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Teaching and Teacher Education 18 (2002) 523–539

TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION

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Action research and the transfer of reflective approaches to in-service education and training (INSET) for unqualified and underqualified primary teachers in Namibia

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Received 9 February 2001; received in revised form 11 July 2001; accepted 17 September 2001

Abstract

The literature on training approaches for both pre-service and in-service teacher training has been dominated since the 1980s by reflective approaches. This has undoubtedly influenced the relatively recent introduction of reflective approaches in developing countries. This article explores efforts, within an action research study of a 3-year (1995–1997) In-service Education and Training (INSET) programme, to implement reflective approaches in the training of unqualified and underqualified primary teachers in Namibia. The study raises 'transfer' questions concerning the appropriateness of reflective approaches, as conceptualised in western contexts, for these teachers. It led to the adaptation of these approaches and ultimately the development of an approach termed the 'structured reflection' approach, which was within the professional capability of the teachers to implement at the time of the study. Action research was used to develop this approach.

Keywords: Action research; Reflection; Primary education; In-service education

1. Introduction

Reflective approaches to training have permeated both pre-service and in-service training in western countries since the 1980s (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Hatton and Smith highlight, however, that the effectiveness of these approaches in the professional development of teachers is not supported by much empirical research. In view of this, the significant support for efforts to transfer them to developing country contexts (Avalos, 1992; Dahlstrom, 1995; Burke, 1996; Zeichner, Amukushu, Muukenga, & Shilamba, 1998) is a cause for concern. This concern is beginning to be addressed. A number of recent action research initiatives, which explored the implementation of reflective approaches in Namibia and Malawi, raised questions about their appropriateness within the research contexts (Ebbutt & Elliot, 1998; Stuart & Kunje, 1998). This article raises a similar transfer question. It explores efforts, within an action research study of a 3-year (1995–1997) in-service education and training (INSET) programme, to implement reflective approaches, as conceived in western contexts, in the training of unqualified and underqualified primary teachers in

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0742-051X/02/$ - see front matter
PII: S0742-051X(02)00014-8

Namibia. This article will also explore the use of action research in addressing the issue of transfer, and in developing reflective approaches that are within the professional capability of teachers to implement in the light of their stage of development at the time of their participation in the INSET programme. Action research was considered appropriate for the study, as it potentially enables the adaptation and development of training approaches, which may be effective in training the teachers participating in the study. The focus, in action research studies, is to improve practice. Consequently, in this study adaptation rather than adoption of reflective approaches was to be embraced.

The article will begin with an examination of the macro-research context, focusing on the educational reforms that were introduced upon independence in Namibia in 1990 to replace the previous Bantu system of education. Reflective teaching was embraced, as it seemed to facilitate the underlying philosophy of the reforms. Secondly, the article will explore the literature which illuminates the complex concept of 'reflective approaches' to training. Thirdly, the micro-research context is presented. This summarises the INSET programme within which the study took place, the number of participants, and the micro-realities within which they work. This leads into a discussion of the research design, specifically exploring the use of an action research approach, which had a different function from that used in other developing country action research studies (Stuart, 1987; Wright, 1988; Walker, 1994). In these studies action research was used collaboratively. The researchers, in their role as trainers/advisers, supported teachers' efforts to use action research to explore aspects of their own practice. In the research study upon which this article is based, I, the author and researcher, in my role as an expatriate teacher trainer, used action research to develop effective INSET strategies. It was not a collaborative action research project. Fourthly, the research findings are presented as an action research report, with presentation and analysis of data from cyclical action research cycles written concurrently, rather than being rigidly demarcated. Finally, these analyses will be drawn together to highlight the main findings which emerged, and to discuss their implications for four groups of people: educational reformers, expatriate advisors, INSET providers, and researchers.

2. The Namibian context

In 1990, Namibia gained independence from South Africa, becoming the last colony in Africa. Until that time, Namibians had lived under German colonial rule (1894–1915) and South African rule (1915–1989). Both powers sought to deprive the indigenous population of their land, basic human rights, and dignity. The apartheid system introduced into South Africa by the Afrikaner Nationalist Party after their election into power in 1948 was subsequently applied to Namibia. Pass laws, a contract labour system, and Bantu Education were introduced. The Bantu Education system, formally introduced into Namibia in the 1960s, was "… a tale of two worlds: one black, bleak and deprived; the other white, rich and comfortable" (Angula, cited in Harlech-Jones, 1992, p. 1). It led to a situation at Independence in 1990 in which

> … it would be hard to find a country anywhere in which education (and teacher) standards were lower for the majority of the population (Chamberlain, 1990, p. 12).
>
> The salient feature of Namibia's Education system has been that between 30% and 40% of school-age children do not attend classes, and that 60% of the teachers are unqualified with a further 30% under-qualified. … Over 99% of the untrained teachers are in the 10 black administrations [the 11th administration was for Whites only] and 80% of underqualified (MEC, 1990, p. 23).

This state of affairs provided a significant challenge for the newly elected government. The Ministry of Education (MEC) set about immediately overhauling the apartheid system of education. They initiated vast reforms to all aspects of the system, which sought to replace the apartheid ideology and traditions that underpinned the

Bantu system. The MEC sought the support of donors in developing their reform programme. Some of this support materialised in the form of 'educational advisers', many of whom "had a big influence on the reforms" (interview, advisory teacher, January 1997). The most influential advisers were involved in devising "a new philosophy for education and culture" (MEC, 1994, p. 1). The theoretical underpinnings of learner-centred education were drawn upon to form a new ideology, which informed the vast number of education reforms to cater for Basic Education for All (BEA).

> The new philosophy of learner-centred education which was based on the four principles of access, equity, quality and democracy [the MEC reform goals] called for the active involvement of learners in the learning process and a focus on helping students learn how to go beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge to learn how to use it, transform it, and teach it in a way consistent with the democratic goals of post-Independence Namibia (Zeichner et al, 1998, p. 185).

Teacher training was considered critical to the realisation of the reforms. "Under the old system, the dominant view was that knowledge belongs to a few 'experts' who deliver it to passive learners" (Zeichner et al, 1998, p. 189–190). Teachers needed to be retrained to enable them to view themselves as producers, as well as recipients of knowledge. Their knowledge was to be valued as a source of expertise for educational reform. This would enable them to embrace the learner-centred philosophy. Critical practitioner inquiry, termed Practice-Based Inquiry (PBI), emerged as an important component to develop the present capabilities of teachers "to transform pedagogical practices in schools in ways which are consistent with the national goals of education" (Ebbutt & Elliot, 1998, p. 210). Consequently, it formed a significant part of the pre-service and in-service Basic Education Teacher Diplomas (BETD), which were introduced in 1993 and 1994, respectively. PBI's methodology is similar to action research: teachers examine aspects of their work in schools in a critical way, develop strategies for solving problems, try out and monitor these strategies, and reflect upon their effectiveness (MEC, 1992).

> In the context of educational development in Namibia, directed as it is towards the radical reconstruction of the social order, PBI is best viewed as a process of moral inquiry concerned with translating the educational values expressed by the national goals into forms of practice which are feasible and appropriate psychologically, historically and socially to the current circumstances of Namibian teachers (Ebbutt & Elliot, 1998, p. 210).

Reflection forms a critical part of PBI. The effectiveness of PBI is dependent on teachers' professional capability and desire to reflect, and efforts are made throughout the BETD programme to develop these. The extent to which this has happened has not been evaluated, though research conducted by Ebbutt and Elliot (1998) raise questions about the capacity of teachers participating in the in-service BETD programme to engage in reflective activity. Limited professional support is cited as a reason for this.

3. Reflective approaches to in-service training

Since the 1980s, the MEC's commitment to PBI was informed by the teacher education discourse on reflective approaches to training (Hatton & Smith, 1995). The MEC was particularly drawn to its underlying situational view of knowledge. The notion of teachers as reflective practitioners is not, however, a recent phenomenon. Dewey, who himself drew on the ideas of earlier educators such as Plato, Aristotle and Buddha, advocated it in the 1930s (Hatton & Smith, 1995). The work of Schon (1983) was particularly significant in stimulating interest in reflective approaches in the 1980s.

Reflective approaches to INSET have also received considerable impetus from research into teachers' thinking, which has presented an increasingly sophisticated account of teachers'

professional knowledge, much of which has been found to be tacit and intuitive.

> Classroom behaviour is characterised by routines interspersed with rapid intuitive decisions which require instant interpretations of the developing situation and almost immediate responses. The appropriateness of such decisions can only be considered during reflection after the event, if there is the time and the will to do it (Eraut, 1995, p. 624).

Teacher trainers need to be wary of neglecting Eraut's last comment above on teachers' will to reflect. Generally, trainers advocating the usefulness of reflection to teachers have had considerable time to develop their own understanding of reflective practice and improving their reflective skills. Over time, they have come to appreciate the effectiveness of reflection in improving practice. They need to consider that teachers who have not been exposed to the theory and practice of reflective practice, though it is likely that they already unconsciously reflect on their teaching, also need considerable time and support to enable them to embrace the new approach. This should lead to teachers coming to view the usefulness of reflection in improving their practice, and subsequently, they will find the time to reflect.

Reflective teaching has been argued on several grounds.

> It enables self-directed growth as a professional. It facilitates the linking of both theory and practice in education. It helps to explicate the expertise of teachers and subject it to critical evaluation. It enables teachers to take a more active role in their own professional development (Calderhead, 1988, p. 9).

These functions of reflective teaching form the basis of PBI in Namibia, and inspired my decision to use reflection as a training approach in the INSET programme. The term reflective teaching, however, is problematic. It is described, conceptualised and operationalised in different ways. Underlying the apparent consensus suggested by the widespread use of the phrase, reflective practitioner, lies a diversity of meanings and intentions. My conceptualisation of reflective teaching draws particularly from Cruikshank's (1989, cited in Adler, 1991) and Hatton and Smith's (1995) definitions: "Reflective teaching is the ability to analyse one's own teaching practice" (Adler, 1991, p. 140); "… deliberate thinking about action with a view to its improvement" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 40).

Various theorists have categorised different levels of reflection. Most of these drew upon Habermas' (1973, cited in Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990) proposed three levels. Zeichner (1981, cited in Adler, 1991) uses the following terms to describe them: technical–rational, situational–institutional and moral–ethical levels. At the technical rational level, the emphasis is on the efficient application of professional knowledge to given ends: "… teachers learn to reflect upon the effectiveness of their teaching strategies: have the learners achieved the given set objectives" (Adler, 1991, p. 142). It also assumes that teachers then think about what they can do to improve a strategy that is not particularly effective. The situational–institutional level allows for examination of goals and assumptions. The third level involves making judgements about whether professional activity is equitable and ethical and "locates any analysis of personal action within wider socio-historical and politic-cultural contexts" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 35).

Hatton and Smith (1995) raise an important point concerning reflective approaches. They highlight the dearth of empirical evidence, which supports their effectiveness in the professional development of teachers. In view of the extent to which they are promoted, this is a cause for concern. Similarly, they point out that there is little research evidence to show how effective various training methods and strategies are in fostering the skills of reflection and will to reflect amongst teachers. This leads into a consideration of the extent to which reflective approaches, as conceptualised in the west, are appropriate for developing country contexts. This is an important consideration, as there seems to be a tendency by western academics to simply export reflective approaches to developing country contexts. For example, Avalos (1992) and Burke (1996) supported Papua New Guinea's proposed development of their traditional skills-based teacher

training programmes to programmes that would enable teachers to take a more active part in their own professional development; reflective practice, they argued, would be a useful method of enabling this. Namibia's MEC, as discussed earlier, sought a change similar to Papua New Guinea in their teacher training programmes, and Dahlstrom (1995) and Zeichner et al. (1998) also advocate the use of reflective approaches to training as a means to achieve this. Walker's (1994) advocacy of the usefulness of reflective practice in a developing country context, unlike the academic's claims above, is supported by her research in South African township schools. Her study explored the use of action research, underpinned by reflective practices, in teacher development. Her use of action research was collaborative, in that she acted as a facilitator to teachers who attempted to use action research to improve their practice. Her study indicates the potential of reflective teaching, but only if adequate support is provided to teachers.

Research findings which question the appropriateness of reflective approaches in developing countries, are beginning to emerge in the literature, however (Ebbutt & Elliot, 1998; Stuart & Kunje, 1998). Reflective approaches to training currently conceptualised rest on certain western assumptions and preconditions. These include:

- a quality general education and teacher training upon which teachers can reflect;
- teachers possessing the tools of reflection;
- an innovative culture;
- a situational view of knowledge; and
- an assumption about professional autonomy.

All of these tend to be absent in developing countries. Stuart and Kunje's (1998) research on the usefulness of action research with primary teachers in Malawi found that "While all the teachers we worked with reflected, at some level, about their own work, not all managed to effect some improvement" (p. 390). Ebbutt and Elliot (1998), in their discussion on the issues that emerged within efforts to implement Practice Based Inquiry in Namibia, begin to question the extent to which reflective practice is appropriate. Pryor's (1998) research suggests that reflective approaches may not be applicable to training primary teachers in Ghana without at first empowering teachers to use them. This article provides some illumination on the issue of the transfer of reflective approaches to developing countries.

4. The research study

4.1. Research context

The Namibian MEC sought the support of bilateral donor agencies to support their reform efforts. I was employed on a donor-funded project, the English Language Teacher Development Project (ELTDP), set up to support teachers' efforts to implement reforms related to ELT (English Language Teaching). Between 1995 and 1997 I was given the responsibility to design and implement an INSET programme for 99 lower primary teachers and 46 senior primary English teachers in 31[1] primary schools. I used my position to conduct research into the development of effective INSET strategies for unqualified and underqualified primary teachers. Effectively, the research study could be termed opportunistic research (Riemer, 1977, cited in McMillan & Schumacher, 1989). Riemer highlights that research interests emerge from personal interests and experience and/or 'accidents of current biographies' (p. 92).

My experience and personal interests, relevant to the research study upon which this article is based, have emerged throughout my career as a primary teacher and trainer in a number of countries. I became interested in English Language Teaching (ELT) while teaching in a primary school in London, in which a significant number of my students were second language English learners. However, it was my experience in the early 1990s at a Nigerian primary school which ultimately led to the research study upon which this article is

[1] At the beginning of the INSET programme in January 1995, there were 31 schools. By 1997, this number had increased to 39 schools. Eight new schools had been built to accommodate increased parental demand for education post-Independence.

based. I taught at the school and was also Head of English. I was responsible for developing the ELT skills of the local teachers at the school. This enabled me to experiment with the use of action research in teacher training. My interest in action research was ignited prior to my work in London and Nigeria, when studying for a Masters degree. When embarking on the research study in Namibia, I felt it would most adequately answer the research questions, most of which focused on the development of effective INSET strategies in developing country contexts. I also felt that my living and working in the research context over a 3-year period would provide me with an understanding of Namibian culture and education, which could help illuminate some of the research findings. I lived in the local town. When visiting schools, I stayed quite often for days at a time at local villages, thus enabling me to get to know the teachers and local people and developing as much as possible an understanding of the local culture.

The schools participating in the study were located in one of the seven education regions in Namibia. Seventy-six per cent of the teachers were unqualified with the remaining 24% being underqualified. The MEC considers the training teachers received prior to Independence to be inadequate and uses the term 'underqualified' to refer to them. A significant number of the unqualified teachers had also not completed their second level education. An extensive needs assessment exercise which I conducted at the beginning of the INSET programme (January–May 1995) presented a picture of schools similar to the typical developing country schools described in various studies (Avalos & Haddad, 1981; Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991): temporary stick buildings; very few, if any, resources; learners having to share textbooks and having nothing to write with; weak head teachers, ten of whom were unqualified teachers; little support and in-service training provided to teachers; and generally poor classroom teaching with a reliance on rote methods (O'Sullivan, 1999). The schools were in isolated and rural locations. Bad roads, little more than dirt tracks, an inadequate postal service and no telephone lines at the schools, further isolated the schools and made communication particularly problematic.

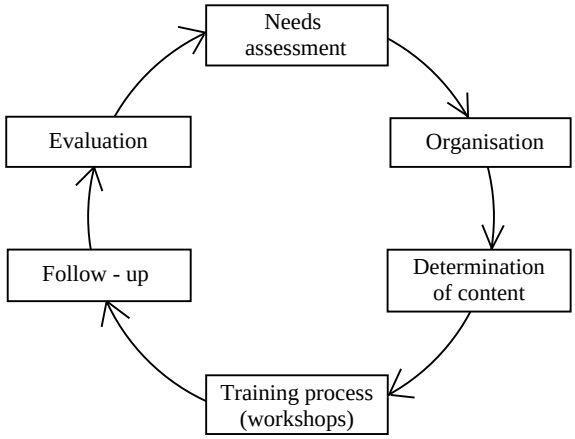

Fig. 1. The INSET strategies model.

The INSET programme took place over four training circuits, each of approximately 6 months duration (June–December 1995; January–June 1996; July–December 1996; January–June 1997). Each circuit was guided by a model (see Fig. 1) termed the INSET strategies model (O'Sullivan, 2001). This article has relevance for two of the stages: training process (workshops) and follow-up. It is concerned with the development of reflective approaches within both stages.

4.2. Research design

In Africa, action research has been successfully pioneered by Wright (1988), Stuart (1987) and Walker (1994), in Sierra Leone, Lesotho, and South Africa, respectively. These studies involved the trainer in a collaborative or facilitative role, supporting teachers' efforts to conduct action research into their own practice, with the ultimate aim of improving their practice. More recent use of action research for this purpose emerged from Ghana (Pryor, 1998), Malawi (Stuart & Kunje, 1998) and Namibia (Ebbut & Elliot, 1998; Zeichner et al., 1998).

My use of action research had a different function. I used it to develop effective INSET strategies, which sought to improve teacher practice, thus ultimately supporting teachers' implementation of English Language Teaching reforms. I brought this about by using action

research cycles to explore the development and effectiveness of various INSET strategies within the INSET programme. Elliot's (1991, p. 69) definition of action research usefully captures my rationale for using it: "… the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it". The strategies I developed ultimately sought to improve the practice of the teachers participating in the study by developing their teaching skills.[2]

My decision to use action research was underpinned by the extent to which I felt that it would enable me to take a critical stance towards western models of educational practice and ensure that the research was useful to the Namibian participants by leading to their professional development. I drew from Elliot's (1991) action research cycle to develop one appropriate to the research (see Fig. 2).

Elliot's (1991) use of the term 'reconnaissance' aptly describes the first stage. It suggests the gathering of as much data as possible to highlight problems and diagnose teachers' training needs, and to suggest hypotheses for action (strategies) to address them. I also found Elliot's (1991) division of the action stage into three action steps useful. It most accurately reflected the action stage of my action research cycles, which tended to involve more than one action step. I discovered however, that the model could not be applied as neatly as the print version suggested. It did not do justice to the reality of the research context. My use of action research cycles involved a degree of overlap, retracing steps, redirection and refocusing. There were also numerous cycles going on simultaneously. Stuart (1987, p. 274) experienced similar problems when she attempted to use cyclical models in her research in Lesotho, in which she worked collaboratively with five teachers, supporting their efforts to use action research to improve aspects of their practice.

> It was not so much one action research cycle as a series of cycles of different shapes and sizes, rolling along inside one another, sometimes coalescing to produce a major re-alignment of practice, sometimes making small adjustments to on-going activities …

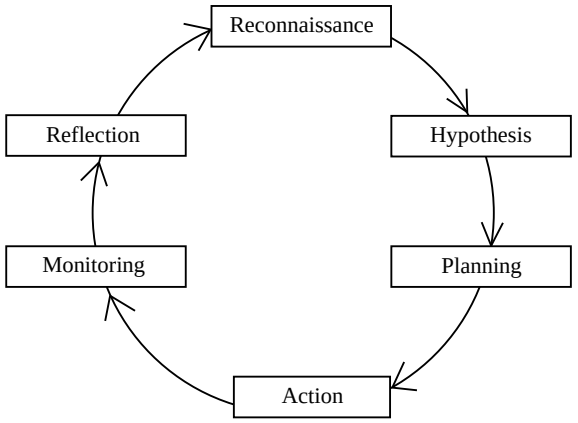

Fig. 2. Action-research model used during the research study.

In summary, various INSET strategies were tried out to see how effective they were in practice, and results were monitored and analysed (O'Sullivan, 1999). The action research cycles tended to correspond with the four training circuits. For the purposes of this article, I will focus on action research cycles concerning the development of a reflective approach and methods within this. These cycles took place within the workshops and follow-up stages of the training circuits. Each training circuit involved at least 4 week-long workshops, one each for grades 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5–7 teachers. Follow-up support visits took place at all schools, during which I observed all teachers teaching a lesson based on the previous workshop. Consequently, each action research cycle tended to involve a number of action and monitoring stages, and reflection tended to be a macro-reflection on these stages. For example, the monitoring of the effectiveness of 'brainstorming' took place during efforts to implement it (action) within each of the ten workshops in the first training circuit. Macro-reflection on the data, which emerged from the ten action stages, highlighted the extent to which it was beyond the capability of the teachers at that time. Data to inform the action research cycles was

[2] Reflection on these action research cycles also led to my professional development as a trainer, though this was a secondary aim of the action research. See O'Sullivan (1999) for a full discussion of this.

collected eclectically. Methods included: interviews, semi-structured and unstructured observations, lesson observations, assessment of learners' work, and an examination of documents (O'Sullivan, 1999).

5. Research findings

The research findings will be presented in the format of a cyclical action research report. Data emerging from all the stages of consecutive action research cycles will be discussed concurrently. This is different to the conventional structure used for articles in academic journals, which tend to present the research data, and then discuss and analyse it. I feel that this traditional approach would limit the illumination and understanding of the research findings. It would not illustrate the processes involved in using action research to address the transfer issue concerning reflective approaches.

5.1. Action research cycles conducted within the first training circuit (June–Dec. 1995)

5.1.1. Hypotheses step of action research cycles

My rationale for using reflective approaches within the first training circuit formed the hypotheses for the first action research cycles. Firstly, I hypothesised that a reflective approach would facilitate the implementation of the reform goals discussed earlier. Secondly, I hypothesised that it had a sustainability function. It would encourage and enable teachers to become involved in their own professional development once the INSET programme had finished.

5.1.2. Planning, action and monitoring steps of action research cycles

The decision to use a reflective approach led to a consideration, within the planning stage, of reflective methods which would best enable implementation. During the first training circuit workshops, the main reflective methods I used were asking questions/eliciting and discussion activities in groups and pairs. The main strategy I used within the former method was the use of the 'why' and 'how' interrogatives. For example, within workshop sessions devoted to developing teachers' basic teaching skills, I always asked teachers to explain why a particular skill was useful.[3] For example:

- Why should we revise?
- How do you think we should correct learners' mistakes? (Source: training notes.)

This was aimed at accessing and using their experience and knowledge to relate theory to practice. Responses to the questions however, were mainly physical: teachers shifted uncomfortably in their seats and proceeded to look at their colleagues and around the room. Very few teachers volunteered an answer. The few answers that emerged were general and did not reflect a knowledge or understanding of the skills. One teacher's answer to the latter question above was: ''make them correct it'' (source: workshop 3, 21 August 1995).

Similarly, monitoring of discussion type activities indicated their ineffectiveness. 'Brainstorming' was one of the most common discussion activities I used. For example, I asked teachers to form groups and discuss and write down the main ideas concerning 'teaching English reading'. My diary notes, written up after a workshop session, illustrate the ineffectiveness of the discussion activities.

> Once it became evident that the teachers had never heard of 'brainstorming', I completed a few examples using common categorical words such as food and weather. A few teachers volunteered their ideas, which I wrote on the chalkboard. I then attempted to elicit a few examples from the teachers concerning 'teaching English reading'. There was no response. I had to write two ideas of my own: textbooks and groupwork. I then asked the teachers to discuss in groups and write down their ideas about 'teaching English reading'. There was

[3] The INSET programme sought to develop teachers' English Language Teaching (ELT) skills. This encompassed a development of general basic teaching skills, which could be used to teach all subjects, including ELT, for example: revision, lesson planning, and asking questions. See O'Sullivan (1999).

absolute silence. Teachers looked uncomfortable. It then became apparent that teachers were not accustomed to working in groups. I explained what I meant. I walked amongst the groups and encouraged them to share and discuss their ideas. They tended to write down one or two ideas of their own. Very little, if any, sharing and discussion took place. (Source: diary entry, workshop 1, 18 June 1995.)

5.1.3. Reflection step of action research cycles

The diary note suggests that a reflective approach was ineffective. Reasons to explain this emerged from a macro-reflection on the action research data which emerged from the numerous cycles conducted during the first training circuit, exploring various reflective methods, for example: cycles concerning the usefulness of asking questions, discussions and brainstorming, to develop various skills. Firstly, a diary entry points out that the teachers were clearly unaccustomed to the basic processes underpinning the use of a reflective approach for improving their teaching practices: "it seems to me that the teachers are unable to adequately reflect on their teaching and participate in group work because these processes are new to them. Most teachers have never attended an in-service workshop prior to this. And their only experience of Education, either as students or on a pre-independence pre-service teacher training course, was within an apartheid system" (source: diary entry, 25 June 1995). The teachers had long been immersed in an apartheid society, which did not encourage them to ask questions publicly, to criticise, or to develop and express their own ideas. They were not familiar with an innovative culture in education, which reflective approaches assume. The Bantu Education sought to stifle the development of questioning, criticism and creativity. The teachers were more familiar with the use of banking approaches to teaching. The apartheid system led to what I termed 'the nodding culture'. For example, during a follow-up school visit, I spent time working through the writing of a communicative lesson plan with a teacher. When I asked him if he understood it, he nodded. Upon observation of his lesson the next day, it became obvious that he had not understood. When I asked him why he had indicated otherwise the previous day, he informed me: "I thought you might think me stupid" (1 April 1996). I assume that I, a white female, was associated with their previous engagements with white people.

It is also reasonable to assume that teachers were uncomfortable with an approach to training which was focused on and valued their own experience and ideas. Shaeffer (1994) supports this assumption, "… many are uncomfortable with group dynamics, self-analysis, and consciousness raising". Pryor's (1998, p. 223) research in Ghana reached a similar conclusion; his analysis purports that, "… Ghanaian teachers do not see themselves as agents, merely as operatives".

A second reason to explain the ineffectiveness of reflective methods is that the teachers did not have an adequate professional foundation upon which to reflect. This finding has received some attention in the literature (Calderhead, 1988; Hargreaves, 1993). It is reasonable to assume that one of the reasons teachers were unable to brainstorm ideas for teaching English reading was that they were simply not cognisant of methods and approaches for it. My lesson observations for needs assessment purposes at the beginning of the INSET programme indicated rote reading as the only method used. Williams (1993) terms this method 'barking at print': teachers read a line from a text and learners repeat it a number of times, often without actually looking at the book. For most teachers the INSET programme was the first professional training they had received. Consequently, they did not have a store of basic professional knowledge upon which they could draw for reflection. Stuart and Kunje's (1998, p. 391) recent research in Malawi supports this:

> One of the limitations of reflection was precisely that few participants had a wide enough store of educational knowledge—either of the subject or of professional issues—to bring to bear on the problems encountered, so links to meaningful theory were hard to make.

As the research progressed, evidence emerged which further supported this assumption. For example, during the third training circuit, I asked teachers to do the same brainstorming activity.

Teachers came up with numerous ideas, most of which were informed by the training on methods of teaching reading they had received during the previous two training circuits. They included: 'common-sight words', 'phonics', 'recall and thinking questions' [recall questions refer to comprehension questions which can be answered directly from the information in the text, thinking questions require the learners to use their own knowledge, views and opinions, to infer, interpret, analyse and criticise the text, in order to answer the question].

Thirdly, teachers' impoverished education during South African rule had not sufficiently empowered them to reflect. It did not provide them with the tools of reflection, which include the higher-order reflective skills, such as comparing, analysing and synthesising, which are necessary to enable useful reflection. Effectively, the evidence presented in this section raises the issue of transfer. It suggests that reflective approaches developed in the West cannot be neatly applied to developing countries. It also indicated that my hypotheses for the action research cycles, facilitating the Namibian reform goals and sustainability, were not realised.

It needs to be pointed out that the reasons to explain the ineffectiveness of the reflective approach discussed above, which emerged from my analysis of data that reflection was beyond teachers' professional capabilities at the time, that they did not have an adequate foundation upon which to reflect, and that they had not developed the higher-order reflective skills, caused me considerable concern. I feared that my analyses would be interpreted as suggesting that I considered reflection to be beyond the capacity of the Namibian teachers. This is not my intention. Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) 'Decolonising Methodologies' highlights the dangers inherent in non-indigenous researchers making assumptions about the thoughts, understandings and views of their research participants, and subsequently misrepresenting indigenous views. For the purposes of this study, it needs to be borne in mind, that my references to reflection are not concerned with reflection in a general sense, a skill that everyone engages in, albeit often unconsciously, throughout their lives. I am not suggesting that Namibian teachers cannot reflect. I am saying, however, that they have not been trained, as have their western counterparts, to use reflection to improve their teaching practices. My comments on teachers' ability to reflect do not refer to anything other than their skills to reflect on their classroom practices. When I discuss their lack of a foundation to reflect, I am merely referring to their lack of a foundation of western education practices, which the Namibian Education reforms are seeking to implement in schools. Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) work on indigenous researchers, she being an indigenous Maori researcher, suggests a method of beginning to address the tension I felt in my analyses. There is a need for indigenous researchers to explore the transfer of reflective approaches. Their studies could throw some useful light on how to tap into and transfer teachers' indigenous reflective skills for use in an education context, to improve their teaching practices.

5.2. Action research cycles conducted within training circuits 2–4 (Jan–June 1996; July–Dec 1996; Jan–June 1997): the development of reflective skills

The findings which emerged from my reflections, discussed in the previous section, led to the emergence of the following questions which formed the hypotheses steps for subsequent action research cycles conducted within the second, third and fourth training circuits:

(A) To what extent is it possible to develop teachers' reflective skills?
(B) If it is possible to develop teachers' reflective skills, how can they be developed?
(C) Are western models of reflective training appropriate to the research context?

5.2.1. Practice and reinforcement

I found many strategies useful in the development of reflective skills amongst the teachers. The practice and reinforcement of reflective methods used in the first training circuit, the 'why and 'how' questions, discussion and brainstorming, were

particularly useful. For example, during subsequent training circuit workshops, I constantly asked questions concerning the skills being developed. The teachers commented about its constant use, "she's always asking us why", one of them informed my guide (10 July 1996). This 'nagging' technique was ultimately effective. During the second training circuit workshops, a few teachers began to volunteer answers. Monitoring of action research cycles during the third training circuit workshops indicated dramatic improvements. Most teachers at least attempted to answer the 'why' and 'how' questions. An interview with a teacher highlights this:

> Did you try to use phonics to teach new words? Do you think it was useful? Why? (Interview question)
>
> Yes, I tried it much. I think it was very good. Before, I was roting the new words. Now I use phonics to get learners to sound out the word, instead of repeating. They can sound out some words on their own now. (Teacher's answer, 5 August 1996.)

The teacher's answer highlights her professional development in the use of reflective skills, in the light of the first training circuit when teachers tended not to answer questions. Reinforcement and practice also seemed to contribute to improvements in other reflective methods, most notably group and pair discussions which became more fruitful. Teachers no longer shifted uncomfortably in their seats when asked to discuss something. It seems that "providing teachers with ample opportunities to practise their use of reflective methods familiarised them with the reflective approach and led to their professional development in the use of it" (source, diary entry, 5 June 1996). It is also reasonable to assume that teachers' confidence increased and that they became more comfortable with an approach which valued their ideas. They realised that their contributions were valuable, initially to me, the trainer, and then to their peers. One teacher's comments illustrates this:

> It's good for me to see that my idea is good for the other teachers [she was referring to her point that asking children questions allows the teacher to check whether they have understood the lesson]. (Interview, 27 August 1996.)

The development of teachers' basic teaching and ELT skills undoubtedly played a role also; they now had a foundation upon which to reflect.

5.2.2. Observation

I found observation a useful strategy for developing teachers' reflective skills. Four main types of observation took place: teachers observed me teaching demonstration lessons, and they observed videos of lessons, photographs of various practices, and other teachers micro-teaching. I will use videos to illustrate the usefulness of observation. During all workshops subsequent to the first training circuit workshops, teachers watched videos of teachers from other parts of Namibia teaching lessons in similar contexts. I hypothesised that it would develop their ability to critically analyse lessons. This, I hoped, would lead teachers to develop the skills they needed to reflect upon and critically analyse their own lessons. Putting this into action involved asking teachers to watch a video of a lesson and take notes on the aspects of the lesson they thought were good and those that could be improved.

Monitoring of this exercise highlighted some problems. Teachers tended not to write any notes. When I asked them what they thought about the lesson, two common responses were: "it was good" and "it was not so fine" (source: workshop session answers, 14 February 1996). Very few teachers elaborated on these types of comments. My reflection on these action steps led me to hypothesise that teachers needed a more structured and guided approach:

> teachers, I think, need more specific guidance from me on how to critically analyse lessons, if they have never participated in this type of an activity before, it is hardly surprising that they had problems with it. I need to guide them on what to focus on in a lesson, how to pick out the 'good' and 'weak' practices, how to make suggestions for improvements. I also need to develop their confidence in making suggestions, then perhaps they will be able to move on to critically analysing lessons without

the aid of the trainer (source: diary notes, 12 June 1996).

Subsequently, for the next action research cycle I designed structured observation forms which teachers had to complete while watching the lesson. Some of the questions were factual and some reflective. I hypothesised that the factual questions would inspire confidence in the teachers, as they could easily answer them. This, I hoped, would lead to efforts to answer the reflective questions. My hypothesis was realised. During the second training circuit, teachers made some efforts to answer the reflective questions. By the third circuit, this had improved significantly. For example, the following questions were posed to teachers observing a lesson on video.

1. How many questions did the teacher ask the children?
2. Were they recall or thinking questions?
3. Do you think she could have asked more questions?
4. Would that have been better? Why? (Source: questions written on an observation form for workshops in training circuit 3.)

The first question was factual and easily answered. It was designed to focus teachers' attention on the small number of questions the teachers tended to ask the children. Most teachers answered the second question. The teachers' knowledge of recall and thinking questions had been developed during the previous two training circuit workshops, thus giving them some knowledge upon which to reflect. At the beginning of the INSET programme teachers had never heard of these types of questions and thus were unable to answer them.

A significant number of teachers answered the third and fourth questions.

- Yes, then she could have given more children the chance to answer, it would be more learner-centred. (Source: workshop 2 in training circuit 3, observation form, 26 August1996.)
- Yes, learners could learn the text better. (Source: workshop 4 in training circuit 3, observation form, 2 September 1996.)

These answers reflect a huge leap in the development of the teachers' critical analysis skills, a useful reflective skill: "now, the teachers are not only able to analyse the effectiveness or otherwise of a teacher's strategy, they are able to offer reasons to explain their analyses" (source: diary entry, 21 October 1996). This leap is also reflected in the teacher's answer to the phonics question noted in the previous section. The teacher found phonics more useful than rote methods.

5.2.3. *Structured reflection*

The use of a structured observation form discussed above illustrates an effective reflective approach that emerged from the research, which I called the structured reflection approach. It involves reflection, which is structured by a trainer with the aim of supporting reflection by the teacher on his/her practice. Effectively, the trainer closely guides the teacher's reflection. The data above indicates its effectiveness for training unqualified teachers. It enables them, within their professional capability at the beginning of a training programme, to reflect on new skills, particularly on the rationale for using them. Another method, which I used within a structured reflection approach, was prompting questions. For example:

> During a post-lesson observation with a teacher I discussed the materials she had made and displayed around the classroom. They mainly consisted of written charts of common-sight words, grammar points and poems. The writing tended to be very small, non-uniform in size and had incorrect punctuation. In reply to my initial question 'what do you think of the displays', she answered: 'they're very fine'. I then attempted to highlight the problems inherent in her work. I wrote a word on an A4 sheet of paper and asked her to read it from the back of the class. She was unable to. I then asked her: 'why are you unable to read it'? She answered: 'because the writing is too small for me'. I used this to prompt an answer concerning her own chart writing size and asked: 'now, try to read your charts from there'. She beamed and replied: 'I never saw this, they are too

small, I must change them'. I used a similar method to enable the teacher to notice the other problems with her chart writing. For example, I wrote two sentences, one was written with non-uniform letters and sloped downwards, the other I wrote on a light pencil line to guide my writing of uniform letters on a straight line. We then discussed the difference between both sentences and the teacher realised her mistakes: 'that example is good; it's the right size, neat, and nice to look at. Now I see my work needs to be better for the learners, before it was untidy and not professional for a good teacher (8 July 1996.)

The evidence presented in this section indicates that reflective skills can be developed amongst unqualified teachers, who have never been exposed to using reflection as a means of developing their teaching skills. It suggests that this development best takes place within a structured reflection approach and a cyclical model of INSET. The former provides the teachers with useful guidelines within which to develop their skills. The latter is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it facilitates practice and reinforcement of reflective skills. It provides teachers with sufficient time, practice and support, to enable them to develop the skills. Teachers' use of structured reflection improved as the training circuits progressed. Secondly, it enables the trainer to experiment with various methods within an action research approach, to develop reflective approaches. Thirdly, the cyclical model enables the development of teachers' basic professional knowledge to inform their reflection.

5.2.4. *Level of reflection*

The previous section indicates that teachers can reflect. It does not indicate however, the level of reflection they reached, in terms of Zeichner's (1981, cited in Adler, 1991) levels of reflection. I will explore this here. At the beginning of each of the third training circuit workshops I asked teachers to complete a revision form. It included questions of a factual and reflective nature, on the content of the previous workshops.

Question:

- Do you think your reading lessons have improved? Why?

Answers:

- I improved my lesson plans, because I practice much (2 September 1996).
- Yes, it makes me more aware of the learners' interest and motivation in the lessons (26 August 1996).

Questions:

- Which stages of the reading lesson did not work for you?
- Why do you think it/they did not work?

Answers:

- My phonics lesson is still bad, I need more knowledge on it (2 September 1996).
- The learners were maybe lazy to think, or they were having a poor background knowledge [in relation to thinking questions] (26 August 1996).
- It was too difficult for the learners (2 September 1996).
- It's due to lack of experience of the method (2 September 1996).
- You must first try to bring the learner at level (26 August 1996).

The level of reflection indicated here is at a level below Zeichner's technical rationality level. Teachers had become aware of the problems in their lessons in a general sense. I called this level basic technical awareness. I consider it useful in that teachers were at least beginning to think about their teaching, irrespective of the level of reflection. This was a huge leap from the beginning of the INSET programme when teachers did not seem to be aware of the effectiveness of their lessons. For example, when I observed teachers teaching a lesson during the follow-up stage, I asked teachers what they thought about the effectiveness of the lesson in general and about specific aspects of it, such as the presentation of new words. The most common answer during the first training circuit was: "I don't know". By the third training circuit

most teachers were able to point out one or two aspects of the lesson which needed to be improved. However, only a few teachers came up with their own solutions to the problems, one of the main functions of reflection. Stuart and Kunje's (1998) research in Malawi, discussed earlier, reflects this. By the end of the INSET programme under study, some teachers (approximately l0%) were able to do this, an indicator of having reached the technical–rational level. Most teachers however could only suggest ideas when heavily prompted.

6. Concluding discussion

At this point it is useful to return to the three questions posed at the beginning of the previous section. In answer to the first question concerning the extent to which it is possible to develop the teachers' reflective skills, the research suggests that it is only possible to develop the teachers' reflective skills if reflection is reconceptualised to include another beginning level of reflection to replace the initial level, the technical–rational level, currently discussed in the literature, and originally proposed by Habermas (1973, cited in Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990). Reflection at this structured reflection level enables the teachers to come up with problematic aspects of their practice, but does not expect them to determine appropriate solutions to the problems. It enables teachers who have not received training in the use of reflection to improve practice to develop the requisite skills. The second question concerns the development of reflective methods. My study suggests that specific methods, for example, practice and reinforcement and observation, are effective in developing the teachers' capability to reflect, albeit not at a level currently illustrated in the literature. The third question is related to the extent to which western models of reflective training were appropriate to the research context. The research findings presented in this article suggest that reflective approaches to training as conceptualised in western countries were not transferable to the training of unqualified primary teachers in Namibia. They were beyond the stage of development of the unqualified and underqualified teachers, at the beginning of the INSET programme, to implement. The research study found, however, that a structured reflective approach was within the teachers' capability. It enabled them to reflect at a 'basic technical awareness' level, a level below Zeichner's technical–rational level. It is reasonable to assume, and needs to be pointed out, that the technical–rational level was potentially within the reach of all teachers if the programme was extended. I suggest that within another two circuits of training (12 months), most teachers would reach the technical–rational stage. I would also suggest that teachers would reach this level at an earlier stage in the INSET programme if there had been more personnel resources available. I was the only trainer for 145 teachers and this limited considerably the intense support I could provide to teachers in developing their reflective skills. Intense support may also lead to teachers reaching Zeichner's other two western levels of reflection, the situation–institutional and the moral–ethical levels.

What is particularly important, however, is that the structured reflective approach was successful in the professional development of teachers, if the significant improvements in teachers' classroom performance and learners' English skills are used as an indicator of effective training. A comparison of data from 75 lesson observations of the same teachers, and learner assessment data, collected at the beginning and end of the INSET programme, indicated these improvements (O'Sullivan, 1999).[4]

The structured reflection approach leads into two further important points: the effectiveness of action research in addressing the transfer issue, and the underlying philosophy driving the approach. The action research cycle data presented earlier illustrates the process involved throughout the research study. More importantly, it highlights the critical role of action research in addressing the issue of transfer of a western reflective approach to developing countries. Initially, action research data highlighted its inappropriateness to the context. It subsequently enabled rigorous and

[4] Learner assessment data involved hearing 204 learners read a text, an examination of their writing in their exercise books, and assessment of their oral skills.

systematic efforts to adapt the approach and develop a structured reflection approach, which was within teachers' professional capability to implement, in the light of their present stage of professional development. As an expatriate trainer, unfamiliar with the context, I found action research critical to the provision of an effective INSET programme. It enabled me to ensure that training approaches were adopted and developed which were useful within the context. I would suggest that other expatriate INSET providers consider using it, and subsequently publish their experiences. This would be invaluable in adding to the dearth of literature, highlighted by Karnieli (1998), on action research for teacher educators. Action research data also provided useful empirical evidence about the effectiveness of methods for developing reflective teaching amongst teachers. Hatton and Smith (1995) highlight the dearth of such evidence.

Structured reflection seems to have an underlying social constructivist view of adult learning. This can be traced back to Vygotsky's (1978) work in Russia during the 1920s and 1930s, which underlined the importance of interaction in learning. It is the notion that learning best takes place when more skilled individuals support novices' learning of new skills. Structured reflection also draws from Bruner's (1983) notable scaffolding approach to learning, which is itself underpinned by social constructivism.

7. Implications of findings

The findings have implications for four groups of people in Namibia and in similar developing country contexts—educational reformers, expatriate advisers, INSET providers and researchers. The educational reforms in Namibia were ambitious—they sought to replace all vestiges of the previous fragmented system of education. The reformers were aware of the critical role of teachers in bringing about the reform: they needed to be trained to reflect upon their practice and ensure that it reflected and was underpinned by the learner-centred philosophy upon which the reforms were based. This led to the introduction of PBI as a critical component of the newly developed in-service and pre-service BETD (Ebbutt & Elliot, 1998; Zeichner et al., 1998). The reformers however, did not consider the extent to which this goal was realistic and feasible, whether it was within the capability of teachers to develop reflective approaches to their teaching within a training programme with limited support resources. My study indicates that reflective approaches as conceptualised within PBI were beyond the teachers' stage of professional development. The teachers participating in the study had professional backgrounds [very little, if any professional training] similar to the significant numbers of teachers in other rural parts of Namibia. The realities within which they worked were also similar. In view of the fact that the teachers participating in the INSET programme received more support than the support that teachers participating in the in-service BETD programme can expect, PBI is not a feasible training approach for the BETD. This has serious implications for the implementation of the reforms, if an understanding of and capacity to embrace and translate their underlying philosophy into practice are necessary ingredients of implementation. The research study seems to suggest that those involved in developing the reforms in Namibia did not adequately take into account the teachers' realities and professional capabilities, and the limited resources available for training teachers. It also raises questions about the usefulness of expatriate advisers to educational reformers in developing countries. If their advice is based on their notion of effective practices in western contexts, how valid is it to developing countries? Educational reformers in developing countries need to consider carefully the advice they receive from 'experts' and ask themselves whether it is feasible in their contexts.

This leads into the main message for INSET providers. When planning an INSET programme they also need to take teachers' professional capacities and micro-realities into account. The research study indicates that developing teachers' capacity to engage in reflective activity as conceptualised in the West is possible, but only with long-term intensive training and follow-up

support. The INSET programme I was involved in only provided teachers with the first steps of reflection: developing their ability to analyse the effectiveness or otherwise of their practice. Most teachers were unable, however, to come up with solutions to aspects of their practice which they considered ineffective. This level of reflection, which I termed 'basic technical awareness', was developed within a structured reflective approach. INSET providers intent on using reflective approaches to training unqualified primary teachers may need to consider using such an approach, particularly in the initial stages of a long-term programme which seeks to develop teachers' reflective skills. INSET planners of short-term programmes may need to review any plans they have for using a reflective approach. Effectively they should ask themselves the following questions: Have teachers already developed their skills of reflection? If not, can the programme provide adequate support within available resources? If not, is a reflective approach the most appropriate approach to use? What other approaches can we use that are within the present capabilities of the teachers in the light of the resources available for INSET?

This leads into the implications for researchers. Clearly, empirical research into training approaches that are effective in the professional development of teachers is critical to informing INSET providers' decisions. However, there is a dearth of such research in developing countries. I make a plea to researchers interested in the field of in-service education to engage in this type of research. My study highlights the usefulness of action research in conducting such research. I found it particularly effective in exploring training approaches and in addressing the issue of transfer which emerged. It enabled the adaptation and development of the reflective approaches conceptualised in the West to an approach more appropriate to the research context. My study also has a message for those advocating action research in the professional development of teachers (Stuart, 1987; Walker, 1994, Zeichner et al., 1998). The latter two studies involved INSET for qualified teachers, the former focused on pre-service teacher training. My study raises questions about the effectiveness of action research as a professional development INSET tool for working with unqualified primary teachers who have not developed the capability to reflect. I find the word capability useful in concluding this article: action research facilitated taking teachers' professional capability into account. It enabled me to address the transfer of reflective approaches to ensure that the training approach used was within teachers' capability to implement. If we are serious about the professional development of unqualified and underqualified primary teachers in developing countries, it is critical that we use whichever approaches and methods will best bring this about. Action research has immense, as yet relatively untapped, potential here. The time has come to begin exploiting this.

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