

Implementation of life orientation programmes in the new curriculum in South African schools: perceptions of principals and life orientation teachers

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The curriculum of the Life Orientation (LO) learning area forms an excellent basis for equipping learners to respond positively to social demands, assume responsibilities, and optimise their life chances. I report on a qualitative study that focused on the extent to which schools and LO teachers succeeded in achieving the outcomes of the programmes. Teachers' views regarding their training and skills in this area were investigated and factors that determined successful implementation were probed. Data were gathered through semi-structured questionnaires and interviews with principals and LO teachers from 12 secondary schools in four provinces in South Africa. Principals identified the problems they experienced in establishing the necessary climate and structures for the implementation of Life Orientation in their schools and teachers described the barriers they had struggled to overcome. The findings emphasised key challenges in achieving successful implementation of the LO programmes in schools.

Introduction and context

Many children in South Africa, including those in biological families, reconstituted families, foster-homes, safe-houses, and street children, are at risk because of inadequate opportunities for harmonious socialisation in their communities (Richter, Brookes, Shisana, Simbayi & Desmond, 2004). They are not adequately guided towards positive self-concept formation or the realisation of their potential. Consequently, they grow towards irresponsible and unfulfilled adulthood where they may never experience the joy of harmonious relationships with their fellowmen (Prinsloo in Landsbergh, 2005:33). They have little respect for their own dignity, suffer from negative self-concepts, refuse to accept authority and show little respect for the value of others or for their lives and possessions. In adulthood they adopt anti-social attitudes and habits and often lapse into criminal activities (Prinsloo in Landsbergh, 2005: 29-30). Their lack of emotional stability contributes to the trend of violent crime, rape and murder, reported daily in the South African press (Pretoria News, 2006).

Causative factors that put so many of the country's children at risk are numerous. The decadence of a materialistic and secularised world where values and norms deteriorate increasingly and adults strive in a self-centred way to achieve material gain and personal gratification contribute to the problem (Prinsloo in Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2003:65). In the South African society, economic circumstances, arising from over-population and unplanned urbanisation, also contribute to unemployment and aggravated poverty, thus intensifying problems of rapid moral decline. Disintegrated families, single parenthood and child-headed households cause more stress and greater poverty. As a

result child abuse and neglect increase and worsen (Beckmann in Le Roux, 1994: 228). Because authority structures are often weak, children never learn the value of discipline and self-discipline and they lack support towards achieving responsible adulthood.

This situation has become a matter of urgency. The Department of Education has realised the scope and intensity of the problem and has endeavoured through the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education and in particular through the Life Orientation (LO) learning area, which was introduced to make a difference in the lives of a new generation of learners. The development of LO programmes has brought educators and educational planners to the realisation that the only hope of reaching children at risk lies in a holistic support system. Extensive research completed by researchers, from South Africa and countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Europe, highlights the need for orientation programmes that prepare learners adequately for the complex and dynamic life in the 21st century. These should include religious programmes, socialising programmes, self-development programmes and life and survival skills training (Pretorius, 1998; Engelbrecht, 1998; Le Roux, 1994; Mwamwenda, 2004; Eggen & Kauchak, 1997; Department of Education, 1992; National Educational Policy Investigation, 1993; White Paper on Education and Training, 1995; Republic of South Africa, 2000).

In the light of the above research conclusions, an overview of the scope and requirements of an effective support system is given in Table 1.

The Department of Education in South Africa has taken cognisance of the findings of the research on the need for such orientation programmes and has consequently developed a series of LO programmes to be implemented over a period of twelve school years. The Department of Education defines the learning area LO as follows:

Life Orientation is the study of the self in relation to others and to society. It applies a holistic approach. It is concerned with the personal, social, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, motor and physical growth and development of learners and the way in which these dimensions are interrelated and expressed in life. The focus is the development of self-in-society, and this encourages the development of balanced and confident learners who will contribute to a just and democratic society, a productive economy, and an improved quality of life for all. Life Orientation guides and prepares learners for life and for its responsibilities and possibilities. This learning area addresses knowledge, values, attitudes and skills about the self, the environment, responsible citizenship, a healthy and productive life, social engagement, recreation and physical activity and career choices. It equips learners to solve problems, to make informed decisions and choices and to take appropriate actions to enable them to live meaningfully and successfully in a rapidly changing society (South African Department of Education, 2003).

Table 1 Scope and requirements of a support system for learners

Religious programmes	Socialisation (Communication) programmes	Life skills	Survival skills
Knowledge of God and an internalisation of a personal religious value system are necessary. This provides anchorage even when no other role models are available. The identification with and internalisation of a personal value system should occur against the background of knowledge of all the various religious viewpoints in the country.	Knowledge of the own self — formation of a positive self-concept and realisation of the own dignity. Knowledge of and skills in communication. The necessity of the acquisition of three or more languages of South Africa. The reality of respect for South Africa's multicultural society and the necessity of cultural pluralism. Loyalty towards the own and respect for other cultures. Sensitivity for group situations. Harmonious living together with others. Development of a social conscience and meaningful participation in community life.	Introduction to media and procuring of information from available sources such as dictionaries, atlases, newspapers, internet and e-mail. Acquisition of specific skills concerning the economy, personal budgeting, loans and contracts. Also knowledge of computer technology, information networks and the implications of biotechnology and atom technology. Career building, how to apply for work, how to handle unemployment and stress. The implications of human rights and the responsibility that goes with it.	Personal hygiene. Healthy life and eating habits. Avoidance of harmful substances such as alcohol and nicotine. Learners should realise the potential dangers of electricity, toxic and flammable substances and firearms. Road safety as drivers and pedestrians. Awareness of dangerous crimes such as highjacking, housebreaking, armed burglaries. Also the necessity of family planning and care for children. Sensitivity for the ecology — importance of natural resources and conservation thereof.

Purpose and scope of the LO programmes structured by the Department of Education in South Africa

LO aims at equipping learners

to engage on personal, psychological, neuro-cognitive, motor, physical, moral, spiritual, cultural, socio-economic and constitutional levels, to respond positively to the demands of the world, to assume responsi-

bilities, and to make the most of life's opportunities (South African Department of Education, 2003:3).

LO is proclaimed to be a unique subject at the Further Education and Training level. It focuses on

the diversity of learners as human beings in their totality and against the background of problematic socio-economic circumstances and deprived pedagogical situations.

LO acknowledges the multi-faceted nature of the human being, as well as issues like human rights, gender, and the environment, all forms of violence, abuse, sexuality and HIV/AIDS. For organisational purposes and to avoid duplication, these issues are located in one of the four focus areas in Grades 10–12 but integrated across the Assessment Standards. The four focus areas of the programmes as planned for the FET phase are:

- Personal well-being;
- Citizenship education;
- Recreation and physical activity; and
- Careers and career choices (South African Department of Education, 2003).

The Department has drawn on knowledge, values, skills and processes from sociology, psychology, political science, human movement science, religious studies, labour studies and industrial studies to finalise these programmes. The ultimate purpose is to equip learners

to engage on personal, psychological, neuro-cognitive, motor, physical, moral, spiritual, cultural, socio-economic and constitutional levels, to respond positively to the demands of the world, to assume responsibilities, and to make the most of life's opportunities.

The challenge is also to prepare all learners to play a meaningful role in society and in the South African economy (South African Department of Education, 2003).

The Department realised that a number of critical factors had to be considered in integrating the programmes into the school curriculum. Schools in South Africa differ from one another in many respects, e.g. there are differences in professional backgrounds and educational levels of teachers in rural, township and urban areas (Rogan, 2000:118). Furthermore the socio-economic circumstances, cultural background and differences of learners in the school system present many challenges for both curriculum developers and the schools that have to implement the programmes (North, 2002:24) The general moral decline and licentious climate of the post-modern South African society also presents an impeding factor in the internalisation of the values of the LO programmes by the learners. Moreover the challenge of the racial, ethnic, and cultural complexity of the South African classrooms as well as the challenges of rural and urban poverty (Van Wyk, 2002:305) are also problems to be considered in this quest for meaningful change and social cohesion.

Teachers have to be adequately trained in understanding the content, aims, outcomes and didactic methods of the LO programmes. A factor that

was not considered at the initial stage of development but which later proved to create many difficulties was the character and moral standard of the teachers appointed to teach Life Orientation. Teachers' own self-discipline, diligence, and high moral standards are important requisites for the successful implementation of these programmes. Morality defines a person's behaviour as good or bad, right or wrong (Rambiyana & Kok, 2002:10). Teachers, whose behaviour is regarded as bad and wrong by the learners, are unable to be successful facilitators in the LO programmes.

Furthermore the question of the expectations and involvement of parents/ caretakers should also be considered. Although parents' support cannot guarantee the success of the aims of the programmes, "their lack of support can sabotage even the most well-intentioned reforms" (Rambiyana *et al.*, 2002:10). It is therefore also important to reach and involve the parents in this whole process.

Aim of research project

In the light of the excellent basis that LO programmes form in providing support for learners in their development towards responsible adulthood, the aim of the project was to

determine whether schools and specifically LO teachers were empowered to successfully guide and support learners, particularly those at risk, towards positive self-concept formation, realistic self-actualisation and responsible adulthood.

Questions that defined the research problem were the following:

- To what extent do teachers succeed in achieving the aims and outcomes of the learning area, LO in the classroom?
- Are teachers trained and skilled to present this learning area?
- To what extent do principals provide a climate of support for LO teachers in schools?
- What kinds of factors form barriers in the task towards successful presentation of the LO programmes?

Research design and method

The investigation followed a qualitative procedure. Analysis, interpretation and description of individual, and group behaviour, attitudes, perceptions and convictions were completed (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:395). The aim was to determine and understand the experiences and perspectives of a number of LO teachers and principals at a number of secondary schools. The study focused on the interpretation of the subjective experiences and meaning attribution of LO teachers and principals and was therefore approached from an interpretivistic paradigm. An attempt was made to determine specific meaning from the feelings, experiences and meaning attribution of educators within the Life Orientation learning area as it manifests in the reality of the school world. No intervention or manipulation of the natural environment was done in order to stay true to the phenomenon.

Data collection

Data were gathered from 12 schools in four provinces in South Africa (Gauteng, Western Cape, Limpopo, and Free State). Schools were purposefully selected to represent urban and rural schools, different socio-economic circumstances (affluent, middle-class and impoverished areas) and different types of schools (former Model-C schools and public township schools). Secondary schools were targeted (specific target was Grade 10). The National Curriculum Statement Grades 10–12 on Life Orientation was published in 2003. The implementation of the curriculum was targeted to be officially implemented in Grade 10 in 2006 as a subject with promotion requirements. The LO teachers in many secondary schools initiated themselves and their learners in the new curriculum at the start of the 2004 school year and were already well-conversant with the possible success of the outcomes by the end of the second term of 2005. Data for this project were gathered over a period of six months in the course of 2005 by means of semi-structured questionnaires to teachers and by individual interviews with teachers and principals. Twelve principals (the principal of each of the selected schools) and 20 LO teachers (all the LO teachers in the 12 schools) were involved in the investigation. An initial semi-structured questionnaire was designed in order to elicit general information about successful teaching in Outcomes-Based Education and in LO programmes. Questions were directed at teachers' knowledge of the content of the LO programmes, their experiences in the LO classroom, perceptions of their skills to implement the programmes, the support they received from the different support teams in their province, their attitude towards the value of the programmes, their relationships with the learners and their perceptions of the influence of the programmes on the lives of the learners. Principals were questioned on the level of support they provided for LO teachers, their perceptions of the influence of the LO programmes on the general behaviour of the learners, the skills of their LO teachers and the type of reports they received from their LO teachers. This questionnaire and the responses evoked provided the basis for the in-depth individual interviews. Interviews with a schedule were used in order to address the identified themes and to leave enough room for participants to explain any meaningful themes that arose from the discussions. One focus group interview was conducted with all the staff members of a selected school to determine the general influence of LO programmes on the entire school climate.

Data analysis

The process of analysis followed the guidelines recommended by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). Data were analysed within a framework determined by the four areas of particular interest, namely,

- training and skills of LO teachers,
- the degree of success they experienced in presentation of LO programmes,
- climate of support received from principals, and

- factors that formed barriers in the successful presentation of the programmes.

The researcher refined themes and sub-themes as identified independently by each participant.

In order to promote the validity of the findings the data were triangulated by using different forms of data collection, namely, interviews and questionnaires. No statistical generalisability is claimed for these research results but because the project covered different types of schools in different provinces of the country, analogies could be drawn and used as a basis for further investigation.

Ethical considerations

Interviews were conducted with respect for the person and privacy of participants and care was taken to ensure that no school, principal or teacher was identifiable in reporting the results. The research was ethical in intent in that the findings were designed to be of benefit to the Department of Education and their research teams and therefore to all children in South Africa.

Research results

The results were based on the experiences and comments from teachers and principals and are presented in two sections. The first section represents the view of the principals who were responsible for creating a climate of support in the school so that the LO teachers could do their work satisfactorily. The second section represents the degree of involvement of the LO teachers, their ability to present the programmes and their experience of success or failure in the execution of their task. Other factors that formed barriers to the task of successful implementation of the programmes are also discussed. In each section themes and categories within themes were identified.

Views of the principals

Principals explained various problems in the way of creating a supportive climate for LO teachers. Six themes emerged in each of the interviews with the principals.

Lack of a value system: Every principal mentioned that many and sometimes most of the learners were careless and irresponsible towards themselves and other people. They lacked any religious anchor — they did not value and respect themselves, their elders or members of the peer group. There was a total lack of responsibility towards the own community and towards society in general. They had no vision or mission in life — they expected and demanded to receive everything they wanted without the least input from their side. Their comments are reflected thus:

They have no dreams; they live from day to day expecting little and giving nothing.

They are disinterested in the general rules of the school. They have no respect for us and there is little we can do to change their minds.

Their parents and grandparents were disadvantaged in the past — now they expect to be treated like royalty. They refuse to accept responsibility of any kind but they demand all the luxuries of life.

Lack of parent involvement: Principals complained that they struggled to get parents involved in school activities and their children's learning process. Parents regarded themselves as disempowered to assist their children with schoolwork. They were not interested in becoming involved and were often not interested in exerting themselves on their children's behalf. Reasons for this situation differed. Impoverished parents were struggling to feed and clothe their families and they lacked the energy to become involved in school matters. Other parents were so busy generating big incomes that they did not have time to spend with their children. Many children lived with relatives far away from their parents and the latter seldom troubled themselves with the children's schoolwork. Frequently children had lost both parents and lived in child-headed households without the support of adults. The degree of this problem differed from school to school. Public schools with predominantly black or coloured learners had the gravest problems. Principals of former Model-C schools were fairly satisfied with parent involvement. Most parents whose children attended former Model-C schools were determined that their children should have a good education and were prepared to pay, help and assist where possible. They were also more prepared to take responsibility for their children's behaviour and discipline in the home and thus conditions in these schools were more positive than in the others. One principal in a rural area came up with an innovative solution to his problem. In his school, the parents of learners were farm labourers in the neighbouring areas. Unable to obtain any reaction from parents of learners, he called for the assistance of the employers, the farmers, who formed a support group that was always prepared to assist when there were needs at the school. The employers also exerted pressure on the parents concerning the discipline of the learners and they assisted the learners with any difficulties in their homework. The system worked so well that the pass rate of the learners in each grade improved remarkably.

Influence of the community: Principals were concerned about the influence of community life on the value system and behaviour of the learners. A general refusal to obey laws of the government and municipalities was rife. Non-payment of basic services, alcoholism, drug abuse, child abuse, criminal activities, extreme violence, sexual licentiousness and a total lack of responsibility served as a daily example to learners in their formative years. The media reinforced these negative influences. Principals complained about television programmes, movies and the yellow press to which the learners were exposed. Principals remarked:

What they see they do and it is really very bad.

They seldom read and when they do, it is the yellow press with its awful vulgarities.

We lose our learners between Grades 9 and 12 (referring to school drop-outs).

Lack of proper role models in the teaching staff: Principals were concerned that many teachers were not exemplary role models. Some teachers were guilty of many of the misdemeanours mentioned under negative influences of community life. They set a poor example in the way they did their work and were often late or absent from school. The result was that learners lost what little respect they still had for authority figures and the discipline problem in the schools intensified. Principals observed:

Teachers are lazy and they are not really interested in the progress of the learners.

They are only interested in their salaries and nothing else.

One principal started a buddy system for teachers in his school. Buddies were responsible for helping and motivating each other and giving support where there were disciplinary problems with learners. The principal reported that since the start of this system, teachers had taken a more responsible attitude towards their work. His opinion was that many behaviour problems of the teachers could be contributed to their emotional vulnerability because they had too little support.

None of the principals of the former Model-C schools had complaints in this regard. They expressed appreciation for the example and hard work of their staff members.

All principals expressed concern that their teachers were vulnerable because of a general lack of discipline in families and in society.

Difficulties with policies of the Department of Education: Principals mentioned a number of factors that encumbered the teaching and learning task in their schools. The policy of 'only one failure in a phase' in Grades 8 and 9 caused serious problems. Principals complained that they were instructed by their provincial departments to pass learners who failed repeatedly. Some of these learners were not able to comply with the standards of their present grade but they had to be passed to a next grade. This did not only cause serious problems for these learners and their teachers but the other learners got the message that they need not achieve in order to pass a grade. Principals said:

Some of these learners can't even spell their own names.

The fact that they pass to a next grade without working at all has a very bad influence on the learners who work hard.

Three of the principals in rural schools had been under the impression that learners were not allowed to fail at all. They also found that the disciplinary process in cases of serious misconduct was much too long. Often learners who were alleged to have committed rape or acts of violence against other learners or teachers remained in the school for weeks before the disciplinary process had gone through all the required channels. This had a negative effect on the rest of the learners and created a negative climate in the entire school. Moreover, the policy of gender equity was not successfully implemented in all

areas. Male principals in rural and semi-rural areas were resentful of women in authoritative positions. They were reluctant to accept the authority of women in senior positions and who were tasked to participate in the decision-making processes in their schools.

Four of the principals complained that the support they received from the learning support facilitators appointed by the Department was very unsatisfactory. The learning support facilitators failed to visit the schools on a regular basis and when asked for assistance they had no knowledge or skills to solve problems.

This real problem was verified by one of the members of the District-based Support Team in two of the provinces.

Issues of cultural diversity: All the principals of schools in which there was cultural diversity in the classroom expressed concern about the success of teaching and learning in the school. They mentioned that teachers had great difficulty in creating a relationship of trust and a climate of success in the classroom. Teachers were neither proficient in the mother tongue of learners nor understood their background and culture. Teaching a class where some learners were not proficient in the language of instruction or where they could not speak it at all was very difficult. Principals of former Model-C schools had the gravest problem in this regard. The learners in their schools were mostly English or Afrikaans mother-tongue speakers. Many black learners who enrolled at these schools were not proficient in either language. The result was ineffective teaching and learning. Language diversity also caused financial, practical and staff problems in a dual-medium school.

Report of the LO teachers

Training of LO teachers: The 20 teachers who were interviewed mentioned that they had had little rigorous formal training in the presentation of the LO programmes. Their training had consisted of one- to three-day short courses on the content and aims of the programmes. They criticised the knowledge and experience of the trainers/facilitators who had been appointed by the Department to empower them for their task. Their key criticism was that these trainers had little teaching knowledge, little knowledge of didactic methods in a learning area like LO, and little knowledge of the current conditions in schools and classrooms. Facilitators did not seem to comprehend the problems in contemporary classrooms. Black and coloured teachers in rural areas offered the most serious complaints. Clearly they felt that the Department was not genuinely concerned about their problems and that the trainers lacked the necessary knowledge and skills. They expressed feelings of abandonment as in the following remarks:

Trainers have never been in a classroom with 40 naughty children.

They talk and talk about how important the programmes are but they give no examples of how we can handle the undisciplined learners who are not impressed by anything we try to teach.

The Grade 9s and 10s are tired of the word AIDS. They pay no attention to

what I say and I don't know how to make an impression on them. The facilitators don't even know what I am talking about.

No-one can ever tell me where I must get all the information I need to show the learners the world of work and to teach them how to prepare for employment and even unemployment. I really don't like teaching this subject.

Workshops and in-service training consists of how to fill in forms, set out portfolios, etc. which have no intrinsic educational value at all.

The general impression given by respondents teaching in government schools was that most teachers in government schools, and in particular those in rural schools, were ill-equipped to cope with the demands of the life orientation programmes. The response of the teachers in the former Model-C schools was different. They also mentioned that they had had neither specific training to put the aims of the programmes into action nor were they impressed with the departmental facilitators. However, they described how they worked together to achieve results. They devised a strategy whereby the LO teachers and the school counsellor formed a team. The information and skills which they conveyed in the LO periods were strengthened in follow-up sessions with the school counsellor and often in individual afternoon sessions with learners in which teachers acted as counsellors. They also collaborated with the principal and the rest of the staff to create an atmosphere of trust and sympathy in the school. Respect for the religious code of conduct of the school was stressed and learners were encouraged to adhere to its principles. Their general teacher training, the quality of their input in the teaching task, and their access to the newest information in textbooks and the internet had enabled them to equip themselves for the task.

The degree of success or failure with which teachers fulfilled their task in the LO classroom: Success or failure in this regard was closely linked to the circumstances mentioned in the previous paragraph. Teachers who lacked training and skills lacked motivation and confidence. They acknowledged that they had little influence on the learners' formation of values and were unable to alter the learners' behaviour. They struggled to maintain the learners' interest in most of the outcomes prescribed under the rubrics: personal well-being, citizenship education and recreation and physical well-being.

The teachers in the former Model-C schools reported a remarkable degree of success in the presentation of the LO programmes. The strategies that they developed and implemented (as mentioned above) strengthened their resolve and the support of their team members gave them self-assurance. They were able to meet most of the required outcomes in all four sections of this learning area.

However, on the other hand, they felt that the effect of the programmes on learners only extended to times when learners were on the school-grounds or in their classrooms. When the learners were out of school, the influence of the peer group, the media and the general climate of licentiousness in their communities, eliminated largely the positive influence of LO programmes.

One teacher in a semi-rural school in an impoverished area had shown remarkable initiative and the principal and community members confirmed that his instruction in the LO classes was most successful. The teacher was a mature man with extensive teaching experience and excellent teaching qualifications. The researcher was impressed with his dynamic personality and sense of responsibility towards the learners in his classes. He had been convinced that any progress with the learners lay in changing their value system. Most learners came from very poor homes where parents were illiterate and did little to encourage their children to study or to respect themselves or their educators. Although the school was in a proclaimed Christian community, parents showed no interest in or affiliation to the Christian faith or any other religion. The learners had never received biblical teaching at home or been instructed in humankind's dependence on a Greater Being. The teacher decided to introduce his learners to a value system through religious principles. He started every class with a short religious ceremony. With the consent of the parents and caretakers he distributed two Bibles to each learner — one to keep in class and the other to use at home. The learners had shown a lively interest in biblical principles and a great desire to learn more about salvation. They started Bible study and prayer meetings after school hours and also brought their parents to these meetings. The teacher was of the opinion that the change that faith had made in their lives had altered their perspective to such an extent that they had begun to internalise the values that govern all four areas of the LO programmes. He mentioned that their behaviour in class, on the school grounds and towards their schoolwork as well as the quality of their relationships with peers and teachers had changed noticeably.

Other factors that form barriers to the successful implementation of the LO programmes as experienced by the respondents: Many of the factors identified by LO teachers were also mentioned by the principals. They mentioned their struggle to understand the life world of learners from different cultures in one classroom. They felt that they did not succeed in realising the aims of the outcome, personal well-being, because they could not empathise with or understand the frame of reference of many learners in the class. The problem was aggravated because the learners were not fully proficient in the language of instruction.

Teachers in rural schools had great difficulty in finding the necessary information to illustrate aspects of careers and career choices. They failed to help learners investigate the diversity of jobs according to economic sectors, as well as work settings and forms of activities in each of these sectors. They did not have access to the trends in and demands of the job market and they did not have the ability to read the market for trends regarding jobs.

An important barrier to successful teaching in this and other learning areas was the lack of discipline in schools. Teachers complained that parents were not interested in instilling obedience and respect for authority figures in children. The disruption and disintegration of family life and the decline of

values and norms in communities had led to a total lack of respect for teachers and for school rules. Parents were often guilty of instigating learners against teachers. They encouraged learners to approach the police with charges of assault whenever teachers made the slightest move to reprimand unacceptable behaviour. Teachers remarked:

You scarcely look at them and they run straight out of the class to the police.

The severe poverty in many areas also caused barriers in the way of teaching and learning. The growing numbers of secondary learners who become heads of households and their daily struggle for survival resulted in those learners not being interested in information that would be of use to them at some time in the future. Teachers mentioned that many parents used their children as prostitutes in order to earn money for food. In such cases the teachers regarded it as extremely difficult and even impossible to reach the aims and outcomes of personal well-being with the learners.

These learners have shut themselves off from their own world to such a degree that it is impossible to reach them.

They completely shut down their emotions and don't even listen in class.

Some of my learners are so exposed to overt sexual activities that there is no way in which I can teach them responsible sexual behaviour.

Another key barrier in the process of implementation of these programmes was overcrowding in classrooms. To reach 40 or more learners at the same time in a short teaching period was a difficult task. Teachers failed to create an atmosphere of personal trust between themselves and individual learners. They found it difficult to learn to know the learners and their personal circumstances before the end of a school year.

Sometimes I don't even know their name before the year is out.

Conclusion and recommendations

This small qualitative study illustrated a number of positive and negative aspects concerning the implementation of the Life Orientation learning area as experienced by a number of teachers and principals. Two findings based on the reports of the respondents must be highlighted. The data in the literature study indicated that the LO programmes were well developed and well structured. They covered all the communication, life and survival skills necessary to provide guidelines for learners to achieve responsible and fulfilled adulthood in contemporary South Africa. A parallel theme, however, was the difficulty in achieving successful implementation of the programmes in many schools in the country. Barriers to the task of implementing the programmes in schools of which the Department of Education should take cognisance were the following:

Professional training of LO teachers

Presentation of the LO programmes requires expert skills from teachers. They should receive intensive training over a period of time in a number of problem areas. Cultural diversity in the class and ways in which a teacher could create

a relationship of trust with learners from diverse cultures must be addressed. LO teachers should understand the frame of reference of diverse South African cultures and they should be proficient in at least three of the official languages. Teachers should be trained in ways of retrieving the information they need to present and to illustrate the different areas of the curriculum. It is imperative that they be trained to present the content in different grades in such a manner as to interest and engage the learners according to their developmental levels. They should receive practical training in positive discipline strategies. In particular, they need to devise ways to manage classrooms to suit the more informal atmosphere of the LO class. They should be equipped with appropriate skills to make the LO lesson dynamic and to involve the learners in the process. Efficient intervention strategies including positive reinforcement and appropriate punishment, such as withdrawing of privileges, time-out procedures, detention, and referral to principal, should be acquired.

The integrity of the LO teacher

The character of the LO teacher is of the utmost importance. Teachers who themselves have no positive value system, who entertain little enthusiasm in the teaching task, who show no diligence and are unpunctual should not be allowed to present the LO programmes. In many ways, the person of the teacher determines the degree of success with which all aspects of life, survival and communication skills are conveyed to and internalised by learners. An official screening process should ensure that the right calibre of person is appointed in this position.

Value systems in South African society

The rapid moral decline in society has an extremely negative influence on the young generation. The Department of Education should seek the co-operation of government in a quest to address secularisation, extreme materialism, corruption, violence, crime, drug abuse, alcoholism and moral and sexual licentiousness. Attention should be paid to the influence of the media with specific attention to television programmes. The value of religion should be acknowledged and focused on. The internalisation of a personal value system against the background of religious knowledge is a strong deterrent to moral decline.

The multicultural classroom in the LO programme

In a multicultural classroom, where the cultural background and mother tongue of the teacher and the learners differ and where cultural differences, religious differences and frame of reference of learners differ amongst themselves also, the teaching task and especially the inculcation of values is a challenging task. This reality is often ignored in order to establish a multicultural society in South Africa. The opportunities to create sympathy, understanding and co-operation among the people of different cultures in South Africa are manifold. Sport, cultural, social, and religious activities can all be employed to achieve this ideal. Teachers and principals should be trained to use all possible opportunities to create social cohesion amongst

learners from different cultures and to achieve successful teaching and learning in the LO periods and in the whole school system as well.

Implementation of policies of the Department

Remarks of a number of the principals showed that they experienced difficulties in the implementation of some of the policies of the Department. The lengthy procedures in the disciplinary process in cases of serious misconduct in particular need attention. A better understanding and execution of this policy is necessary.

Concluding remarks

The development of the learning area LO is one of the most successful accomplishments in the construction of the new education dispensation in South Africa. It seems to meet all the criteria for the evolution and maturation of a responsible, fulfilled and happy career man/woman, citizen, family member and spiritual being. The different provincial departments as well as the district offices have made it their task to train and support teachers to implement these programmes effectively. The quality and quantity of the training and support are not always as successful as intended but although the present problems are many and varied they are not insurmountable. The attention of educators, policy makers and the Department of Education should be focused on ways and means to accomplish this task as soon as possible.

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