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Did they learn anything? Experiences of social sciences teachers on an initial in-service post-graduate teacher education programme, 2013/14, at The School of Education, UWI, St Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago

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In the annual revision of the programme, six Social Sciences teacher educators explored the experiences of their teacher-participants to ascertain whether such experiences were aligned with the objectives of the Social Sciences curriculum sessions. Through the interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA), the researchers collaboratively explored the views on how 14 teacher-participants, who volunteered to take part in the research, experienced the programme. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, two focus group interviews were conducted simultaneously at the end of the programme. Interviews were transcribed by the teacher educators who also met as a team to undertake the coding exercise done inductively through the application of the constant comparison method of Glaser and Strauss (1967) to arrive at the themes. The findings show that teachers' experiences were aligned with the session objectives especially with respect to learnings on the nature of their discipline, developing skills for teaching diverse learners, becoming responsible for self-development as teachers. Such learnings seem to indicate a positive change in praxis and professional identity. The recommendations made would lead to a review of the session objectives for the Teaching of Social Sciences in the Dip. Ed. programme for future cohorts.

Key words: Phenomenology, initial teacher professional development, community of practice, constant comparison method, secondary school Social Sciences teachers

Background and Introduction

The School of Education (SOE) of The University of the West Indies (The UWI) at St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago has been delivering the Diploma in Education (Dip. Ed.) for over 43 years. The Dip. Ed. provides initial in-service post graduate teacher professional development to secondary school teachers in Trinidad and Tobago. To graduate from the programme, participants must complete four courses. The first is that of *Educational Foundations*, which exposes participants to the Philosophy, Psychology and Sociology of Education, the integration of Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) and Language use in the classroom. These sessions are delivered in plenaries by a team of educators from across the programme. The second, entitled *Project in the Theory of Education*, requires participants

to undertake a literature review on a topic of their choice relevant to education, under the guidance of a tutor. The third course is the *Curriculum Process* in which participants engage in classroom action research. Finally, *The Practice of Education*, involves both lesson-delivery and critical reflection on the trainee teacher's lessons by a faculty teacher educator and at times by the teacher's peers in various locales.

The programme is delivered in two main time spans. There is an intensive induction period in which participants attend sessions for six hours per day for five weeks during their July-August vacation period following which they continue with the programme in the new academic year, while they teach full-time. There are two aspects of the teaching practicum, namely, at least two one-on-one school visits per semester during which their respective curriculum supervisors observe each of their 10 teacher-participant in her/his school of employ and on ten scheduled Field Days. The "Field Day" sessions accommodate three participants to teach in schools of their colleagues' with evaluation by the curriculum supervisor and teacher-peers.

The Social Sciences curriculum group comprises the following subjects: History, Geography, Social Studies, and Business Studies (Principles of Accounts, Principles of Business, Accounting, Management of Business, Economics, Office Administration and Electronic Document Preparation and Management (EDPM)). Participants' teaching experience prior to entering the programme may vary from two to ten years. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Diploma in Education (financed by the government) is not at this time mandatory; that is, a secondary school teacher can teach without professional training.

The Social Sciences teacher educators are responsible for delivering the *Curriculum Process* and *The Practice of Education* courses in their specific subject areas. The objectives of the sessions are to have participants:

1. Begin to accept responsibility for self-development as teachers
2. Understand the different dimensions of the role of the teacher in the social sciences and humanities
3. Begin to question commonly accepted notions that link underachievement, ability and socioeconomic status
4. Develop the skills for teaching and assessing diverse groups of learners
5. Be able to use social science subjects as avenues for the development of (a) critical thinking and (b) the development of personhood
6. Develop an awareness of the nature and purpose of a discipline
7. Be literate in and apply knowledge of technology integration in their professional practice (*Curriculum Sessions*, 2013)
8. Understand and apply important concepts linked with teaching and learning- curriculum, syllabus, units, objectives, set induction and closure
9. Be able to write units of instruction and lesson plans which respond to the nature of the subject and the needs of learners
10. Be literate in and apply knowledge of technology integration in their professional practice (*Curriculum Sessions*, 2013).

In particular, the participants are exposed to the following topics during the year (*Curriculum Sessions,* 2013):

- The nature of Social Sciences and its disciplines
- Exploring Learners and the Learning Context
- Understanding the 'curriculum' and 'syllabus'; Planning Units and Lessons; Differentiated Instruction
- Curriculum Integration with an emphasis on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Health and Family Life Education (HFLE)
- Classroom action research (the Curriculum Study)
- Preparing for the Practicum, which includes creating a Portfolio to show personal and professional growth during the year.

Rationale for research

The old paradigm of teacher education consisted of courses on theory, pedagogy, and content along with a teaching practicum. This model has been criticized for its lack of integration between courses, between theory and practice, between the world of the university (college of teacher preparation) and school contexts and between the individual needs of teacher trainees and their individual histories and school requirements. Approaches to teacher education have shifted from an emphasis on a positivistic epistemology to one that is constructionist and which emphasizes voice, histories, contexts and lived realities of teachers and students. These overall shifts have been incorporated into the Dip. Ed. programme, which is in constant revision based on informal feedback from participants.

Further change came with the academic year, 2013/14, when the Trinidad & Tobago Ministry of Education (MoE) mandated that the intake of trainee-teachers be doubled. With the increase in numbers, there was thus a felt need to assess whether the Social Sciences teachers experienced their curriculum sessions as intended. To gain such insight, the teacher educators of the Social Sciences curriculum group decided to investigate the participants' experiences of the curriculum sessions, with an eye for their inherent learnings, and to determine whether their experiences were aligned with intended outcomes of the Social Sciences sessions of the Dip. Ed. programme. On gathering and reducing data, the results could facilitate further course refinement for the purpose of teacher development.

Literature review

In teacher preparation as well as in many other fields of professional education such as law, medicine and engineering, the connection between theory and practice is vital for the successful preparation of a graduate. How to organize the delivery of theory and practice so as to make for a skilled practitioner has been a perennial concern. Carr and Kemmis (2004) distinguish between the traditional

model and a collaborative emancipatory model. In the traditional model a positivistic epistemology separates theory from practice and a linear relationship exists between the two. This model is practised in some technical fields such as medicine and engineering where the site of practice is the domain where the theory is implemented. At the other end of the continuum, writers such as Wenger (2008), Kemmis & McTaggart (1988), Kemmis and Heikkinen (2011) view theory and practice as interdependent and having a dialectical relationship, with practice being a site of theory and generative of theory. In this latter approach teachers achieve self-understanding through reflection and obtain some element of control in their professional lives. Wenger argues for a social theory of learning in which learning is achieved through social participation involving negotiation with self, social context, social structure and the processes and technologies of the working environment. Kemmis, Wilkinson, Hardy and Edwards-Groves (2010) discuss the concept of "ecologies of practice". In their view practices are living entities with ways of "saying" "doing" and "relating" (p. 3). This approach highlights the unique identity and functioning of different forms of practice.

Hargreaves and Fullan (1992), while of the view that the traditional skills-based approach in teacher preparation contains components important to the teacher development process, identify its shortcomings when used as the dominant approach to teacher preparation. This skills-based approach of the technical rationality model, for instance, is too often imposed on teachers rather than developed with them. Skills in which teachers are trained are frequently implemented out of context and may not suit the classroom environment. Interestingly, in their approach to educational theory Carr and Kemmis (2004) distinguish the technical, practical and strategic approaches to education rejecting the technical and practical as inadequate viewing instead educational activity as relational and social. This latter has implications for the professional formation of a teacher. Also, the emergence of a fluid postmodern social reality makes certainty about the knowledge base for teaching a dubious possibility. Darling-Hammond (2006) emphasizes that competent teachers of the 21st century must do more than teach subjects effectively and manage classrooms well. Good teachers must be able to arrange instruction for diverse classrooms, understanding how learning occurs across a wide array of social and cultural contexts. Good teachers must be keen to improve professional knowledge. In this view, teachers become more than teachers of subjects, but teachers of children, teachers of classrooms and teachers of the society.

In the case of Trinidad and Tobago there are two sets of forces that make for resistance to a more open and creative approach to teacher performance in the classroom. One is a cultural pedagogy that resembles the" banking concept" (Paulo Freire, 1968, p. 46) which is hegemonic in the school system. This approach to teaching privileges the transmission mode of instruction with strong emphasis on note-giving, and rote-learning (De Lisle, 2012). This pedagogy has its origins in colonial society (Bacchus, 1975; De Lisle, 2012; Figueroa, 1971; Hordatt-Gentles, 2003; Miller, 1971).

Did they learn anything? Experiences of social sciences teachers on an initial
in-service post-graduate teacher education programme, 2013/14, at the School
of Education, UWI, St Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago   67

The second force making for the continuation of a "banking concept" is universal to the teaching profession so far and is due to the way the teaching profession has been institutionalized. Lortie (1975) argued that teachers work was "cellular" that is, isolated from one another (p. 14). Also teachers have undergone an "apprenticeship of observation" (p. 61) as they have been exposed to teaching as children in classrooms. These two facts about the profession then lead to "presentism, conservatism and individualism" (pp. 212). Teachers come to the profession conditioned to teach as they were taught in institutional contexts where change is unlikely.

Consequently, new approaches to teacher education evolved after the 1970s based on his findings. These new approaches were all based on a different set of understandings of the theory-practice nexus discussed above which debunked the technical rationality model. These approaches emphasize teacher development as self-understanding grounded in the teacher's life and work. Darling-Hammond (2006) underwrites the new approaches to teacher education that emphasize teacher as researcher, reflective practitioner and collaborator with other professionals. Reflective practice, as a key tenet of this approach to teacher education, emphasizes self-understanding grounded in teacher's life and work. The use of critical reflection on experience is fundamental to this approach, the foundations for which are based on the work of Dewey (1997), Vygotsky (1978) and Schon (1983). This social constructionist approach promotes agency on the part of teachers for construction of self. It emphasizes the use of cases, portfolios and video presentations all in a spirit of self-study and self-critique for the purposes of self-improvement.

Schon (1983) opposed the positivistic epistemology of the skills-based approach to teacher education. His approach to reflection had two dimensions; reflection on action and reflection in action. Reflection on action engaged theory after the teaching act is complete. This kind of reflection allows for a post facto examination of what has already transpired and consequently formal theories can be applied from hindsight. This is different from reflection in action which involves how the teacher in the middle of the teaching situation makes decisions as situations and circumstances arise. Reflection therefore is a tool that is used in all aspects of teacher education programmes. Through the use of journals and portfolios participants can critically engage the entire teaching/learning experience which their students experience.

Another tool for the promotion of reflective practice in teacher education is that of action research which operationalizes the interdependence of theory and practice. This form of educational investigation is based on systematic intentional enquiry for the purposes of self-improvement and the production of understandings in specific and unique contexts and situations. It also therefore falls within the approach to teacher development as self-understanding where participants explore their unique problems which bear directly to their circumstances. The first driving question for action research is: How do I improve my work? (Cochran & Lytle, 1990; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Steps in action research involve data gathering, formulating relevant questions, implementing an action plan, interpreting data and

drawing conclusions which may involve producing new insights or knowledge. Reflection is central to the process as data gathering may involve cycles of reflection and action and data gathering (McNiff, 2002).

Another approach to teacher development involves the recognition of teacher development as identity formation and reformation. Recognizing who the person is, in terms of gender, age, personal history and social class affects the specific ways in which teachers are capable of exercising agency in their own identity formation. It is in the intersection of a range of personal and social factors that the dilemmas of change and improvement are worked out. Teacher education programmes therefore engage this process directly in order to facilitate sustainable teacher development. This is done through the study of case histories, journaling, portfolios and the exploration of personal histories and biographies of student teachers. Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) identified four critical characteristics of professional identity. Firstly it is an ongoing process and is never stable or fixed. Secondly it is about both person and context where the development of the teacher involves each individual interacting with a specific context over time. Thirdly, a teacher's professional identity consists of a set of sub-identities which must all be integrated with one another. Fourthly, agency is essential for professional development and learners must therefore be actively involved in their development. This agency implies a constructivist view of learning so that learning takes place individually and collaboratively through the activity of the learner.

Schulman (1987), in rejecting the positivistic epistemology which regarded academic subjects as bodies of knowledge to be transmitted, advanced the case for pedagogical content knowledge. In his approach the context of the learners, the ideas in the workplace and the realities of the cultural context have to be factored in to the process of curriculum implementation. Here the knowledge of the teacher had to be transformed into a form culturally appropriate to the learners. When used in the context of professional learning communities, teachers develop professional knowledge about teaching and improve their practice through reflecting on their practice and on the experiences and insights of other teachers. This commonly involves trying to think about teaching and learning from different perspectives in order to develop deeper understandings of teaching and learning situations (Hill, Ball & Schilling, 2008).

Communities of practice are evolving in such a way as to afford teachers opportunities to construct knowledge of practice through engagement in community sharing. The emphasis on community supports a view of knowledge as supported in social acts and as situated and enacted in social communities of practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). The concept of professional learning communities, modelled on the learning principles of communities of practice based on situated learning through participation in group life, has its origins in the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (2008) . Over the last two decades the concept of professional learning communities has become popular as a way to implement professional development of teachers in schools as well as in teacher education programmes. Lieberman and Miller (2011) surveyed various studies

Did they learn anything? Experiences of social sciences teachers on an initial
in-service post-graduate teacher education programme, 2013/14, at the School
of Education, UWI, St Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago

69

of communities of practice in the USA and identified the problematic aspects of forming and maintaining them. The strengths of these communities were the way they privileged theory and practice; encouraged members to examine their own practice and try out new ideas as well as reflect on what worked and what did not work. The tacit knowledge of the group is open to those sharing and participating in the life of the group. Learning within the socio-cultural community involves the construction of an identity as the learner shares the inner life of the community. This cultural knowledge of the group provides a lens for interpreting experiences.

Research Question

In what ways do Social Sciences teachers' reflections on their significant experiences of the Dip. Ed. programme, 2013/14, align with the objectives of the Social Sciences curriculum sessions?

Methodology

Participants' experiences were investigated through the interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). Researchers probed the meanings teachers made of their involvement in curriculum sessions and teaching practice. This approach very much concerned with meaning-making was thus appropriate to this study as its very aim according to Chapman & Smith (2002):

> is to explore how participants make sense of their experiences; IPA engages with the meaning that experiences, events and actions hold for participants…the researcher's own conceptions are required in order to make sense of the personal world being studied through a process of interpretative activity (p. 126).

Though helpful for probing a small sample, however according to Smith (1999) "micro-level theorising should be richly informative of those particular individuals [but] may well be fairly modest in its claims to generalisation" (p. 413).

Six social sciences teacher educators collaborated throughout the research. Fourteen out of fifty social sciences teachers volunteered to be part of the study, eight of whom came from government-assisted ('prestige') schools and six from government schools. Two 90-minute focus group interviews were conducted simultaneously in June 2013 at the SOE, The UWI, St. Augustine.

Interview data were audio-recorded, transcribed and reduced by the researchers using the Constant Comparison Method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Guided by the research question, codes were allocated to extracts drawn from the interview transcript and categorised under themes in an inductive and iterative process (Ali, et al., 2015): "All authors arrived at consensus through critical discussions at every level of analysis, ensuring robust trustworthiness and validity of findings" (p. 5), thus minimizing researcher bias. Subsequently, the choicest

verbatim extracts were put into tabular format and aligned to session objectives. Findings were then reprised in relation to relevant literature. Ethical considerations included participants' informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality.

Findings

Findings gained through reflections of participants, indicate that there were developmental learnings aligned with curriculum session objectives (*Curriculum Process* and *Practice of Education*). The following paragraphs, with headings highlighting main Social Sciences curriculum session objectives, explore the manner in which these became manifest with the aid of themes that emerged from the data reduction process. The themes were: Vicarious learning on Field Days; Personal Value Shift; Enhanced Professionalism; Reflective Practice; Teaching of Disciplines in Secondary Schools; and Building a Community of Practice.

1. *Begin to accept responsibility for self-development as teachers*

With respect to this objective, some teachers expressed a greater confidence in their teaching abilities. Lily claimed: "I find myself personally more confident as a professional when I step in front of a classroom because of the things I have learnt." Such feelings can be understood based on the work by Beijaard et al. (2004) who see growth in professional identity occurring through private self-interaction with specific contexts over time. During the Dip. Ed. experience opportunities were provided over varied contexts and learning experiences that teachers may take control of their professional identity; this appears to have paid off. Betty, another participant, articulated her development by way of a new sense of agency (Beijaard, et al., 2004) in employing new classroom strategies:

> It is easy to slip back into old techniques, teacher-centred rather than student-centred, me being the boss and controlling the class, that's what I used to do. But now I've learnt that they can do a lot more of it and I can teach smarter, not harder.

2. *Understand the different dimensions of the role of the teacher in the social sciences*

For a Social Sciences teacher to be 'anti-social' appears to the authors of this study as a notable contradiction. What is promoted as good practice rather, is the cultivation of communities of learning in which the socially constructed nature of knowledge is taken on board and supported in social acts, situated and enacted in social communities of practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). That Lily could celebrate the idea of "Thinking through Geography rather than just thinking the subject Geography" as significant for her, shows that she is beginning to grasp the idea that engaging fully in the discipline of Geography is not simply a cognitive exercise but involves activities with outcomes for the development of human beings through the actual processes involved in its study. On a personal

Did they learn anything? Experiences of social sciences teachers on an initial
in-service post-graduate teacher education programme, 2013/14, at the School
of Education, UWI, St Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago   *71*

level, for Kate, a teacher of Social Studies on interacting with her colleagues on the Dip. Ed.: "affirmed that being a Social Studies teacher is just as good as being any other teacher in any other subject area". Thus this new sense of professional worth embodies the collaborative emancipatory learning of Carr & Kemmiss (2004).

3. *Begin to question commonly accepted notions that link underachievement, ability and socioeconomic status*

In the context of Trinidad and Tobago, with its two-tiered stratification in education, (namely the existence of 'prestige' schools and 'others') it was refreshing to hear Fran, who is employed in a 'prestige' school, mention that on Field Days: "…going to the other schools made me see different learners, yes, but at the end of the day, they're children and they're students who want to learn, who *can* learn." This insight reflected a shift in her personal value system and underscored the need for teachers to eschew ability-profiling on the basis of type of school (assumption of lesser gifted children) and socio-economic status (that students face too many existential obstacles and thus teachers can't expect too much), critical for national development. Fran's comment is in line with the view required for official schooling to be an inclusive venture where all contribute to the re-shaping of a new society capable of surviving in a hostile world environment (Bacchus, 1975; De Lisle, 2012; Figueroa, 1971; Hordatt-Gentles, 2003; Miller, 1971).

4. *Develop skills for teaching and assessing diverse groups of learners*

Teachers developed skills for teaching and assessing diverse groups of learners through engagement in collaborative teaching, thus building a community of practice (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999), especially on Field Days. One participant, Betty, noted that: "Field Days were...invaluable for learning from others, learning from colleagues, visiting the other schools, seeing different school cultures and different dynamics." As Helen said, "It has enhanced my knowledge …, because now I know not just my one boring way I can teach but I can now take a little of each person that I have encountered and now really put something together and allow the children to get the benefit from what I have learnt from the other nine [colleagues]". The interaction of colleagues became the arena for learning as in an ecology of practice (Kemmis et al., 2010).

In Helen's case the challenge of teaching diverse learners occasioned a personal value shift as she applied the constructivist principle of accessing student prior knowledge:

> I couldn't believe I saw all the conclusions coming up and after the children could just reiterate the points and like it came from them. So having to do multimedia lessons and make them debate the thing for themselves has enhanced this programme for me. At least it showed me where I was going wrong all the time.

As Helen incorporates thinking about teaching and learning from the needs and perspectives of the learners in her charge, she was able to develop a deeper understanding of teaching and learning situations (Hill et al., 2008).

In the same vein professionalism was enhanced through conducting action research (the Curriculum Study) as participants, having identified specific strengths and concerns relevant to their students' learning, sought to craft suitable strategies to reach their particular students. Lily, for instance, opined that "the Curriculum Study was really a culmination of everything we learnt - how to write, how to assess ourselves, how to assess learning in the children. 'Cause to me when I conducted that study I felt like a professional". This confirms the views of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) and Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) that action research, as a systematic intentional enquiry, impacts favourably on self-improvement and the production of understandings in specific and unique contexts and situations. Evident also among teachers employing action research was the use of appropriate strategies to allow for diverse students' learning styles. The following statement captures students' reflective capacity by the use of journal writing and Yma was ecstatic about the results: "They did a little journal and they said they loved the drawing; it was different, and I captured them".

5a. Be able to use social science subjects as avenues for the development of critical thinking

Participants reflected on previous classroom practices, especially in relation to traditional modes of classroom instruction and their unintentional ignorance of the need to cater for students with varied learning styles. Over the course of the Dip. Ed., new insight into learning and learners dawned upon the participant who came to realise the importance of engaging their own critical thinking toward the creation in their classrooms of a dynamic learning environment (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The value of varying the learning stimuli and the role of critical thinking in facilitating the renewed environment was hinted by Vera as she said: "It made me move away from the focus on the text book...I now look at alternative resources" so that she could cater more adequately to a wider of array of student diversity.

5b. Be able to use social science subjects as avenues for the development of personhood

Teachers also experienced enhanced professionalism as some claimed that they were now 'sold on' the idea of student-centeredness. Being able to see students as unique individuals who should be the focus of all lessons is a significant step towards respecting their various individualities. Kate, for instance, claimed: "I think that is just one of the biggest things that I have learnt from Dip. Ed. - that my lessons are not about me, they should be about my students." This statement tends to reinforce Schulman's (1987) belief that several factors, such as the context

Did they learn anything? Experiences of social sciences teachers on an initial
in-service post-graduate teacher education programme, 2013/14, at the School
of Education, UWI, St Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago   *73*

of the learner must be factored into the process of curriculum implementation. Comparatively, another participant, Helen felt that: "I always thought we needed to just teach the subject matter but again I saw the importance of the HFLE element because its Social Studies and we [are] trying to make our students better citizens." Here the participant seems to view the context of the subject as a bedrock for the development of personhood. Helen's statement also appears to reinforce Schulman's (1987) argument that the teacher must shape themselves into a form appropriate to the learner, thereby creating greater opportunities for the development of both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills.

6. *Develop an awareness of the nature and purpose of a discipline*

Some teachers believed that the sessions which targeted *the nature of their discipline* produced in them an understanding of the interconnectedness with other disciplines. The existence of links throughout the other disciplines in the Social Sciences supports the notion that teaching and learning from different perspectives form a better understanding of the teaching and learning contexts of a subject (Hill, et al., 2008). One participant, Betty, conveyed her understanding of the significance of connectedness among disciplines by stating: "It's important to have some idea of the nature of other disciplines too that are closely aligned to ours. I could see the ways in which there could be [curriculum] integration more easily now than I could've seen it before." Similarly, Kate captured the development of an awareness of the nature and purpose of a discipline as it relates to the building of a community of practice:

> Dip. Ed. did not necessarily improve my understanding but it increased my love for teaching Social Studies. So it made me feel confident, proud that I am a Social Studies teacher because I saw other people being passionate about it...exploring creative ways to teach it.

Therefore, Kate was able to develop a passion for the discipline by observing her colleagues teach on Field Days. This transference of emotion for the teaching of her discipline may have occurred because of the exposure to different teachers' perspectives in teaching and learning – a relational and social activity (Carr & Kemmis, 2004). The end result being her increased enthusiasm for teaching her discipline more creatively and with greater enthusiasm. For all participants, this enthusiasm was captured in their portfolios, as Wendy said: "I felt in doing the portfolio it took me from the beginning to the end. So that's how I was able to see how I developed during the course of the year… it was a lot of work. I enjoyed that".

7. *Understand and apply important concepts linked with teaching and learning-curriculum, syllabus, units, objectives, set induction and closure*

Trainee teachers engaged in dialectical fashion executing previously planned lessons which were then critiqued by tutors and fellow trainees. In this

way they benefitted from the interrelation of theory and practice and grew in self-understanding through reflection (Kemmis & Heikkinen, 2011). Kate came around to becoming a reflective practitioner when she says: "I think I now analyse my lessons more and I am determined to ensure that my lessons have set inductions and that they are planned and I am trying not to make my lessons teacher-centred". George, likewise, integrates both the procedural aspects of planning and executing a lesson as well as the thinking behind those activities. In the following statement he says: "I see why [Dip. Ed.] is required [for a teacher] to be a HoD [Head of Department] because it helps you to look at lesson plans and it helps you to compare and actually give people advice on different things when they [are] teaching." That teachers must do more than teach subjects effectively and manage classrooms well is the insight of Darling-Hammond (2006) who sees the need also for teachers to understand how learning occurs across a wide array of social and cultural contexts.

8. *Be able to write units of instruction and lesson plans which respond to the nature of the subject and the needs of learners*

Many of the participants entering the programme admitted that their concern was on 'finishing the syllabus' rather than on taking the time to assess whether learning really took place. As Kate reflected on this mind-set, she intimated:

> I have learnt from Dip. Ed. as well…it's okay to work at their pace. It's frustrating and yes when you consider the end product you might tell yourself, well, you know for the exam, they not going to be there. I tell them this is learning for life... it's about lifelong learning. So whether they pass CXC or not, these things will always exist and ...they will have that knowledge for life.

Helen became concerned about being more efficient in her teaching than she was before. She said: "When you write out a unit it really brings out all the fine details you would not have thought of before. Putting the teaching points explicitly there - it helps you to refocus on what the lesson intended for the day and not just stray all over the place". In reflecting on the needs of her learners, Vera admits:

> I am now more reflective so, for example, at the end of the day or at the end of a class I would look back at what I did. It also made me more student-centred in that I really look at the students now. Before I would probably focus on what I have to do, what I have to get through in a double period. But now I would really think about what the students would gain at the end of the two periods. So definitely in those two ways, it helped me to be a better teacher.

*Did they learn anything? Experiences of social sciences teachers on an initial
in-service post-graduate teacher education programme, 2013/14, at the School
of Education, UWI, St Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago*

75

9. Be literate in and apply knowledge of technology integration in their professional practice

In gaining technical prowess on the Dip. Ed. through learning to integrate ICT into their teaching, Vera opines that in her lessons "I would pull a Video from YouTube. I even allow them to take pictures and create a Photo Story and those things really stimulate them". Likewise Opal excitedly advances the view that the "use of technology has definitely enhanced my lessons. I myself, as a teacher, thoroughly enjoy preparing the presentations or the photo stories or the videos". Lily shared her experiences in integrating ICT in her lessons in which she observed. "For a wiki you definitely have to put up something that makes sense...they [quiet students] gave some of the best answers."

In these accounts note how strongly the affective domain of learning has been engaged. In this way their professional development emerges through incorporating the processes and technologies of the learning environment (Wenger, 2008).

Conclusion

Reflections by participants indicated that they had experienced positive professional development as a result of the Social Studies curriculum sessions in the Dip. Ed. Programme. Having thematised responses from participants, researchers were able to discern clearly that the themes identified were aligned to course objectives. A few examples should suffice for illustration purposes: The objective *to accept responsibility for self-development* as teachers emerged in Lily's growth in professional identity; *questioning commonly accepted notions that link underachievement, ability and socioeconomic status* was manifested in Fran's personal value shift; the *skills for teaching and assessing diverse groups of learners* was evident in Helen's experience of personal value shift and in Lily's experience of enhanced professionalism; the *development of critical thinking* was realized in Vera's reflective practice; the *development of personhood* was evident in Kate's significant experience of enhanced professionalism; *the awareness of the nature and purpose of a discipline* was seen in Betty's involvement in building a community of practice and in Kate's passion for the discipline.

Recommendations/Implications of findings

At times, any one objective was actualised in various ways emerging in more than one theme – e.g. the *nature and purpose of a discipline* was seen in Betty's community building and in Kate's passion for the subject. That any one objective was aligned to various themes (note that the themes represent groupings of significant experiences) showed that objectives had been realised in a multiplicity of ways, emphasising the diffusing of learning that had taken place among teacher-participants. Three main recommendations become apparent.

Firstly, having seen that the experiences of teacher-participants demonstrated what the authors of this paper intended them to learn, there is need to continue and consolidate the approach of the teacher educators that is seen to be bearing fruit. Elements of this approach involved professional development as propelled through meaningful learning experiences and engagement in communities of practice enriched by insights from constructionism and sensitivity to context.

Secondly, the multiple realisation of objectives implies that learning is taking place in various ways, with various applications, across different discipline sub-areas of the Social Sciences and in many different aspects of the teaching endeavour in the Dip. Ed. Social Sciences curriculum sessions. Consolidating and supporting this learning seems to require a model for teacher-educators, that both acknowledges the dispersion of learnings across the various activities that teaching and learning involves and yet at the same allows all involved to maintain and re-establish focus objectives.

Thirdly, for sustaining learnings evidenced in the findings it is recommended that teacher-graduates be provided with opportunities for continuous engagement and support.

Did they learn anything? Experiences of social sciences teachers on an initial
in-service post-graduate teacher education programme, 2013/14, at the School
of Education, UWI, St Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago   77

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