

# Twixt the workshop and the classroom: transgressing or progressing?

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It is commonly conceded that promoting quality teaching is vital for improving education. To this effect, the South African Dept of Education presents training workshops to in-service teachers. The workshops are experienced as highly relevant, supportive, a very popular means of training, and they are generally well attended. Yet, teaching successes in the Eastern Cape province remain bleak. The aim of this investigation has consequently been to ascertain why there is such a chasm between the enthusiasm displayed by teachers during these workshops and their subsequent classroom practices, which should translate into more success in the classroom.

## Tussen die werkwinkel en die klaskamer: oorskryding of vordering?

Dit word algemeen aanvaar dat verbetering van die gehalte onderwys beslissend is vir die bevordering van opvoeding. Om hierdie rede bied die Suid-Afrikaanse Dept van Onderwys opleidingswerkwinkels vir diensdoenende onder-wysers aan. Hierdie werkwinkels word as hoogs relevant, ondersteunend, 'n gewilde middel tot opleiding ervaar, en hulle word oor die algemeen goed bygewoon. Tog bly die onderwysuksesse in die Oos-Kaapprovinsie maar skraal. Die doel van hierdie ondersoek was dus om vas te stel waarom daar so 'n gaping is tussen die entoesiasme van die onderwys tydens die werkwinkels en hulle klaskamerpraktik wat tot meer suksesse in die klaskamer behoort te lei.

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It is commonly conceded that promoting teacher quality is a vital component in improving education (*cf* Goe 2007, Harris & Sass 2007: 2, Heidenreich *et al* 2006: 289). Quality teaching refers to the implementation of pedagogies that best fit the situation in order to elicit the full potential of the learners, which will result in improved student achievement (Lovat & Clement 2008). It is expected that effective and quality teachers will deliver improved learning that can further contribute to “better educated societies that not only increase the quality of life of the people that participate in them, but create many economic, cultural and civic advances” (Schacter & Thum 2004: 411).

However, media reports claim that education in South Africa is in a crisis because of a decline in the pass rate and a lack of skills (*Fin Week* 2008, Fleisch 2008). The inability of South African learners to read with understanding and to learn independently has resulted in what is termed “a national emergency” in education (Hugo 2005: 1). Schools are confronted with major challenges to improve their efficiency due to social, economic and technological changes (Steyn 2010).

Based on the above reality, it is accepted that effective teaching of learners should be a national priority (Turnbull & Turnbull 2004). The professional development of teachers is vital in ensuring such effective teaching (Mestry *et al* 2009). Healthy classroom practices are required to reach this goal (Bush *et al* 2010).

Therefore, teachers need to be exposed to the most effective teaching strategies in order that learners may achieve the best possible results (Hind *et al* 2003). Hargreaves & Fullen (1992) also claim that improving the success of learners will depend on a skilled teaching force, one that is empowered with the latest teaching strategies and knowledge.

To enable teachers to accomplish this goal, the Eastern Cape Department of Education, Port Elizabeth District, organises various forms of in-service training for teachers. An example is cluster meetings, at which learning-area specialists in the GET

phase hold information-sharing sessions. Another form of training occurs by means of in-service workshops (*cf* DoE 1997, Le Roux & Ferreira 2005). The rationale for conducting workshops is to provide opportunities for teachers to equip themselves with appropriate teaching strategies and skills, to overcome certain limitations in their basic training, and to advance in their particular fields so that they can, in turn, provide quality education for learners (Smith 2004, Hind *et al* 2003). Highly qualified and dedicated education specialists, both from the Department of Education and outside providers, conduct these workshops.

This article proves that teachers experience these workshops as being beneficial, relevant and supportive, as well as being an effective means of training, as is also confirmed by Battalio & Todd (2005). These workshops are generally well attended. The recurring question, however, is: If ongoing in-service training and programmes are readily available and are presented effectively to teachers by experts in education, why do the results of their learners not reflect a corresponding upward trend?

## 1. Problem statement

According to media reports, in the long term, learners' end-of-year achievements do not confirm the efficacy of the teaching they have received. It is believed that the problem has its origin in the continuing low returns, in respect of pass rates, yielded in the classroom, despite the provision of relevant quality workshops that form part of an ongoing professional development programme for teachers.

Teachers are the primary resource for achieving the goals of successful education. They will have to adopt new approaches and different styles of teaching and assessment (*cf* Boardman *et al* 2005, Baglieri & Knopf 2004, Hamre & Oyler 2004). This implies that teachers need to be equipped with these new approaches and strategies.

Consequently, the Department of Education has responded to the need for in-service education by introducing professional

support and relevant workshops for effective teaching (DoE 2002).

The present study has attempted to determine how teachers value these workshops and whether their newly acquired teaching strategies are being transferred to the classroom.

## 2. Research question and aim

The rationale for these workshops is to provide teachers with skills and strategies that will supplement their existing repertoire of teaching skills. Teachers are then expected to utilise these new strategies to enhance their teaching and, in turn, the performance of their learners. This leads to the research question: Does the workshop experience of teachers translate into the implementation of appropriate teaching strategies in the classroom? The aim of the research is to establish whether teachers are integrating the strategies and skills they have learned in workshops into their existing lesson planning in order to enhance their teaching and the subsequent learning in the classroom.

## 3. Concept clarification

A workshop can be defined as a gathering of people engaged in some form of manual, creative “hands-on” work (Hanks *et al* 1988: 1374). In order to provide an enabling environment for teachers when organising workshops, it is common practice for the coordinators to select a venue that has the necessary facilities such as space and work surfaces. Specialists usually take teachers through the workshop activities, away from the school, in a setting that is conducive to learning.

On reflection, teachers agree that these workshops are very productive, as they focus only on the work under discussion. This enables them to concentrate on the task-at-hand and reflect continuously, thereby ensuring that they return to the school empowered with renewed competencies and the necessary motivation to perform their teaching tasks with heightened proficiency (Jirasinghe & Lyons 1996).

#### 4. Theoretical foundations of the research and the research approach

The research is based on a constructivist, interpretive philosophical foundation (De Vos 1998, Rodwell 1998) and approached against the conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic model (Bronfenbrenner 1997). This model explains that interaction takes place at all levels of the network of systems in which a person functions. The different systems, such as the learner, the family, the school, friends, and society in general, influence one another. Therefore, as a social system, the school should have a major influence on learners' achievements and their successful learning experiences (Donald *et al* 2002, Stainback & Stainback 2002).

This investigation is firmly positioned within the framework of Vygotsky's cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) (Hardman 2008, Roth & Lee 2007). The underpinning philosophy is that each living being forms part of a dynamic social context that connects it with the environment and with other human beings through interaction (Stetsenko & Arieivitch 2004: 475). This illustrates that socio-cultural factors have an effect on the changes that are taking place, and that they have the potential to overcome some of the practical problems being experienced between educational theory and practice (Roth & Lee 2007).

According to the cultural-historical activity theory, the self is portrayed as individualistic, yet at the same time its social embeddedness emerges strongly, "rendering an account of the self as a profoundly social phenomenon" (Stetsenko & Arieivitch 2004: 476). This illustrates the point that the self has an important individual dimension that is firmly rooted in a social and relational view of human life and development. The active dimension of teaching ensures that teachers elicit change within the social dimension in which they find themselves (Stetsenko & Arieivitch 2004). This fact confirms the claim that quality teaching has a major influence on successful learning in the classroom, as has been confirmed by Goe (2007).

Two researchers embarked on this project. The topic is fairly new and complex, and has generated much interaction between the researchers. When applied to this study, the workshop experience is postulated as constituting a collective enterprise of activity among the group of participating teachers. While this is an individual encounter for the teacher, it gains significance against the backdrop of the teacher's connectedness with the environment and to other teachers. Each individual is "a member of a historically situated educational community" (Roth & Lee 2007: 187).

In the workshops, reputable specialists assist practising teachers to acquire new knowledge and novel teaching strategies in the particular context of classroom practice. Teachers are encouraged to identify facets of their classroom teaching which pose problems to them. They collectively brainstorm possible solutions for the problems, determine what could be done and how, and ultimately find options that go beyond the solo efforts of the individual (Roth & Lee 2007).

The minds of the teachers are socially influenced during the communication between the facilitator and the teachers. This is done in an attempt to fill the zone of proximal development (ZPD), to which Vygotsky refers (*cf* Hardman 2008, Roth & Lee 2007). This represents the gap that exists between what teachers can achieve with the assistance of specialised guidance, and what they can do on their own.

These participating teachers do not teach in isolation; they form part of the teaching community of practice and the broader education system as a whole. This community can be viewed as an activity system (*cf* Hardman 2008). The teachers become core participants (Williams *et al* 2007), fully involved/engaged in mediation (Lei 2008), and generating new knowledge and strategies that are enriched by the activity. They are gaining new skills through the engagement, and continually influencing one another. The products of their activity – redesigning, planning, managing their teaching, and implementing newly learned strategies – are then expected to translate into change and

improvement in the classroom and society as a whole (Roth & Lee 2007).

A qualitative approach was selected as being appropriate for this study, as “the purpose of qualitative research is to describe, explore and explain” (Ploeg 1999: 1, Babbie 2001). The researchers observed and recorded the behaviour of the participants, in this instance the teachers, in their specific environment (their classroom context) and their natural settings (Creswell 2003: 181).

The researchers chose a descriptive, exploratory, naturalistic, interactive, inductive, emergent, flexible, holistic, contextual and interpretive design (*cf* Ary *et al* 2002, Holliday 2002, Silverman 2002).

## 5. Methodology

The findings of this study resulted from fieldwork conducted with Intermediate Phase Language teachers at urban area schools in the Port Elizabeth district. This was accomplished in the form of narratives and observation of the lesson presentations of these teachers.

The use of narratives in social research has gained impetus in contemporary times (Webster & Mertova 2007: 4). The narrative is a perfect instrument for seeking to comprehend experience (Clandinin & Connely 2000). The narrative has the potential to open up complexities pertaining to problems and to “highlight[ing] critical episodes and events, and in so doing [it] provides insights into human understanding ...” (Webster & Mertova 2007: 69, Harper 2002).

As such, teachers are engaged in “researching for life” (Blakeslee & Fleischer 2007: 3), with their narratives being developed out of their personal needs and challenges. Narrative inquiry, therefore, allows practising teachers to express themselves and attribute significance to their experiences in their classrooms and lives (Clandinin 1993: 2). This new knowledge is then referred to as embodied knowledge (Leitch 2006).

Observation depicts the act whereby one perceives and sees, by watching and carefully paying attention. In a scientific sense, it refers to a “detailed examination of phenomena diagnosis or interpretation” (Hanks *et al* 1990: 782). Observation of participants in their natural setting is a widely used method of data collection (Hoepfl 1997: 6). The observer takes cognisance of the activities, settings and people in order to gain knowledge of and insight into the context in which the events occur.

This takes place by means of procedures, such as written observations (field notes), reports, graphs, checklists and reflective journal entries by the observer. The process of observation is perceived to reveal a greater depth of understanding than single interviews, as it provides the observer with the opportunity to witness prevalent behaviour in the natural context that would not ordinarily surface during an interview.

The research was conducted in two phases. In phase one, a study of the affective component of the teachers was conducted, while the effectiveness of change was established in phase two. The data collected provided the basis for the design.

## 6. Phase one: a study of the affective component of the teachers

### 6.1 Sampling of participants

Fifty-one teachers attended this reading workshop, and the sampling was done to afford individual teachers an equal chance of participating. Teachers were asked to be as spontaneous and succinct as possible in rendering an account of their attitude before and after attending the workshop. They were also encouraged to be honest in recounting the impact of the workshop on their outlook, even if this impact proved to be negative.

It was emphasised that it was not necessary for them to disclose their identity if they did not feel comfortable about doing so, as their input was considered valuable for the research. All



information gained formed part of the audit trail in the research, and is available for verification purposes.

## 6.2 Data collection

During the first phase, the researchers requested the teachers, who had participated in a weeklong professional training workshop for teachers on the teaching of reading, to write narratives on how they had experienced the teaching of reading before and after attending the workshop. The justification for this narrative was that several teachers had mentioned during informal discussions that, before the workshop, they had experienced phases of despair and self-doubt, but that after the workshop, they felt newly inspired to carry on. It was then decided that these feelings and emotions should be documented, as these are all factors that contribute to the emotional state of teachers and the quality of the work they produce in the classroom.

## 6.3 Data analysis

The narratives of the teachers were analysed according to the strategy suggested by Tesch (Creswell 1994: 155). Meaningful clusters emerged as significant themes and categories (Neuman 2003, Acrobal 2002). The narratives were also analysed by an independent re-coder, and a consensus discussion between the researchers was held to confirm the findings.

# 7. Phase two: establishing whether change was effective

## 7.1 Sampling of participants

Participants were selected from among teachers who had attended the reading workshop and who had previously indicated their willingness to participate in the research. The researchers did not know beforehand, which participants were incorporating aspects of the workshop strategies into their lessons and which participants were not. This enabled the researchers to keep an open mind

during the lesson observations, as it only became evident as the lessons unfolded whether a new approach (newly learned teaching strategies) was being followed.

## 7.2 Data collection

During the second phase of the research, the researchers visited the selected schools that had been invited to attend a workshop on the teaching of reading. The purpose was to ascertain whether any of the focus areas in the workshop were being incorporated into the lesson presentations of the teachers. The sample schools were included in these visits.

The data collection during phase two was accomplished by means of the observation of the lessons presented by the teachers who had participated in the workshop. The underlying reason for selecting the observation method for the purpose of this study was to scrutinise the selected lesson procedures. The rationale for this was that “observation is a first-order approximation” (Blanton *et al* 2006: 117), and accordingly reflects on the truth as closely as possible.

The researchers designed an instrument for the purpose of lesson observation (*cf* Appendix A). In this way, the different lessons observed were evaluated according to the same consistent criteria, thereby ensuring consistency of assessment. The two researchers acted as observers and kept field notes during observation. Reliability was ensured by the researchers’ observations, and the subsequent consensus discussion on the participant’s lesson.

The researchers paid follow-up visits to observe lessons of twenty-two of the fifty-one teachers who attended the workshop. Initially, twenty-three of the selected teachers agreed to the demonstration lessons, and one teacher withdrew. Of the twenty-two remaining teachers, six teachers were from township schools, three from a private school, and thirteen from so-called schools for “coloured”.

In order to keep the observation procedure transparent, a colleague from the Department of Education accompanied the researchers. Teachers were amenable to the procedure, as the researchers concerned had already established good rapport with them. They were encouraged to invite their colleagues to sit in on the lesson, if they so wished. The rationale behind this was to underline the whole issue of transparency and constructive critique. Upon enquiry, the presenter of the workshop confirmed that twenty-two out of a total of fifty-one teachers is a fair representation on which to base the research findings.

### 7.3 Data analysis

During the lesson observation, the form that served as the observation instrument was completed. The classroom atmosphere was taken into consideration, as it had been impressed on teachers by both the researchers and the facilitator that it was their responsibility to create an environment conducive to learning and teaching (Van Aswegen & Dreyer 2004: 299). Such an environment is characterised by encouragement, assistance and high expectations (Nieman & Monyai 2007: 159).

Learners need to be exposed to work in an atmosphere that is non-threatening, particularly as the relevant workshop was directed at English First Additional Language teachers, and all learning and teaching would therefore be in the learners' additional language.

As a first-order approximation, observation enables the researcher to conduct an in-depth study of the interaction between the teacher and the learners. Observation entails descriptive observations of verbal and non-verbal behaviour (Myers 2002). This means that the observer can chart the progress of the lesson in its totality. This would comprise teacher input, output and communication skills, as well as the climate in which the learning is situated.

An individual report based on lesson observations was issued to each teacher who had agreed to participate in the research

project. The report focused on what had been highlighted during the weeklong workshop, and not on issues that were irrelevant to the study. Upon completion of all the lesson presentations, the researchers perused the reports issued to teachers and proceeded to study the emerging strands of thought.

## 8. The trustworthiness of the research

A variety of measures were applied to ensure the trustworthiness of the research. Questions were asked about the following criteria regarding the research (Lincoln & Guba 1985): truth-value (credibility); applicability (transferability); consistency (dependability) and confirmability (neutrality and freedom of bias) (Krefting 1991). The measures applied included strategies, such as peer review, member checking, prolonged engagement with the teachers, a dense description of the process and observations, a rigorous process, appropriate distance, reflection on the process, and an audit trail.

The findings were also verified by means of the relevant literature (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, Creswell 1994), by comparing the findings with any other relevant research, to identify any shortcomings, differences, similarities and unique contributions (Marshall & Rosmann 1999).

## 9. Ethical considerations

In conducting the research, much attention was paid to ethical considerations, such as informed consent and the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants (De Laine 2000).

## 10. Findings of the research

### 10.1 Phase one

#### 10.1.1 Emerging themes

The teachers who recorded their narratives admitted to having had varied experiences in their professional careers. Some had reached a phase in their career where they felt inundated with work and crushed by the socio-economic problems prevalent in the surrounding community from which their learners were drawn. Others had simply reached the phase where they were experiencing a dry period in their career, as substantiated by one participant.

Giving vent to their feelings helped them to surmount these hurdles, and not to succumb to the depression and despair caused “by the doom and gloom we constantly encounter”, as articulated by one participant. The following themes surfaced in the narratives:

- *Teachers experienced uncertainty and apprehension before attending the workshop, but this was refuted by their experiences*

There was a sense of apprehension, as teachers did not know what to expect from the workshop. Would it be a theory-laden workshop? Would it merely be “new names for old and practised methods”? Would they be wasting time they could ill afford to spend away from their learners? One teacher revealed “much scepticism was felt before the workshop, as this was taking us away from our schools for a whole week”.

Another teacher expected “to be overwhelmed and bombarded [by...] segmentation, blending and phonics”. Harman (2002) reiterates that the “human factor” should be handled with sensitivity in order to curb any such uncertainty and apprehension. If the feelings of people are taken into consideration, this creates a healthy attitude (Muller 2006, Fullen 2007).

However, the participants mentioned that their fears had been unfounded, and that they “would definitely recommend

such workshops". One participant reported that "the workshop motivated me", while another "came back more invigorated and willing to tackle the reading problem in my school". Another participant also admitted to having been apprehensive about the workshop, but enthused afterwards: "I was equipped to adequately assist my struggling learners". Another participant stated that she had "got more from the workshop than I expected". A further participant admitted that before the workshop, she thought she would be wasting valuable time by attending, but was surprised by "the fresh approach of a skilful facilitator".

- *It is the "how" and not the "what" that counts*

Participants were of the opinion that the value of the workshop was not so much what had been taught, but rather how the content had been presented: "[T]he lively, practical demonstrations enabled me". This is supported in the literature by Pennekamp ([s a]: 4) who affirms that where teachers have several teaching strategies to fall back on, they are in a better position to institute corrective measures when learners are not learning. Nieman & Monyai (2007: 104) assert that in order to ensure "effective learning" teachers need to demonstrate versatility in their strategies.

Another participant stated that they "were shown how to use the media", once again underlining the importance of the "how" rather than the "what". Yet another participant asserted that colleagues now appreciate that "the 'way' we present our lessons is of the essence and not 'what' we present".

- *Reading strategies can be implemented*

It transpired from the narratives that the workshop was experienced as being topical and relevant. "The use of relevant sources enables me to implement these skills in my own classroom", was one response. This enabled teachers to identify with the content easily, leading them "to implement what needed to be implemented in my classroom". One participant mentioned, "INSET programmes like these really assist us". Another postulated: "I'm trying to incorporate these different aspects of reading" and "the workshop

was of a very practical nature that afforded us the opportunity to prepare lessons". In this way, teachers expressed the view that the time [and energy] expended at the workshop was used constructively.

Literature confirms that strategies serve as strength during change (De Boer *et al* 2007). Muller (2006) contends that the successful training of people depends on the acceptable channelling of their expectations, energy and experience.

- *Self-reflection is a prerequisite for change*

The need for change is based on self-reflection. Botha (2004: 241) regards reflection as a "focused review". Modern classrooms are characterised by a diverse learner population. It follows, therefore, that teachers should reflect on their teaching strategies and how they can adapt their thinking and strategies to meet the challenge of this diversity. One participant commented on her self-reflection: "I was now able to be the agent of change in my practice by facilitating improvement in my own classroom initially, and ultimately in the practices of my colleagues and other stakeholders".

Another teacher emphasised the concept of change: "I could now skilfully change the negative and boring into positive and lively". Yet another participant asserted: "If I change or adapt the way I present my lessons, I could tap into that brain and bring out what is already there".

When one examines the cognitive and affective components of teachers within the ambit of this workshop, the following points emerge regarding this theme: There are teachers who recognise the need for self-reflection and acknowledge that they need to change. It is a fact that the need to change stems from within November (2005: 1133) postulates that "to engender that change meant a decided break [...]" There needs to reside within the individual the willingness to change and to become an agent of such change.

The foregoing led the researchers to confirm that teachers decidedly do matter and that they work consciously to advance learners' levels of achievement. November (2005: 1133) admits that before self-reflection he was not aware that his teaching style was discordant with his philosophy of life. By his own admission, his teaching style was authoritative, while his philosophy of life held an opposing view. It was only after he had indulged in self-reflection that he was in a position to view himself from the outside. Teachers, therefore, need to pursue a path of self-questioning that will lead them to discover the need for change.

## 10.2 Phase two

After observing the participating twenty-two teachers' lesson presentations and the information collected via the research instrument, the following points were established.

The majority of the twenty-two teachers had clearly made concerted efforts to implement at least some aspects of what they had learned in the workshop. Observing the lessons also revealed that at some schools, where two teachers had attended the workshop, one teacher would implement the new strategies, while the other would not. This phenomenon was evident at two well-functioning schools, a township school and a school for "coloured". One can deduce from this that what happens in the classroom is to a large extent dependent on the enthusiasm and initiative of the teacher concerned. This confirms the view expressed by Conrad & Serlin (2006: 43) that "teachers matter" and that they can indeed make a difference.

Even though it was emphasised that the purpose of the researchers' visit was to monitor the work of teachers and not to level any criticism, some of the workshop participants were not prepared to permit any follow-up activities. This led to the conclusion that teachers perceived the workshop activities and the classroom activities as being discrete and detached. Another reason could simply be that they did not want change in their classrooms: Van Aswegen *et al* (2004: 299) state that in order for teachers to be part of change, they have to understand the essence



of that change. Some of these teachers may not fully understand the need for any change in their strategies; hence, the apathy that was displayed.

According to the literature, it is widely accepted that change is often imposed on us by circumstances. When applied to the teaching and learning situation, this can be perceived as changing one's approach, in order to accommodate struggling learners, or adopting new strategies to improve one's results. According to Morrow (2007: 6), changes in education depend on what teachers do and think. This statement is substantiated by November (2005: 1132) who believes that teaching consists of both intrinsic and extrinsic values that should ideally complement each other. A teacher's system of values forms the foundation of what s/he does and thinks about in the classroom.

Change is not required at teacher level only; learners often project a negative attitude. One participant stated that the pace of learning at her school was very slow, and that it was incumbent on the teachers to penetrate this apparent apathy in order to advance learning. Teachers spend several hours each day working closely with learners, and there is therefore a tendency among learners to emulate their teachers.

This contact between the teacher and the learners gives rise to a power situation that favours the teacher's position. As such, the teacher exercises considerable control in the classroom. It follows, therefore, that improving teacher knowledge, teaching strategies and the quality of teaching will also improve the learning and quality of the learners (Steyn 2004: 217).

## 11. Discussion of the findings

Teachers often feel uncertain and apprehensive about workshops. However, skilfully presented workshops genuinely assist teachers. It is not the "what", but the "how" that counts in teaching. It is possible to apply strategies to improve teaching. Teachers need to reflect on their own teaching and question their own methods. Change cannot be imposed from the outside. While workshops

provide extraneous assistance to teachers, the need to implement the strategies emanates from an innate desire on the part of teachers to improve their teaching skills.

Teachers must recognise the need for change and that they must initiate and maintain any such changes in their classrooms. This, in itself, can pose a challenge, as it is natural to settle into a routine and avoid any strenuous added effort. It is correspondingly difficult to break this routine mould. There is, therefore, a real possibility that the implementation of change can be elusive. Dornbrack (2007: 98) confirms this view in her statement that change is difficult, suggesting that teachers have to be alert to the need for change and to follow this up by initiating and maintaining that change. This initiation and maintenance of change is seemingly one of the major hurdles to be overcome, as teachers are not necessarily equipped to identify the need for change, and then to take it further and ensure that the required change takes place.

The prevailing climate at the school where the need for change is identified can also be a root cause as to why change is not sustainable. In view of the hierarchical structure of schools, it can be viewed as presumptuous on the part of teachers to want to institute any change, even if it is for the better. Failure to conform is often perceived as being defiant, and nobody wants to be regarded as disruptive. In the light of this, teachers will have to display the courage of their convictions if they want to succeed in the pursuit of their aims. It appears that a collective effort is required at school level to ensure that any envisaged changes are implemented and maintained.

Change is generally preceded by self-reflection. As researchers, we have reservations about the willingness and ability of teachers to embark on a series of reflective practices. These reservations are embedded in the following realities: first, to engender change is to accept more responsibility for the teaching-learning situation and, secondly, the fact that thousands of teachers already have an overload of work makes this highly unlikely.

In respect of the themes that emerged from the data collection, the following is therefore recommended:

- Awareness should be raised among teachers that they are important; their importance cannot be downplayed; teachers matter. Teachers should be made aware that their role is a vital one. What happens in the classroom leaves an indelible mark on the learners. The teacher should therefore ensure that this matter benefits learners.
- Functional strategies demonstrated at workshops should be implemented in the classroom without exception. This will reinforce the principle that where opportunities are created, these opportunities must be utilised. Workshop and classroom activities are not mutually exclusive and should be viewed as interrelated.
- Self-reflection and openness to change should be nurtured in order to enable the development of appropriate skills and knowledge, thereby advancing the practice of quality teaching.

## 12. Conclusion

Teachers play a vital role with regard to improving the quality of education. This article emphasised the inter-relatedness between teacher passion and verve for quality education, and the determination to make a difference in terms of successful learning in classrooms. Teachers are not compelled to implement teaching strategies learnt at in-service workshops; implementation remains voluntary. However, considering the triptych of teacher, lesson and learner, what the teacher does – and how it is done – will determine the quality of the education praxis.

This article proves that it is not only the knowledge, but also the implementation of effective teaching strategies that can breathe life into an otherwise precarious education situation in South Africa. Change cannot be imposed from above. While workshops provide extraneous assistance to teachers, the need to implement the strategies must come from an innate desire on the part of teachers to improve education. Teachers must become aware of the need for change and follow that up by initiating and

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maintaining such change to the benefit of each individual learner and the future of our country.

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