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From Policy to Practice: The Teacher's Role in Policy Implementation in Namibia

Introduction

A shift to constructivist curriculum represents one of global education reform's critical challenges. Traditional top-down teacher training methods in new pedagogical approaches have proven ineffective at moving reform from rhetoric to classroom practice.

Namibia's Ministry of Education has implemented a strategy of decentralized, bottom-up teacher development. Teachers act as the conduits for new policy and reform implementation, rather than being acted upon by training programs. A teacher self-assessment system provides tools for teachers to reflect on their classroom practice and participate in their own professional development within a national reform framework. The experience in Namibia provides lessons that can be applied elsewhere for effective, decentralized teacher development.

The Policies

In recent years, both in developing education systems and in industrialized societies, classroom work has been more and more regulated by national level laws, policies, and procedures, with little input from teachers. In a developing country like Namibia, where great demand is placed on teachers to implement radical changes in classroom instruction, one reform model has the potential to ensure that teachers are better equipped to implement innovative practices and have greater influence on policy formulation.

Since gaining independence in 1990 from South Africa's former apartheid regime, Namibia's political leaders have applied a large measure of the available human and material resources to building an education system based on equity, access, quality, and democracy, according to the 2002 Presidential Commission Report. Reforming education in Namibia has meant moving from a racially segregated, exam-driven system based on rote memorization of facts to one based on democracy and constructivism. This radical change in conceptual framework has required a transformation in teachers' understanding of their work.

Two major Ministry of Education policies require teachers to use learner-centered teaching strategies and monitor learner performance through the continuous assessment (CA) methodology. To support reform efforts, teacher professional development in Namibia was been based on the model used in other developing countries: centralized policy formulation, provision of written materials on policies and their implementation, and cascade training moving from the central Ministry to education regions (i.e., geographic units) to smaller groups of schools (i.e., circuits) to teachers in schools.

The Purpose and Outcomes

Due to the nature and philosophy of the apartheid education system until Namibia's independence, teachers had little or no opportunity, training, encouragement, or systematic methodology to reflect on their own professional practice, ask questions about classroom

conduct, or relate their instructional practice to their students' success or failure. Adaptation of the critical inquiry and constructivist learning theories was an important feature of the reform effort and resulting policy formulation, reflecting an increasing need for democratization and social equality. Education leaders intended to foster the democratic ideals of an open society in Namibia's classrooms and schools.

To support the implementation of these key reform policies, the National Institute for Education Development (NIED) and its donor partners developed and distributed a reformed syllabus, teachers' guides, and policy implementation documents to local education units, schools, and teachers. A cascade model training program accompanied the distribution of policy documents. Despite these efforts, and not unexpectedly, given the radical nature of the changes and the apartheid regime's lasting influence, translating the policies' ideals into effective classroom change has proven cursory at best.

Studies conducted by the Ministry of Education and its donor partners demonstrate that teachers can define learner-centered education (LCE) and CA while continuing to use whole group, rote learning, and assessment strategies. It became clear that a 180-degree change in under-trained and untrained teachers' classroom practices would not occur. The central Ministry's dependence on cascade training and distributing materials only at the national level are not the implementation strategies that will reform teacher practice.

An Example of Localized Policy Implementation

The school self-assessment (SSA) system is one of the Ministry of Education's important efforts to support more effective implementation of key instructional strategy reforms and track school performance. System components include parent participation, school management and leadership, outside support, and classroom instruction. This paper focuses on the teacher/classroom instruction aspects. For teachers, SSA provides a set of tools that enable them to reflect individually on their classroom practice and participate in a non-threatening, collegial dialogue with fellow teachers and support providers. Teachers rate themselves on a variety of required behaviors according to a four-point scale. Samples of the forms are included in the at the end of this paper.

Teacher support providers, who are regional education officers providing teacher professional development, conduct classroom observations to validate teacher self-report data. The observation protocol includes indicators that parallel the SSA's and uses the same four-point scale. Teachers, parents, community members, and the principal discuss their individual responses and collaboratively develop a school summary and a score in each of the quality indicator categories: teaching strategies, school management, outside support, and parent involvement. The school self-assessment summaries are then synthesized into the circuit and regional summaries for use in developing school plans for improvement activities.

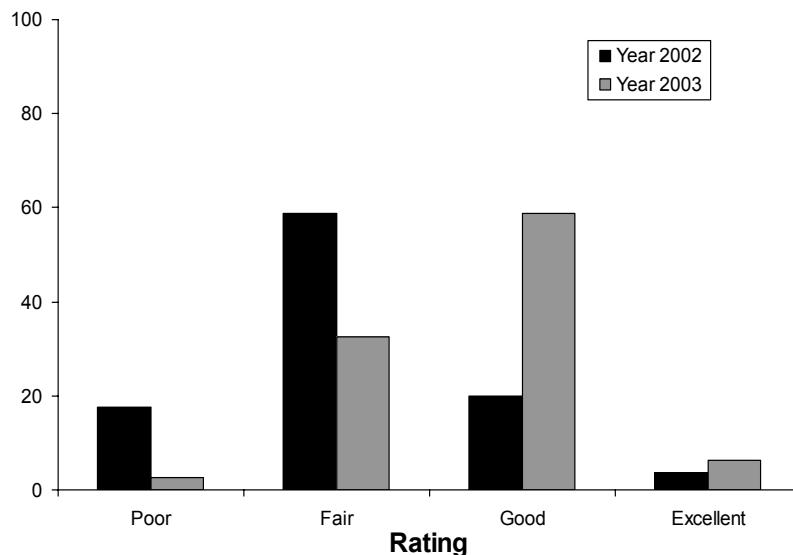
In addition to the school report, teachers receive summary comparisons of the classroom observations and their own self-assessments. Prior to the use of self-assessments, the participating teachers had almost no opportunity or encouragement to systematically reflect on their own professional practice, discuss their work with colleagues about their work, change daily interaction with learners to improve performance, or inform decisions about potential professional development activities provided by the education system.

The Results

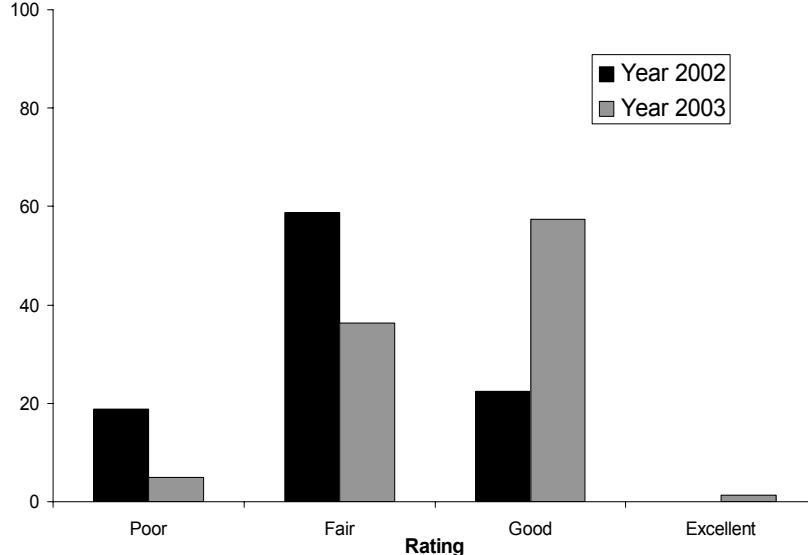
By analyzing the teachers' summary indicator responses and comparing those responses to classroom observation summaries on the same indicators with data over a two-year period, a picture emerges of teachers who have gained a deeper understanding of the concepts and policies that are meant to guide their practice. They gain a method to analyze their own work against an objective set of teaching practice indicators and the skills and confidence to influence decisions about their own professional development. The data show two trends:

1. In both LCE and CA, the observers' ratings show improved teacher performance:

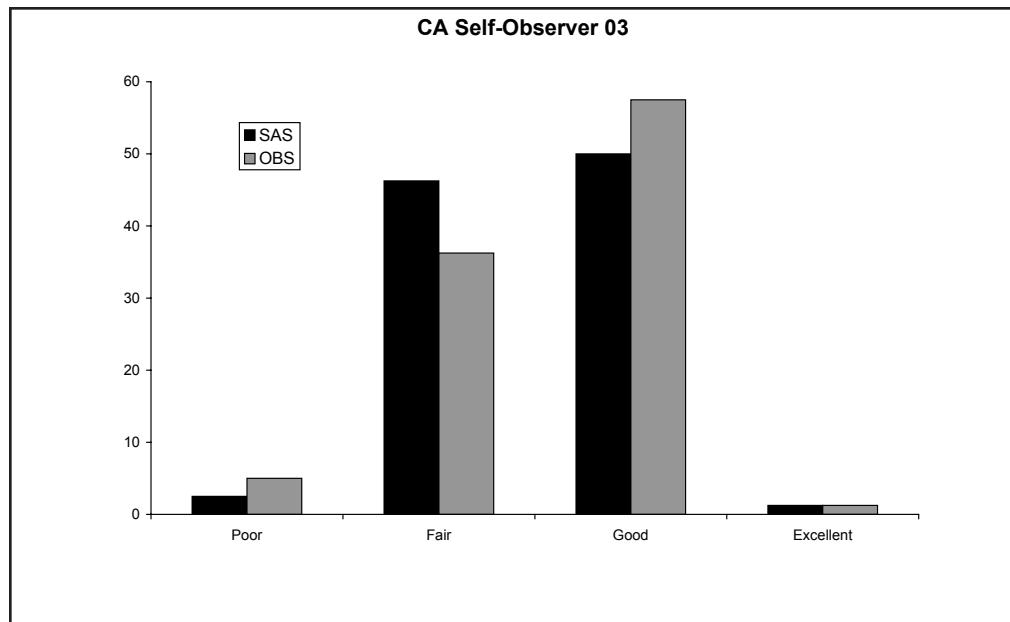
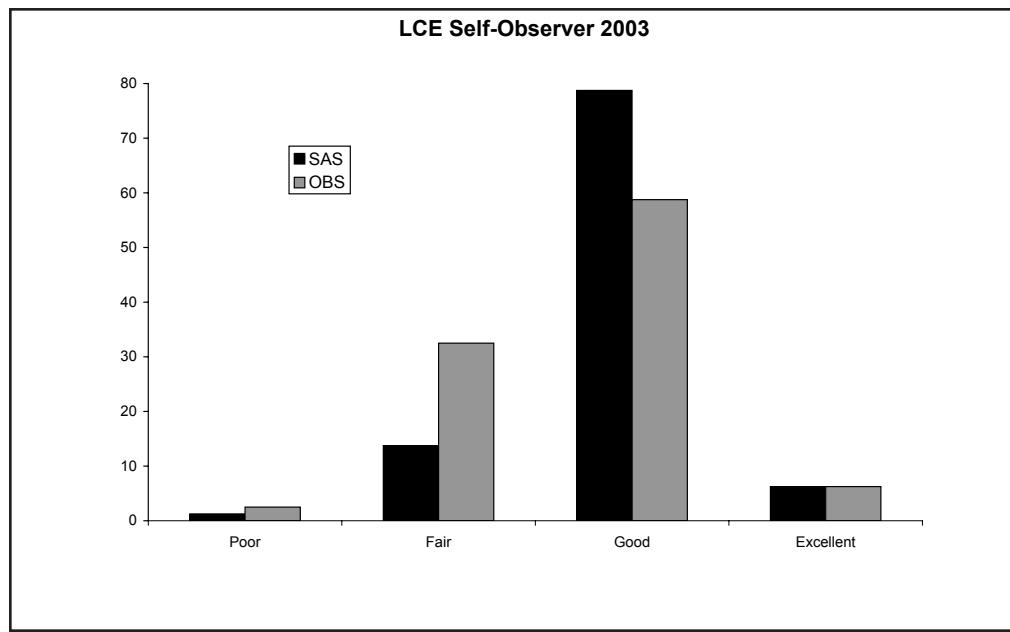
Observer Ranking LCE 2002 vs 2003



Observer Ranking CA 2002 vs 2003



2. Over the same period, the teachers' and observers' ratings came together more closely:



These trends developed as the teachers and support providers spent time discussing LCE and CA while working on specific teaching and learning tasks to demonstrate those concepts. Collaborative problem solving became the norm, seeking teaching materials outside the textbook and syllabus to enrich lessons became an important strategy, and creating structures and methods for working together became a feature of their work. The results of the analysis of the first two years of teacher SSAs in Namibia indicate that several conditions need to be in place:

- Teachers and support providers collaboratively arrive at professional development activities and content;
- Support for teachers to change practice includes a feedback mechanism, as opposed to the top-down approach that had been used in the past; and
- A variety and range of curriculum and teaching material resources need to be available to teachers.

The Advantages

Incorporation of the SSA into the local provision of teacher professional development brings policy into the classroom in ways that directly impact teacher behavior. The structure ensures that teachers understand policy initiatives so that they can be directly involved in appropriate implementation strategies. The system simultaneously helps develop leadership at local levels among teachers and their support providers. It brings professional development activities to the school and circuit level, rather than taking teachers away from time in class for large cascade meetings not directly related to their own classroom situation.

With the impetus of systematic reflection via the SSA and the opportunity for collaborative problem solving, the participating teachers' experience is a model of how they can be more directly involved in active national level policy implementation. At the same time, the teachers are directly informing and choosing the kinds of professional development support they require, including LCE and CA. Furthermore, teachers are developing materials and strategies to implement instructional reforms required by policy.

Participating teachers are gaining a powerful voice in terms of the character and quality of the professional development. Reflecting on learner-centricity and how to implement it in their classrooms is by its very nature enhancing and internalizing their understanding of those concepts. As teachers become more articulate, adept, and analytical about their own practice, their learners move to the center of the teaching-learning process and thereby acquire the skills they need to become lifelong problem solvers—one of the original goals of the reform process.

The Challenges

Implementing the SSA is labor-intensive and demands the commitment and cooperation of a cadre of already overstretched teacher support providers. It requires recordkeeping at the school and circuit levels and asks teachers to participate in professional development activities outside of class time. Despite these challenges, the system is well in place in over 500 schools in Namibia, with Ministry-supported national level implementation in the immediate future.

Teacher Self-Assessment Tools

A. Teacher Self Assessment: Please review the following activities and rate yourself and your classroom. This sheet is FOR YOUR PERSONAL USE, so please be honest with yourself. You do not need to share this assessment with anyone else unless you want to. Please use this to rate yourself and to help build a professional development plan to become a better teacher.

Classroom Practices	Always	Often	Seldom	Never
I prepare complete a lesson plan for every subject				
I understand the curriculum objectives of my grade or subject.				
I refer to the syllabus objectives when I prepare my lesson plans.				
I present the learning objectives to the learners before every lesson				
I review the learning objectives with the learners after every lesson				
I complete assessment activities for every lesson				
My assessment activities adequately tell me whether my learners are understanding the lessons				
I adapt my teaching plans based on the learning assessment for each learning objective.				
I keep regular records on learner progress and can tell at any time how many learners have mastered the basic competency.				
I fully understand the content of the subject that I am teaching.				
I give clear instructions for all classroom activities				
I begin and end lesson activities on time				
I have clear rules for learner behavior in the class.				
I am consistent in applying the class rules.				
I try to adjust the lesson to take into account the different capabilities of the learners				
The learners are allowed to work at their own pace.				
I organize my class so that the learners are spending most of the class time on active learning tasks.				
My classroom is organized for group or pair work (not all facing the teacher)				
I assign homework				
I check all homework and class work and give feedback				
I have an adequate number of textbooks for all learners				
I use writing materials (pens, pencils, exercise books)				
I prepare materials for class, such as posters, real objects like stones or sticks.				
I have the learners prepare materials for class, such as puppets, dolls, drawings.				
I display learner work on the walls.				
I limit my use of non-LCE teaching techniques, such as “whole group call response,” rote repetition, and giving the answer.				

Classroom Atmosphere	Always	Often	Seldom	Never
There is a relaxed and friendly atmosphere in my classroom.				
I address the learners in a pleasant tone of voice.				
My learners initiate questions and observations.				
Both the learners and I relate the lessons to activities in their daily lives.				
I show genuine interest in what the learners say and think.				
The learners show genuine interest and respect for the ideas and comments of their classmates.				
I show respect for my learners.				
The learners show respect for me.				
I know each of the learners individually (names)				
I give prompt feedback to my learners.				
I give feedback to learners in a way that they find encouraging and helpful.				
I reward learners for good work.				
I use different ways to give praise to keep the class interesting.				
Learners support and praise each other for good work.				
Learners bring items to the school to share and learn				
Parents make presentations in my class				
Parents assist me in teaching				

B. Actions I can take: What can I do to improve the classroom atmosphere and make it more conducive to learning? What will I work on this year?

C. Assistance needed: What help do I need from the principal, the circuit team, or others to help me to do a better job. How will I ask for this assistance?

D. Teaching and Learning Practices Inventory: Please review the following activities and rate yourself and your classroom.

Teaching Practices	Expert	Good	Basic	Novice	NA
Learners sit in groups for regular class activities					
Learners work together in groups (talking, sharing ideas, working out the right answer)					
Learners do projects or presentations in groups					
Learners work together in pairs to complete assignments					
Learners work together in pairs for projects or presentations					
Learners are grouped with other learners of similar ability					
Learners are grouped with other learners of different abilities, so good learners can help the weaker ones.					
I use a variety of questioning techniques					
I try to draw out answers from learners rather than giving them the answer					
I use games to teach ideas					
I use role play in teaching					
I use visual aids					
I include community activities in the classroom					
Learners set their own individual targets for learning					
I demonstrate lessons in a way that keeps the learners involved					
I have learners demonstrate lessons in a way that keeps the entire class engaged					
TOTAL (1) (sum marks in each column)					

Texts and Materials	Expert	Good	Basic	Novice	NA
I can use the syllabus effectively to present the basic competencies.					
I use other materials to teach basic competencies					
I can make my own materials to present basic competencies in a way that is appropriate for my learners					
I use writing materials regularly in class to keep learners actively engaged.					
I use drawing materials regularly in class to keep learners actively engaged					
I have the learners prepare materials for use in class					
TOTAL (2)					

Continuous Assessment	Expert	Good	Basic	Novice	NA
I use assessment to measure learner knowledge of basic competencies					
I use quizzes often (at least once a week) to test what learners understand					
I regularly give homework and check the homework					
I use questions and answers in the class to measure whether each individual understands the lesson					
I give short assignments in class and check them to assess learning					
I give my learners opportunities to present what they know to others.					
I keep detailed records for each learner that reflects what they have learned, organized by basic competencies.					
I am confident that I always know whether my learners really understand the material					
I am confident that my learners will do well on the school leaving exams, based on my CA activities.					
TOTAL (3)					



Policy • Systems • Management

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