a workshop for all the teachers by the AFLA teachers [referring to an in-house cascade model] so that the information that they have is transferred or transmitted to all the teachers.

One aspect highlighted in terms of the support rendered has implications for sustainability as the following quote reveals:

> The monitoring was done well for me. . . . It doesn't matter how many actions you have on paper; the implementation and monitoring is the most important to me. (Principal)

This observation is significant in light of the need to ensure that the content of the CPD programme is implemented, rather than remain just a policy on paper. For any programme to be successfully implemented, there needs to be commitment from all stakeholders involved. However, since the advantages of the programme are seen from the start—in terms of learner involvement, for example—these would serve as further motivation for teachers to actively promote its implementation. Subject advisers further provided valuable insight into issues of sustainability. They believe that sustainability depends on the inclusion of the other grades in the FP (bearing in mind that this was a Grade 3-focused initiative) and on other school phases and, additionally, to other schools in the district as part of a systemic approach to enhancing teaching and learning, as the following quote reveals:

> Sustainability will be a challenge if the approach will not be rolled out to all schools. . . . It's got to be taken on in Grade 4, 5 and 6 and groom teaching should carry on into those grades. (Subject adviser)

This not only suggests that the sustainability of the programme outcomes would be improved if it were to be implemented throughout the school, but the chances of success would be much greater if it were to be implemented in all the schools in the district. This would, no doubt, prove useful in terms of support during cluster meetings and PLCs wherein teachers from the various schools could share their experiences and advice and, in so doing, further embed efficacy and sustainability.

However, subject advisers noted some challenges for sustainability, which included structural challenges for support and monitoring and buy-in and commitment from school management. Their opinion was that "it all depends on the principal who's driving the curriculum." This was the reason that principals were invited to participate in the programme; it is acknowledged that if school management does not support an initiative, the chances of it succeeding are low.

From a more personal view, a subject adviser also saw the structure of the subject advisory service in the district as a challenge. This was

> due to the number of schools in the district and the model of support we are currently following [2017/18] and with change next year [2019].

The 2019 changes meant that some of the subject advisers who had previously been responsible for an AFLA school no longer worked with the school or even in the geographical area where the AFLA programme had been implemented. This meant that some subject advisers were shifted to work with schools that had not been involved in the

programme. Those subject advisers were thus not able to provide the continued support and motivation to the teachers who might have needed them.

The teachers agreed unanimously that the programme training was useful and should be extended to the other grades in the phase, to other grades at the school, as well as to other schools. They believed that the AFLA training had equipped them with a useful set of techniques and strategies to apply in their classrooms. Some of the comments were as follows:

> I did this and this and it worked and then when you try it for the second time you feel like, okay, now I can see the difference so, yah, it was good. (Teacher)

> A lot more goal-orientated and learners know exactly what we are going to do. . . . It made my lessons more detailed and better to understand . . . I am more focused on the specific. (Teacher)

In the year following the training, it was found that some schools' organisational structure was to rotate the teachers to grades. This meant that some of the Grade 3 teachers moved to Grade 1 the year following the training (in 2018). They reported some successes and challenges of implementing AfL with their new classes. Examples of these were the no-hands rule, the use of the mini-white boards, and the exit tickets. In the latter two cases, the Grade 1s had difficulty because they were still learning to write, and some of the learners also found it difficult to contain their excitement when they knew an answer but were not allowed to raise their hands when the teacher asked a question. In most cases, they reported that the learners eventually got used to this way of work:

> They are taking a bit of time to get used to the new methods. . . . It is beginning to work with my new class. (Teacher)

These teachers felt that if the programme had permeated the phase, it would have been part of the learners' way of working, and implementation would have been easier and quicker.

The researchers believe that through sustained effort, this could improve exponentially. Teachers appeared to have become more reflective, more focused, more confident, more competent, and certainly more motivated.

> I did not use most of the techniques [AFLA] but now I am comfortable to use the techniques as well as learners. (Teacher)

The data revealed a use of AfL techniques and strategies that was judicious, qualitative, and evolving from developing positions of strength. Based on their convictions and experiences, teachers were making improvements: planning differently in a more focused manner, delivering lessons with confidence and competence, teaching with more focus, monitoring with increasing levels of quality feedback, and reflecting on their actions in the teaching-learning process:

> It also helped us with our lesson preparations and to develop us in the areas of weakness when we presented our lessons. (Teacher)

> As soon as you ask "why" learners tend not to know what the reason for answer is, so I give them time and we discuss it—the question must be giving an opportunity to a learner to express fully his/her thought with reasons . . . why the thought is like so. (Teacher)

Context and the shaping of the model and outcomes

Bearing in mind that the successful implementation of any model of training must assess the critical role of context, the following contextual issues need to be foregrounded. Competing priorities: the data pointed to numerous instances where the researchers found competing priorities to be an inhibiting factor. While some of these may be generalised to teachers across the world, those specifically contextually relevant to this study in the South African context were interlinked to a range of factors including culture, teacher-learner ratios, timetable design, extra-curricular requirements, personal life, and time. Some teachers' comments pertaining to these factors were:

> There are other things [such] as family matters, funerals and other [responsibilities on Saturdays].

> I started neglecting it . . . something very easy to set aside because there's other [school] things going on so it takes the backburner.

> If this was maybe at a different time then there will be much better implementation and then a person will not have so divided attention . . . not split between other people and other things. (Teacher who was also attending another series of workshops)

These comments illustrate that the teachers were generally hard-pressed to fully meet the requirements of the CPD programme due to time constraints. This was as a result of the numerous personal and professional demands placed on them in the case of this programme, but which teachers in general also face (Sayed, 2018). Some of the family matters referred to above were household chores and parental duties that the teachers had to fulfil on Saturdays when the workshops were held. Some teachers had school activities to attend while others had to attend workshops pre-arranged by the district. Some teachers were unable to attend some of the workshops because they had to attend funerals, which are important activities from a cultural perspective. Demands such as these, coupled with the everyday workload of FP teachers—where the learner-teacher ratio is generally 35:1 but could stretch to 40:1 and higher—meant that some teachers were unable to devote their full attention to the training programme, thereby diminishing its efficacy.

Because of the heavy workload of teachers—"We work in an environment where we [are expected to do] a lot in terms of administration"—many of the teachers initially viewed the lesson planning sheets and reflection exercises as burdensome, but once they were accustomed to them, the teachers became more accommodating. A teacher noted:

> In the beginning, AFLA was seen as extra . . . but in the end, it didn't turn out to be like that.

The latter part of her comment was echoed by another teacher who noted:

> [The lesson plan] that we use every week, every day is more complicated than your page [lesson plan template].

These two comments raise another issue—that of change of practice. Most people are reluctant to adopt changes unless they see tangible advantages or receive support and encouragement from peers (Sadeck, 2016).

An associated systemic issue refers to timetabling and teacher workload. Being FP teachers, they spend the whole day with their classes—without any non-teaching periods—which meant they were not able to support each other by sitting in on each other's lessons and observing and commenting on lesson planning and presentations. (This was one of the strategies proposed by the CPD programme to facilitate efficacy and sustainability.) Two relevant comments in this regard were:

> No. . . . For example it's very difficult to sit in each other's lessons and you gonna have to really motivate that to [school management]. (Teacher)

> It is difficult to share best practices if we are not able to sit in each other's classes . . . we don't have free periods like [school management] . . . nobody actually has it. (Teacher)

This situation, wherein teachers were unable to support each other through observation, although not necessarily crucial to the sustainability of the programme, diminished the efficacy of the programme because a level of peer support was then negated. On the other hand, the loss of support evidenced in this instance was countered by the support received by another teacher through her phase PLC as indicated below:

> It was useful for us to implement . . . because you knew you had to come to your colleagues with the PLC and share that. Like me, I didn't get the project from the beginning and then my group, my team was so helpful to me. (Teacher)

This teacher's comment underscores the importance of peer support, which not only motivates the colleagues but also bolsters the sustainability of a programme.

Although not exhaustive and not common to all teachers' lived experiences, the examples cited illustrate the various contributing factors, which, in various knock-on permutations, compromised the teachers' total commitment to the training programme.

Discussion

In the previous section, we explored the delivery model of a CPD in AfL in supporting a shift in pedagogy across schools in a rural district of the Western Cape. The emphasis of this paper and the findings above have related to the model of CPD employed to the shift in teacher pedagogy and in relation to issues of sustainability. The argument made above was around context. In this discussion, we now reflect on crosscutting themes emerging from the three sets of findings.

As pointed out earlier, most of the countries south of the Sahara fall into what Burns and Lawrie (2015) called fragile contexts, and South Africa is no exception due to its fractured past, particularly bearing in mind the number of curriculum changes the country has undergone in the past 28 years. This, coupled to the need for equipping un- or under-qualified teachers, and the South African Council for Educators (SACE) requirement of teacher development, speaks to a need for effective CPD programmes in South Africa, especially in impoverished and rural settings, that cannot wait.

However, as Burns and Lawrie (2015) expressed, the kind of CPD programmes prevalent in such fragile contexts are generally of limited duration, variable quality, and suffer from nearly non-existent support or follow-up for teachers. The AFLA CPD programme was an attempt to address this, running over a period of two years with regular on-site support for the teachers in the first year. The model was further strengthened by breaking a mould that restricts participation to teachers only and, in this instance, allowed school and district officials to participate to serve as additional levels of support for the primary role players—the teachers. This approach is also in line with the three criteria identified by Gulamhussein (2013), namely, that the CPD should be significant and ongoing, there should be support during its implementation stage, and initial exposure should not be passive. The approach was further enhanced by the requirement that the teachers try out what they had learnt, assess and reflect on implementation, and solicit support from peers, officials, and programme trainers who conducted follow-up visits at the schools. In this way, the "high-quality continuing professional development" referred to by Phorabatho and Mafora (2013, p. 617) could be achieved, with the aim of bringing about a significant paradigm shift in teacher thinking and practice as envisaged by the introduction of AfL in the classrooms. Based on teacher, school management, and district official responses, the implementation of the CPD programme was deemed successful. Comments from the various stakeholders were generally favourable. Unfavourable comments referred to the timing of programme workshops, which cut into the personal and administrative time of the teachers.

The materials utilised in the CPD programme included notes, relevant videos, and reflection exercises. These were largely useful because they could be used for reference both during and after the workshops—as reported by the teachers and subject advisers. However, some teachers felt that there was too much information and the materials took too much time to get through. This is a significant comment because material quantity could be a deterrent to the effective implementation of the training and thus its sustainability. It was suggested that more

succinct notes be provided for support. Another comment raised for consideration was the issue of language. The language of the notes, videos, and workshops was English, yet this was not the first language of any of the participants whose mother tongues were either isiXhosa or Afrikaans. Although none of the participants raised any concerns in this regard, it could well be that there would have been a different level of engagement during school support visits. However, at this juncture, the materials are considered adequate to advocate, promote, and develop knowledge and skills specific to AfL. But given that the subject advisers and teachers noted that they continued consulting the materials after training, it would be advisable that materials be provided in the mother tongue of the participants.

One major concern of any CPD programme is its sustainability. Villegas-Reimers (2003) asserted that effective teacher and learning that translates into changed practice takes time and requires ongoing learning opportunities with high levels of support and follow-up. The AFLA programme provided this in that it comprised a 6-month period of training with monthly support and follow-up from programme presenters. Additional support was available from subject advisers who had attended the workshops and from the programme presenters on request from the teachers. Further attempts to ensure sustainability were effected by obtaining buy-in from school management and district officials. As can be seen from the data provided, all saw merit in the training and felt that it had a positive effect on the teachers. However, as mentioned by a subject adviser, success of the training relies heavily on principals to drive the process.

The efficacy or failure of a programme is largely determined by context. As can be seen from the study data, there was a varied level of up-take on the part of teachers due, in part, to the pressures of competing priorities. Because the workshops were conducted on Saturday mornings, they occasionally clashed with other commitments of the teachers, ranging from personal chores, children's extra-mural activities, school commitments, and funerals. The everyday demands of teachers impacted their commitment to the programme, and one teacher admitted that when pressed for time, she would put AFLA priorities on the backburner.

There are also structural issues at school and district levels that would affect the efficacy of the training. As one subject adviser noted, and as referred to earlier, efficacy also depends on how the principal drives the process. Coupled to this was the refrain from all levels that for the training to be effective and sustainable, it should not be implemented only at a whole school level but, rather, at district level (bearing in mind that this was a Grade 3-focused initiative). A further issue raised by subject advisers concerned their reallocation of schools, which resulted in the inability of some to continue with support provision because they were allocated to schools that had not participated in the CPD programme.

Conclusion

This study was a snapshot in time of a few rural, non-fee schools in the Western Cape, South Africa. It was a CPD initiative that used AfL as the context and sought to be developmental and transformative in nature. The initiative and study were negotiated at district and school

levels, closely investigating the impressions of, and effects on, various role players in the initiative. It was determined that there was an interdependence and interrelationship among these role players. In addition, the findings of this CPD initiative suggest that not only did the programme receive a stamp of approval from all role players, but various levels of learning had also taken place among the participants, particularly the teachers. These issues speak positively to the sustainability of programme outcomes.

However, sustainability issues cannot be predicated on positive outcomes alone. Such outcomes are influenced by context and systemic factors. Outcomes need to be understood in context and the dynamic way in which they could alter when changes occur in other parts of a system. Issues of sustainability are determined by, and interrelated between, individuals and units of individuals and systemic factors and, specifically as highlighted in this case, by issues raised by various role players.

The lessons learnt and the shortcomings highlighted in the study of this programme should inform the development of a comprehensive CPD framework in South Africa, as the Department of Basic Education is currently engaged in doing. At the same time, it is acknowledged that it is unrealistic to expect any programme to be fully implemented immediately. This implies that the level of success of any CPD programme will only be seen over an extended period and depend on continued support from school and district management. This is particularly so when it comes to assessment and schools' preoccupation with a strong testing regime. Crucially, this paper suggests that context and the day-to-day realities of schools shape how interventions to improve teacher professional practice are implemented. Thus, should the rollout of an assessment programme be introduced in a school, district, or on a larger scale, for it to succeed, the issues highlighted herein need to be taken into account and, where necessary, be either circumvented—where they could jeopardise the programme—or bolstered where they would lead to successful implementation.

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