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Factors influencing the in-service programmes: Case study of teachers with learner-centred strategies in Blue Waters¹ setting

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Key policies on teacher development emphasise the necessity of a teaching force that is competent to apply learner-centred practices. Barriers to learning, like poverty, present huge classroom challenges and have implications for in-service programmes intended to develop learner-centred practices. This study endeavoured to determine factors that influenced the effective implementation of in-service programmes to assist teachers with learner-centred teaching in the Blue Waters area of the Western Cape. It was anticipated that identifying these factors would assist teachers in poverty-stricken schools in an area like Blue Waters to effectively deal with poverty-related challenges of individual learners. A qualitative case study approach was applied with convenience and purposive sampling. Semi-structured interviews and a document study were used as tools to collect data. The participants of this study consisted of one principal, one social worker, and one district officer from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). Qualitative data was analysed through thematic analysis. The competencies of teachers, Department of Education (DoE) and Department of Basic Education (DBE) policy intentions, socio-economic issues, and the types of in-service development programmes were revealed as factors inhibiting the In-Service Development Programmes at schools. This study recommended that the application of this strategy needed the holistic development of teaching skills at schools in Blue Waters.

Keywords: barriers to learning; in-service programmes; learner-centred strategies

Introduction

The post-apartheid government of South Africa, through its policies, intended to contribute to the redress and equity of an inclusive education, while simultaneously ensuring that its economic policies concurred with global trends (Vally, 2007), as reflected in the legislation of the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Inequality still exists more than twenty years after the end of Apartheid and continues to reflect racial disparities (Bhorat, Hirsch, Kanbur & Ncube, 2014). Despite considerable educational reforms being introduced by the South African, DBE, inequality is unwavering. Many teachers, in areas like Blue Waters, are faced with socio-economic challenges, for example poverty, in the classrooms and are expected to deliver quality teaching that ensures successful throughput of learners. These learners generally require individualised scholastic attention and understanding, which are embodied in learner-centred teaching methodologies.

This study, with the objective of determining the factors that influenced the implementation of in-service development programmes through document study, examined South African DoE policies pertaining to these programmes. In particular, the DoE intentions for in-service development programmes, the expected competencies of teachers, and the references to the inclusion of all learners, irrespective of barriers to learning, are explored within these policies.

Furthermore, determining the factors that influence the implementation of in-service programmes necessitated the exploration of the socio-economic challenges, for example poverty, with which a vast majority of South African teachers are confronted, through interviewing key informants in a poverty-stricken area like Blue Waters.

The findings of this study, point to aspects of learning theories that can contribute to recommendations for a theoretical model for holistic learning and learner-centred teaching in South Africa, which inform in-service development programmes that are responsive to the needs of all learners, particularly those affected by poverty.

Literature Review

The two-fold intentions of South African DoE policies have bearing on the features of in-service development programmes which support and guide teachers to effectively adhere to the requirements of inclusivity and meet global demands. Barriers to learning, such as poverty, hamper learners' needs being met, and impact on successful throughput of learners (Mok, 2010). These factors also hinder the successful achievement of the level of competence for teachers, as required of them in terms of DoE policies, and contribute to the need for in-service programmes which incorporate holistic learning and learner-centred teaching.

Inclusivity versus global demands

South African DoE policies like the National Curriculum Statements (NCS) Grades R-12, emphasise that social transformation needed to redress equity, so that these needs could be considered for all learners in schools (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2011b). Legislation, such as the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (Republic

of South Africa, 1996) enable more advantaged schools with higher fee structures paid by affluent parents to employ extra teachers, which in turn alleviates class size. In sharp contrast to these affluent schools, Schools in the Blue Waters area are still unable to afford the employment of additional teachers.

Arends and Phurutse (2009) report that most schools in rural areas and townships are faced with many daily class instruction challenges, arising from socio-economic factors such as poverty. Landsberg, Krüger and Swart (2011) explain that poverty in South Africa is characterised by a disposition of inadequate education, low wages, unemployment, malnutrition, conflict, violence and crime, as well as substance abuse. Similarly, Mouton, Louw and Strydom (2013) point out that poverty and behavioural challenges are linked. Teachers are generally expected to, through learner-centred practices (as reflected in relevant DoE, 2006; and DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2011a), deal with these challenges/barriers to learning, as well as the effects thereof, while still focusing on the successful throughput of learners at schools. Dealing with the impact of poverty (and by implication high learner-teacher ratios), while still being responsible for learners' scholarly success, is an intensely challenging situation for teachers (Adler & Reed, 2002). This necessitates educational assistance from the DBE through relevant in-service programmes, at local, provincial and national levels.

Implications of the barriers to learning

According to the South African Department of Education, the fundamental objective of the White Paper 6 is to establish an inclusive education and training system for all, in order to achieve equality and human rights for all (DoE, 2001). Regarding the principle of social transformation, it highlighted that all learners should be included at schools, regardless of their socio-economic conditions, enabling them to reach their maximum potential (Department of Basic Education [DBE] & Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2011; DoE, 2001). The guidelines for responding to learners' diversity through curriculum and assessment statements (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2011a) distinguish the barriers to learning in two main groups. *Intrinsic barriers* refer to personal attributes of individual learners that affect some aspects of learning, whereas, *extrinsic barriers* involve impairments located in the learners' immediate, or wider societal and cultural environments that influence learning.

Poverty is one of the barriers to learning affecting teaching as well as learning (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). Socio-economic deprivation, for example poverty, as an extrinsic barrier to learning, affects the cognitive and social development of learners in impoverished communities (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2012), necessitating learner-centred

teaching practices, focused on the individual needs of learners. For example, learners who experience socio-economic deprivation, require specific learning needs to achieve their academic goals. If these needs remain unmet, learners might fail to learn effectively, or be excluded from the learning system (DoE, 2001:7), thus diminishing their chances of attaining success at school. In addition, external factors, including poverty, under-development of basic services, lack of/overcrowded housing, unemployment, dysfunctional families, violence and crime are primarily responsible for learners' emotional and behavioural problems in schools (Adelman & Taylor, 1994; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). Scholars report that hunger and poor nutrition may affect the physical and psychological conditions of learners, reduce learners' motivation to gain knowledge, and decrease their participation in education (Stofile, Linden & Maarman, 2011; Stofile, Raymond & Moletsane-Kekae, 2013; Van der Berg, 2008). These factors hamper successful throughput of learners and require that teachers' classroom practices be responsive to learners' individual needs.

Teacher development, therefore, faces multi-dimensional challenges for both pre-service and in-service programmes. According to Adler and Reed (2002:5), it is a "... complex, tension-filled practice ...," and the practice of merely upgrading the subject knowledge of teachers is too simplistic. Additionally, this simplistic approach will not bring about better learner attainment, unless it is accompanied by teacher development programmes that focus on dealing with teachers' contexts, as well as the contexts of the learners, as required by the learner-centred approach reflected in the National Curriculum Statements (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2011b). However, Brodie, Lelliot and Davis (2002) caution that challenges like violence, large classes, and learners with diverse backgrounds, impede a learner-centred approach.

Expected competencies of teachers

A fully competent teacher is able to facilitate learning, while being sensitive to the diverse needs of learners (including learners with barriers to learning); the needs of the subject/learning; as well as the differing needs of the learners as detailed in the Norms and Standards for Educators (DoE, 1998). Teachers should, therefore, possess knowledge of different approaches to learning and be able to use these approaches to suit individual learner needs and contexts (DoE, 1998).

Furthermore, competent teachers must be able to demonstrate competence in learner-centred teaching (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2011b); and the knowledge, skills and values acquired by the learners in classrooms should be meaningful for their lives, in local, as well as global contexts. The National Curriculum Statements Grades R-12 also

emphasises that learners of all socio-economic backgrounds and races ought to be encouraged to develop their ability to become self-fulfilled, in order to take up meaningful citizenship in South Africa; and argues for the redress of imbalances, while displaying sensitivity towards issues, such as poverty and inequality (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2011b). Clearly, the DBE views the importance of teachers' competence in learner-centred teaching practices, specifically those addressing challenges, resulting from poverty and inequality.

In-service teacher development

Schools are crucial as centres for the acquisition of knowledge, where teachers are required to provide quality education in an accessible, affordable environment for all learners. Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, Mundry, Love and Hewson (2010) suggest that teachers are required to improve their professional capacities at schools, in order to achieve the full potential of education.

Judging by the initiatives in place for in-service training of teachers and the relevant DoE policies, which both emphasise the importance of, and which guide the in-service development for teachers, it is evident that the DoE views on-going development for teachers as important. The National Policy Framework for Teacher Development in South Africa (DoE, 2006) highlights the role of teachers for a good quality educational system. This framework also emphasises the successful development of teachers to meet the social and economic needs of the country. In addition, the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, 2011–2025 (DBE & DHET, 2011) has, as its central aim, the enhancement of the quality of teacher education and development, in order to improve the quality of teachers and teaching programmes.

Recent studies on in-service development programmes for teachers in Africa include Amusa and Toriola's (2013) qualitative study conducted in South Africa, Kenya, Botswana, Egypt and Nigeria and the study of Msomi, Van der Westhuizen and Steenekamp (2014) in a rural school in KwaZulu-Natal. Amusa and Toriola (2013:62) examined the realities and challenges that teachers in Africa are confronted with reveal that classes are in an impoverished state and are overcrowded, where teachers are impacted by poor living conditions, and their consequences, for example: poverty and drug abuse; teachers lacking adequate training; classroom discipline challenges; and a lack of clear focus on student learning, but on the adherence to national directives on curriculum.

While there is evidence that in-service development programmes are regarded as important by educational authorities like the Department of Education and local education

districts in countries in Africa (Amusa & Toriola, 2013:66), financial support for these programmes are, however, either limited or absent, and trainers or facilitators of in-service development programmes are chosen because of seniority rather than competence are themselves untrained.

Msomi et al. (2014) in examining teachers' responses to the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) implementation and demands suggest that, inter alia, teachers are provided with opportunities to improve their teaching skills through in-service training or workshops; one of the purposes of in-service development programmes is to assist with the implementation of new policies, and further describe the IQMS as an example of such a programme.

Professional development programmes for teachers have been also criticised for being brief, fragmented, decontextualized, removed from the reality in classrooms, and probably inadequate to improve the standard of teaching (Ono & Ferreira, 2010:60). Many models of professional development for teachers, therefore, are not very successful (Ono & Ferreira, 2010).

Aspects of learning theories for learner-centred teaching

The afore-mentioned DoE policy documents (DBE & DHET, 2011) point out the holistic development of learners, which, at the least, requires the application of learner-centred principles by teachers. Learner-centred teaching, towards the holistic development of learners, presents a huge challenge to teachers (Brown, 2003) particularly for poor schools with high teacher-learner ratios and learners, who are subjected to impeding socio-economic deprivation (Brodie et al., 2002).

Curriculum reforms of the past decade have been informed by the notions of learner-centred teaching (Brodie et al., 2002) and teachers generally display an eagerness about the new curriculum, believing that they are working with the principles embodied in the curriculum. Still much teaching practice remains teacher-centred (Chisholm, Volmink, Ndhlovu, Potenza, Mahomed, Muller, Lubisi, Vinjevold, Ngozi, Malan & Mphahlele, 2000 as cited in Brodie et al., 2002).

The next section highlights conditions for optimal learning posited against aspects of Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Transformational Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2000) and Holistic Learning Theory (Yang, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework in this study was guided by literature on teacher learning and learner-centred principles, all conducive for optimal learning (Brown, 2003; Leu, 2004; Pulist, 2005). Additionally, aspects of Social Cognitive Learning Theory, Transformational Learning Theory and Holistic

Learning Theory served as the underpinning framework.

Teacher learning and learner-centred principles

Bransford, Brown and Cocking (2000:27) state that the principles of learning, as well as the implications of the learning environment's design, are equally relevant for both child and adult learning. Professional in-service development for teachers should, therefore, contain a learner-centred element, be knowledge-centred and assessment centred, and focus on conditions for optimal teacher learning (Bransford et al., 2000). Leu (2004) suggests that effective teacher professional development programmes are teacher facilitated; approach teachers as active participants; and accept that teacher knowledge and classroom realities are central.

Teacher development programmes should also develop learner-centred teaching strategies, where learners' prior knowledge, their interests and strengths, and their linguistic abilities and cultures (Brown, 2003:99) are taken into account. Teachers should also remember that learners have different strengths and abilities, but still maintain high expectations for all learners; and keep in mind that they are responsible for learners' intellectual, emotional, physical, as well as social growth (Brown, 2003). Similarly, teachers must heed the various inherent psychological factors of the learner (McCombs, 1993) and the environmental and other contextual factors that learners interact with should, simultaneously, be recognised. These learner-centred strategies emphasised by Brown (2003) and McCombs (1993) have significance for teaching learners who experience poverty, and particularly so for the development of in-service programmes which develop teachers' competence at these strategies.

Conditions for optimal learning

Schools need to consider the conditions that contribute to a successful learning environment, as well as the learning process of learners (McCombs, 2000). These conditions need to be created and maintained by the teachers in the classrooms, to ensure learners' success in learning (Brown, 2003), which are key principles for learner-centred teaching.

Pulist (2005) further explains that successful learning is possible, when learners' needs are at the centre of the teaching/learning process. More specifically, this entails listening to the needs of individual learners; getting to know them and finding out what they know; and creating a context that is conducive for successful learning. Consequently, the focus of this study will be on effective teaching processes for the promotion of optimal learner motivation (Gibbs, 1992), and will include building the learners' confidence, creating an

atmosphere for learning that is free of anxiety, and placing an emphasis on what learners know. This approach implies a shift from a teaching methodology that focuses only on that which ought to be taught, to one that also includes how, and by whom, it would be taught/learned (Pulist, 2005).

These conditions have far-reaching implications for teacher in-service development. An understanding and application of relevant theories of learning is also important.

Theories of learning

Figure 1 illustrates some of the conditions for optimal learning posited against aspects of Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Transformational Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2000), and Holistic Learning Theory (Yang, 2004).

Social cognitive learning theory

According to Social cognitive learning theory, individual and environmental factors influence each other. Bandura (1977:392) claims that all learning could occur through observing others' behaviour and the consequences thereof. Individuals' behaviour is influenced by personal factors; the social environment; and the reciprocating influence of the behaviour of individuals on personal factors and the social environment. The interaction between environmental, personal and behavioural factors is central to cognition and learning. Furthermore, individuals are able to exercise influence over their own behaviour where "... they select, organize [*sic*], and transform the stimuli that impinge on them ..." (Bandura, 1977:vii), being products and producers of their environment.

Transformational learning theory

Central to this transformational learning theory, which is unique to adulthood, is the on-going process of the construction of meaning, based on the interpretation of experiences.

Transformational learning occurs when previous, or new experiences, are re-interpreted, based on a new set of expectations. This set of expectations is embedded in the individual's frame of reference, through which an individual understands his/her experiences. Through transformational learning, the frames of reference can be transformed into becoming "... more inclusive, open, emotionally capable of change and reflective ..." in order that more true/justified, beliefs/opinions are produced (Mezirow, 2000:9).

Holistic learning theory

Holistic learning theory asserts that learning (either an individual or a social activity) entails a change in an individual's cognition, behaviour and attitude, resulting from maintaining the balance between the three forces influencing the knowledge forces, viz. rationality, reality and liberty (Yang, 2004).

Knowledge is perceived as the individual's understanding of reality "... through mental correspondence, personal experience, and emotional affection with outside objects and situations ..." (Yang, 2004:242) and has three interrelated and distinctive components, viz.: explicit, implicit and emancipatory knowledge. *Explicit knowledge* (rationality) is transmitted formally and systematically, whereas *implicit knowledge* (reality) is the behavioural aspect, emanating and existing in an individual's behaviour, action and accumulated experiences. It is therefore personal and context-specific. Emancipatory knowledge (liberty), the emotional component of knowledge, is value-laden,

as reflected by the emotions and feelings that individuals embrace about the situations and objects by which they are surrounded (Yang, 2004:242). Figure 2 illustrates some key common points among Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Transformational Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2000), and Holistic Learning Theory (Yang, 2004). Bearing in mind the conditions for optimal learning, additionally the shared aspects among these three theories provide valuable insight into the design of in-service programmes responsive particularly to learner-centred teaching of learners who experience extrinsic barriers to learning, such as poverty.

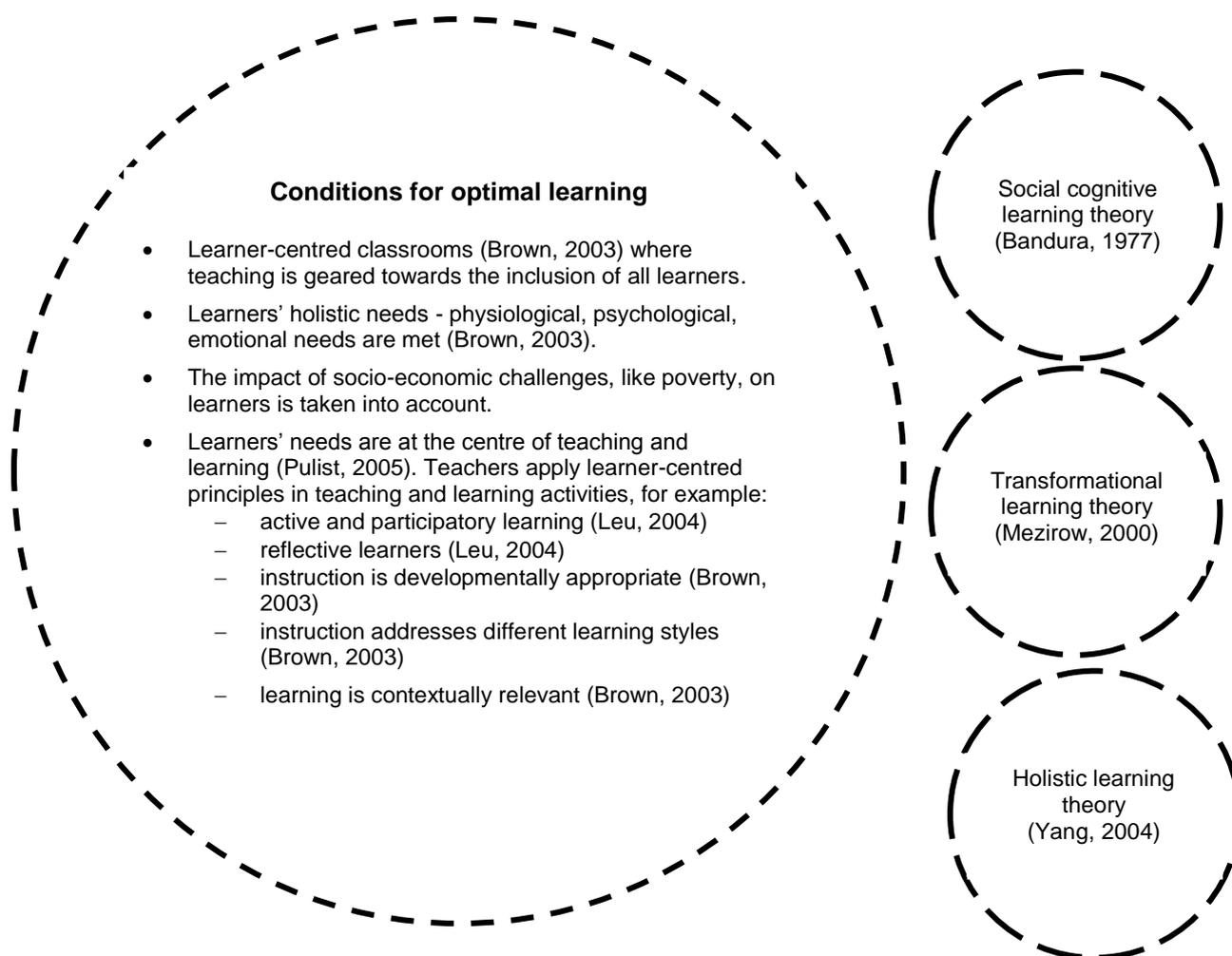


Figure 1 Conditions for optimal learning and learning theories (Martin, 2013:27)

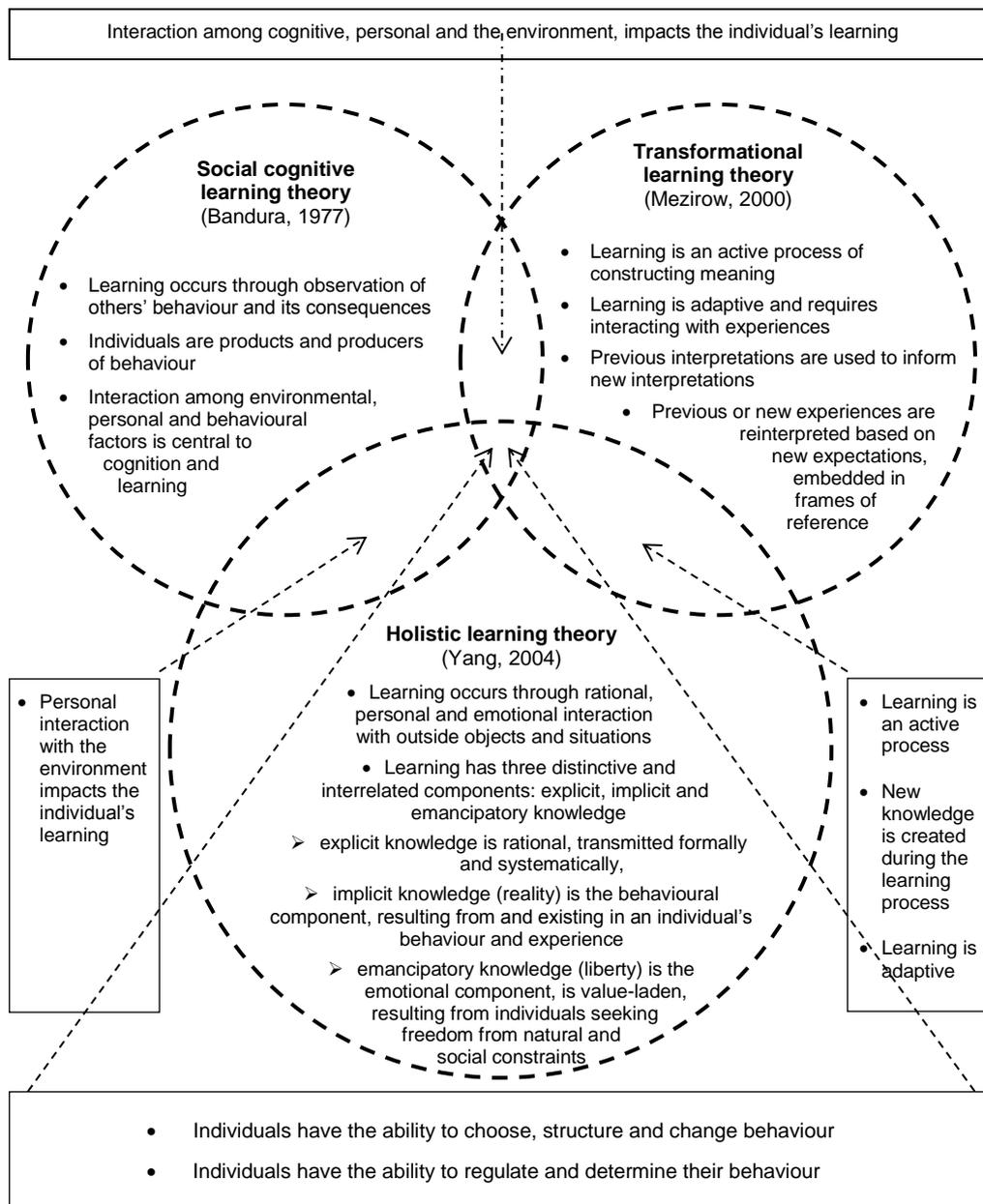


Figure 2 Some common key points among social cognitive, transformational and holistic learning (Martin, 2013:31)

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to determine the factors that influenced the implementation of in-service development programmes, offered by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), as a tool to assist teachers with learner-centred teaching strategies in the Blue Waters setting in the Western Cape.

Methodology

Research Method and Design

In this study, a qualitative research approach, using a case study design was chosen to establish the context in which in-service programmes occur; sketch the content of in-service teacher develop-

ment programmes; and to investigate the Department of Education (DoE) and Department of Basic Education (DBE) policies pertaining to in-service teacher development. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a principal of a school in Blue Waters, a social worker from the area, and a district officer of the WCED. An interview schedule with open-ended questions was employed as an aid to guide the interview, engage the participants, define the purpose, and ensure that the topic of discussion is systematically covered. The researcher also utilised a literature review of public policy documents as an additional method of data

collection (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 2011).

Research Setting

The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) comprises eight education districts. According to the South African DBE (2012), in 2010, there were 1,455 ordinary public schools in the Western Cape, with 959,714 learners and 31,870 teachers. In 2009, in the Western Cape, more than 41.9% of these schools had a class size of more than 40 learners (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2011a), including the schools in Blue Waters, one of the many impoverished townships in the Western Cape. The research was conducted in Blue Waters, which is situated in the Metro South District. It is known as a township, rife with extreme poverty, high unemployment, and gangsterism (*Mail & Guardian*, 2011).ⁱⁱ

According to the area social worker who participated in this study, there are many women-headed homes in Blue Waters. These homes are under-resourced and absent fathers/husbands are common. Households are further disadvantaged by the increase of alcohol consumption and other damaging activities by the women, who are single parents, resulting in a complete breakdown of supportive family structures.

A principal of one of the schools in Blue Waters conveyed to the media that, besides the (already) challenging socio-economic conditions, the area resembled a war-zone during 2011 and 2012. Gang violence emanating from this area is regularly covered in local newspapers. For example, an eleven-year old girl, a victim of this gang violence was shot in both legs while playing outdoors (*Cape Argus*, 2011). Because of the gang violence, learners are afraid to be on holiday and prefer being at school (*Cape Times*, 2011). This is the background of many learners attending the schools in Blue Waters.

Participants

Sampling, sample and setting

A combination of convenience and purposive sampling strategies were used as the participants were selected with specific criteria pre-established. It was convenient to interview the principal of the school and the social worker in the area, as they were easily accessible (Marshall, 1996:523) to the researcher; and selecting them was the least costly, in terms of time, effort and cost. Additionally, due to the researcher's experience and background as a teacher in the area, the selected location of the research proved valuable in gaining access to the community and research area. The sample size consisted of one principal of a school; one social worker based at a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in Blue Waters; and one district officer from

the Metropole South District, as participants for the study.

Procedure

Prior ethical clearance was given by the Ethics committee of the University of the Western Cape, and permission was granted by the WCED to conduct research at the designated school. The participants were provided with consent forms for their written, voluntary consent to participate in this study, and they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were also informed that they had the right to withdraw before, during, or after the research process, without prejudice.

Data Collection

Two instruments were used to gather qualitative data, namely semi-structured interviews and a document study. An interview schedule was prepared before the interviews and the questions posed to the principal and the district officer focused on: the types of in-service development programmes; the usefulness of these programmes for effective teaching and management of schools; and, whether these programmes assisted teachers with the socio-economic challenges presented by learners in the classroom. The social worker was asked to provide the context and nature of the interventions of the NGO. The documents that were analysed in the document study, namely: The Norms and Standards for Educators (DoE, 1998); The National Policy Framework for Teacher Development in South Africa (DoE, 2006); The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, 2011–2025 (DBE & DHET, 2011); and The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2011b), were useful for additional information and data.

Data Analysis

After all the semi-structured interviews were conducted, the researchers transcribed, organised and separated the data into three sets including Set 1 for principal, Set 2 for district officer and Set 3 for social worker. A code was assigned to each set for easy identification (set 1 = R1, set 2 = R2 and set 3 = R3). According to Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004), these sets should be individually read, and then separated into meaningful units. This helped the researchers to code the data through comparing into different units and patterns across the units. This coding process included naming the particular theme and adding a brief description of the characteristic/s of the individual themes (Boyatzis, 1998:31). The key themes emerged from the interviews such as social economic challenge (SEC), where the specific socio-economic challenge is poverty; it was coded as R1, SEC, poverty. Also, the

correlation between poverty and other factors like violence, crime, substance abuse and/or unemployment (Landsberg et al., 2011) as well as behavioural challenges (Mouton et al., 2013), were noted when coded.

Two questions guided the document study, namely what are the expected competencies of teachers for the holistic development of learners, and, what are the DoE and DBE policy intentions for in-service teacher development. The relevant documents were skimmed, then read through and interpreted (Bowen, 2009). This process included appraisal of and synthesising of data, which included quotations and complete passages. By analysing the content, main categories and themes were developed. Key themes emerging from the document study were: Expected competencies of teachers for the holistic development of learners, and DoE and DBE policy intentions for in-service teacher development.

Results

The results for this study are discussed bearing in mind the thrusts of the research questions, namely what types of in-service development programmes are offered to schools, the usefulness of these programmes for effective teaching and management of schools, and whether these programmes assisted teachers with the socio-economic challenges presented by learners in the classroom.

These results revealed that the types of in-service development programmes offered to schools; expected competencies of teachers for the holistic development of learners; as well as the DoE and DBE policy intentions for in-service teacher development and socio-economic factors; all influenced the implementation of teacher in-service development programmes in the Blue Waters research setting in the Western Cape.

Types of In-Service Development Programmes Offered to Schools

The Principal and the District Officer highlighted that in-service development programmes are co-ordinated by the Cape Teaching and Leadership Institute (CTLI). This institute focuses on curriculum interventions, like lesson planning and assessment, mostly for mathematical literacy and science. The principal stated that the programmes were mostly useful and relevant but “sometimes they re-invent the wheel” i.e., the delivery of programmes are repeated. The materials required for the in-service development programmes and the training, are provided through the assistance of Senior Curriculum Planners of the WCED and other external service providers (Education Labour Relations Council [ELRC], 2009).

The District Officer stated that in-service development programmes, which focus on the learners’ socio-economic challenges, are generally

not offered. However, conferences focusing on behavioural challenges have been convened, and have been attended by some teachers, managers and principals. Additionally, the onus rests with principals to access the assistance of learner support units.

Effectiveness of In-Service Development Programmes

The Principal stated that training received from the WCED through the CTLI in the past year was for Curriculum and Policy Statements (CAPS), which focused on lesson planning and assessment. While these programmes are useful and relevant, “sometimes they re-invent the wheel.” Other factors that influence the effectiveness of in-service development programmes include: the venues are inaccessible; teachers have to attend many meetings, and provide learners with extra tuition; and the WCED is restricted by limited funding.

The District Officer commented that when inputs are provided by the WCED, “... the minute the support is moved out of the schools, then, everything falls apart.” The District officer continued, “... if the Teacher Support Teams at schools are motivated, it brings about positive results.”

Expected Competencies of Teachers for the Learners’ Holistic Development

The Norms and Standards for Educators (DoE, 1998) document sets out the applied competencies of teachers and serves as a benchmark against which the standards of teachers’ performance can be measured that may define the applied competence of teachers. This document clearly implies that competent teachers are able to demonstrate competence in learner-centred teaching – a fully competent teacher is able to “mediate learning in a manner which is sensitive to the diverse needs of learners, including those with barriers to learning” (DoE, 1998:5). Therefore, fully competent teachers should select, sequence, and pace learning, while being sensitive to the differing needs of the subject/learning, and the differing needs of learners. Competent teachers should also be able to develop a supportive and empowering environment for individual learners, while responding to the educational needs of other learners. Simultaneously, competent teachers ought to be familiar with, and be able to use different approaches to learning to suit individual learner needs and contexts.

Learner-centred principles for the holistic development of learners are further emphasised in the National Curriculum Statements Grades R-12 (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2011b), which states that the knowledge, skills and values that learners acquire in classrooms should be meaningful for their lives, locally and globally. Furthermore, the abilities of learners, from all socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicities, ought to be

developed for them to be self-fulfilled, to take up meaningful citizenship in South Africa. It also argues for the redress of imbalances to ensure equal opportunities for all learners, while displaying sensitivity to issues like poverty and inequality.

DoE and DBE Policy Intentions for In-Service Teacher Development

Document study focused on reviewing key DoE policy relating to teacher development. The National Policy Framework for Teacher Development in South Africa (DoE, 2006), an overall strategy for successful professional development of teachers, acknowledges the expected competencies of teachers and attributes the minimal levels of learner achievement to the poor conceptual and content knowledge of teachers. This document also mentions that (only) some teachers need to develop specialist skills in certain areas, such as diversity management, classroom management and discipline.

The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa for 2011–2025 (DBE & DHET, 2011) emphasises that teacher development ought to: contribute to an improvement in the quality of learner achievement; focus on the needs of schools; and add to the development of the entire education system. In addition, teacher development should be focused on classroom teaching of a specific subject in particular. It is envisaged that distinct roles, responsibilities and ground-breaking, collaborative relationships among the key role-players are defined for the improvement of teacher development. A reduction in the overload of policy prescriptions and regulations and the provision of equal, sufficient and efficient allocation of funds, as well as other resources, would propel all teachers towards master teaching.

Socio-Economic Challenges

Poverty related issues formed the central theme relating to the context of the teaching and learning activities at the school in Blue Waters. The researchers observed traces of poverty and unemployment in the surrounding residential areas of the school evident from the poorly maintained three-storey council flats and adults either walking or loitering outside of the school.

The social worker further reported a high incidence of violence and family violence; high rates of unemployment and learner dropouts; an excessive demand for assistance with applications for housing, social grants; and financial assistance. On the two occasions that the researcher visited the school, the principal was busy dealing with behavioural issues from learners. He further stated that shootings in the surrounding area do occur, which impacts on teaching and learning.

The principal also expressed that there are initiatives such as the Safer Schools Project for every metropole, which endeavour to address the socio-economic challenges at schools. This particular project focuses on safety for schools, for example, the provision of extra security. The impact, however, is minimal.

Another intervention in poverty is a feeding scheme, by means of which poor learners are provided with a meal. Furthermore, the principal revealed that while a learner support team is available to assist learners, due to WCED financial constraints, one psychologist has to serve many learners, and consequently there is a long waiting list. The principal stated: "If I don't act on my own, then I will wait forever." It would appear that the principal, therefore, was constantly engaged with learners' poverty-related challenges. Similarly, the social worker also stated that support from the WCED is minimal, due to the fact that for every social worker there are 5,000 learners. The assistance of the principal is further hampered as in-service programmes focusing on learners' socio-economic challenges are not generally offered, as reported by district officer.

Consultation Processes for In-Service Development Programmes

The Principal stated that he is generally not consulted about the in-service development programmes offered by the WCED, adding that the impact of these programmes could be greater if teachers and principals are consulted. The District Officer highlighted that there are systems in place, as well as channels (like the Integrated Quality Management Systems [IQMS]), through which information about the needs at schools is fed from the schools, to the Circuit Team, the District, and the WCED. The District Officer added that the courses at the CTLI are determined by the programme directors, based on the information received from the Circuit by the District, which filters through from the IQMS and School Improvement Plans (SIPs). The District Officer further referred the researcher to the Teacher Development Summit (TDS) Report (ELRC, 2009), which provided more details about in-service development programmes offered.

The Principal recommended that teachers and principals be consulted about the nature of in-service development programmes and suggested that a questionnaire from the WCED to principals might assist with identifying the needs of individual schools. Teachers should also be given an opportunity to provide feedback of in-service development programmes. The Principal's final recommendation was, "Have a *bosberaad* (outdoor meeting), and decide there."

The district officer mentioned that recommendations have come from the TDS. One was the amalgamation of the Workplace Skills Plan (WSP) and teacher development. The TDS report (ELRC, 2009) cites this as a recommendation for streamlined and alignment of training.

The TDS report

The TDS report reflects that policy related to teacher development is fragmented; the implementation of policy is not successful throughout all provinces; provincial circulars contradict policies and collective agreements; and policies have been developed without an overview of how they interrelate, leading to duplication. The principal's view that teacher development programmes offered by the CTLI sometimes "... re-invent the wheel" points to the duplication of programmes.

This report also highlighted that districts have neither the will nor the capacity to support schools. While in-service programmes are offered across all the phases, on closer examination, inclusive education encompassing holistic learning and learner-centred teaching features as one of the programmes offered in the Foundation Phase only.

Evidently, the focus of teacher-development provided by the CTLI is on curriculum, as indicated by the principal. The principal's comment that the activities of the WCED are curtailed by limited funding, reiterate the lack of capacity of districts to support schools adequately, as reflected in the TDS report.

In summary, the results explicitly indicate that poverty and its correlated issues have a bearing on the performance of learners. For example, behavioural challenges and violence are prevalent within the teaching and learning curricula activities at the school in Blue Waters, while DoE and DBE policies reflect expected competencies of teachers for learners' holistic development. The results of the study have suggested that the in-service programmes available are not focused on learner-centred teaching practices, toward holistic development of learners. Instead, in-service programmes are focused on curricular interventions, mostly for Maths Literacy and Science. Other limiting factors are funding constraints and inadequate consultation processes between the school and the WCED. These factors place severe strain on learner-centred teaching and learning practices at schools impacted by socio-economic challenges such as poverty, and indicate a need for contextualised in-service programmes, responsive to the needs of all learners.

Discussion

The findings of the study displayed a disjuncture between the challenges presented by learners in impoverished areas and the support provided by the WCED in-service development programmes.

The Norms and Standards for Educators (DoE, 1998), as well as the National Curriculum Statements Grades R-12 (DBE, Republic of South Africa, 2011b) are focused on a competent teaching force, well versed in the application of learner-centred practices, toward holistic learning. More specifically, the latter emphasises principles of social transformation and redress, as well as sensitivity to issues like poverty and inequality, so as to facilitate equal opportunities for all learners. However, the DoE and DBE policy intentions for teacher development as reflected in The National Policy Framework for Teacher Development in South Africa (DoE, 2006), and The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, 2011–2025 (DBE & DHET, 2011) allude indirectly to these principles. Instead, the DoE and DBE policy intentions for teacher development reflect a focus on teachers' conceptual and content knowledge, as well as classroom teaching of a specific subject.

Bransford et al. (2000) have suggested that in-service development programmes need to be learner-centred, and focused on creating optimal conditions for learning. This requires that schools in areas like Blue Waters are supported holistically in a way that incorporates favourable conditions for teaching and learning and relevant in-service programmes geared towards teachers' needs and contexts.

The majority of requests for assistance from the NGO in Blue Waters are directly related to poverty, which is perceived as one of the barriers to learning, affecting teaching and learning (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). The issues of domestic violence and gangsterism, substance abuse, and unemployed youth, as reported by the social worker, are amongst the manifestations of poverty (Landsberg et al., 2011).

The disjuncture between in-service development programmes and the classroom challenges impede learning and teaching in schools situated in areas like Blue-Waters (Mouton et al., 2013). Learners affected by poverty require specific learner-centred teaching strategies (Brown, 2003; McCombs, 1993). When their needs are not met, it is likely that throughput rates are negatively affected (Mok, 2010). Thus, learners in schools in areas like Blue Waters require learner-centred practices so that their individual learning needs, which include both cognitive as well as social developmental needs (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2012), are met.

The discussions at the TDS summit have highlighted the fact that the implementation of the IQMS is not effective; and is problematic and fraught with inconsistencies. Deacon (2010) suggests that teacher development and support have been hindered by overlapping and duplicated functions. Deacon (2010) adds that provincial providers in the same province are hardly ever aware

of activities, priorities and needs at district offices. This could explain why the principal highlighted that the in-service development is sometimes about what is already known. "Re-inventing the wheel," as described by the principal, encroaches on the time of teachers, and is coupled to the demands of new policy for curriculum, learner ill-discipline, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient parental participation and the IQMS (Deacon, 2010:25).

This indicates a serious lack of support and guidance for teachers to develop strategies for effective teaching and learning of impoverished learners. These findings concur with the views of Spreen and Vally (2010), who state that teachers are still not adequately trained to assist all learners to be successful, and learner-centred practices have not been implemented. Spreen and Vally (2010) further argue that learner-centred education has been "imported" without taking into account structural factors like resources, poverty, classroom space, parental involvement, and work pressures. Besides this, training for teachers does not model learner-centred practice (Spreen & Vally, 2010).

Spreen and Vally (2010:53) further emphasise that the design and implementation of policy has to reflect the needs, understandings and social realities of teachers and learners, instead of powerful stakeholders and protected interest groups. They add that very little policy research studies have examined classroom, or changes in teaching and learning, based on teacher perceptions and learner perspectives. Teacher in-service development programmes therefore require a holistic approach, which entails conditions for optimal learning, and key, relevant aspects of learning, as posited by theorists like Bandura (1977), Mezirow (2000) and Yang (2004).

Conclusion

This study examined teacher in-service development programmes as an approach to assist teachers with learner-centred teaching strategies. The findings indicate that teachers of impoverished learners are confronted with a range of classroom challenges, hampering successful throughput of learners. While learner-centred practices are emphasised in the expected competencies of teachers and other DoE and DBE policies pertaining to teacher development, the types of in-service development programmes offered to teachers are not responsive to teachers' needs in respect of developing learning-centred practices. This requires a holistic approach to in-service programmes.

The DoE policy reflects a commitment of support for teachers. Additionally, the DoE and DBE policy intentions for teacher development indicate that teachers are expected to be competent to address these challenges through learner-centred teaching. However, the findings indicate that in-service development programmes do not nec-

essarily assist teachers to teach in a learner-centred manner, and instead focus on the curriculum.

Possible reasons for the mismatch between the in-service development programmes and the needs of teachers arising from classroom challenges were also revealed. These mostly point to shortcomings within the IQMS, resulting in the needs that teachers express often being diluted the procedural channels between the IQMS at schools, to districts, frequently resulting in duplication of in-service programmes, or a mismatch between needs and support.

Limitations

This study used a purposive sampling technique. Key informants that were easily accessible were chosen from the metropole where the researcher lives and had worked for many years. The researcher's personal experiences of in-service development programmes triggered an interest to explore these programmes further. Therefore, bias was of particular concern. The scope of this study was limited due to financial constraints, restricting it to that which was possible in terms of time and resources.

Recommendations

Holistic teacher in-service development

It is further recommended that teacher in-service development programmes adopt a holistic approach, incorporating strategies for holistic learning and learner-centred teaching. This essentially requires conditions that are optimal for learning and key, relevant aspects of learning theories.

Systemic change in response to socio-economic challenges

Inequality, cemented in race (May, 1998; Woolard, 2002), still exists in South African society more than twenty years after the advent of the new dispensation (De Kadt, 2010). Educational reforms, in isolation, can be clearly seen to be unable to ease the levels of inequality in South Africa. Changes in teaching and learning, and effective teacher development, toward successful learner achievement, therefore necessitates a complex, inter-locking, long-term range of adaptations (Badat, 2009:10). These adaptations include interventions and innovations toward a system that supports and contributes to the social and economic transformation of individuals. This would accelerate towards a climate for conditions that are optimal for learning, and facilitate holistic learning and learner-centred teaching.

Monitoring and reviewing teacher development policy

As an immediate intervention, it is recommended that monitoring and reviewing processes for teacher development be implemented, as set out in the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South

Africa, 2011–2025 (DBE & DHET, 2011). Given that this is a long-term framework, it is imperative that support for teachers of poor learners is periodically monitored and reviewed, for effective teaching and learning.

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Notes

- i. This is a fictitious name for purposes of anonymity.
- ii. For purposes of anonymity, the authors of newspaper articles referred to in this document will not be revealed.
- iii. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.

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