

University of KwaZulu-Natal

**Teacher agency within a prescribed curriculum:
The case of maths teachers' experience of implementing
the CAPS curriculum**

By

Alisha Singh

Student Number 206505301

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education**

Teacher Development Studies

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Supervisor: Professor L. Ramrathan

2015

DECLARATION

I, Alisha Singh declare that:

- (i) The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
- (ii) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- (iii) This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
- (iv) This dissertation does not contain other persons' writing unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers.

Where written sources have been quoted, then:

- a) their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced;
 - b) Where their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation marks, and referenced.
- (v) Where I have reproduced a publication or which I am an author, co-author or editor, I have indicated in detail which part of the publication was actually written by myself alone and have fully referenced such publications.
 - (vi) This dissertation does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the dissertation and in the references section.

Signed: _____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. To God Almighty for his presence in my life and throughout this incredible journey. The Lord is my shepherd and has been my strength through these challenging times. *“With God, all things are possible” – Matthew 19:26.*
2. To my wonderful parents, your constant support, encouragement and faith in my capabilities is the reason I have persevered and have completed this study. Thank you both for believing in me, and providing me with endless opportunities throughout my life. This study is dedicated to you, and I am eternally grateful for your love, guidance and personal sacrifices.
3. To my participants for your contribution to this study and your valuable insights.
4. To my supervisor, Professor Labby Ramrathan. Your guidance, encouragement and assistance have been sincerely appreciated.

ABSTRACT

Political changes that have taken place in post-apartheid South Africa have contributed to several policy initiatives aimed at achieving a more democratic and unified education system. Teachers in South Africa during the post-apartheid period contended with three major policy changes: Curriculum 2005 (C2005), Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). CAPS being the current state curriculum consists of a policy statement for teaching and learning in South African schools. The CAPS curriculum has been noted for its restrictive attribute and this study explored the agency that maths teachers have within the CAPS framework of education.

This study focused on understanding the agency which maths teachers experience when implementing the CAPS curriculum and explored the various ways that teachers used their agency in mediating the restrictions experienced in implementing the CAPS curriculum. This was done by using the following instruments: descriptive essays, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews as a means to generate rich, thick data required for understanding teachers' experiences, classroom practices and feelings of teaching within a restricted curriculum.

A case study approach within a qualitative design was employed. Three maths teachers were selected and deemed appropriate as this study sought depth of information and relevance. In this regard the case study was Aster Primary School, which is an urban primary school situated in KwaZulu-Natal. The findings generated from the three experienced maths teachers were analysed and represented within the context of the teachers' teaching experiences, the school context and the prescript of the CAPS policy framework. The findings offer an understanding of how practising maths teachers account for their unique and diverse teaching experiences and provide a contextualised understanding of their agency, and how this shapes teaching and learning in their respective classrooms. The Samuel (2008) Force Field Model provided a framework to understand how teachers mediate the various forces that operate within a school system and emphasised the need for teachers to be autonomous professionals within this force field.

The findings revealed by this research study indicate that the conceptions that maths teachers have about the CAPS curriculum are influenced by their past experiences. Evidence from the data generated indicate that policy initiatives aimed at educational transformation in South Africa are to a large extent not congruent with teachers' existing beliefs. Teachers in this study have expressed their need for greater agency within their classroom practices and to be treated as autonomous professionals that possess the capability to act within the best interest of their learners. Participants have also explained that teachers are in fact central to the curriculum and should therefore be included in policy construction and revision.

This dissertation concludes with a brief summary of the major conclusions that can be drawn from the study, and offers recommendations in light of the conclusions drawn. The reconceptualisation of education through new policy initiatives, and curriculum revision should focus on understanding teachers' contextual realities in their working environment. Teachers are required to take ownership of educational changes that occur and curricular reform needs to be focused on understanding teachers' professional lives, development and requirements. Teachers are ultimately agents of change and must be treated as experts within the dynamics of change.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Description	Page
DECLARATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	xiii
CHAPTER 1 SETTING THE SCENE	1
1.1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	2
1.3. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	2
1.4. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY	3
1.5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	4
1.6. KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS	4
1.6.1. What are teachers' experiences of implementing the CAPS curriculum within school education?	4
1.6.2. What agency do teachers have within the CAPS framework for school education?	4
1.6.3. How do teachers use their agency, if at all, in mediating the restrictions experienced in implementing the CAPS curriculum?	5
1.7. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	5
1.7.1. Agency	5
1.7.2. Policy shifts	6
1.7.2.1. CAPS: Curriculum bondage	6
1.7.3. Teacher professionalisation	6
1.8. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	7
1.9. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	8

1.10. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY	9
1.11. OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS	9
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL LANDSCAPE	11
2.1. INTRODUCTION	11
2.2. SCHOOL CURRICULUM GENESIS WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL SYSTEM SINCE DEMOCRACY	12
2.2.1. RNCS – Reinventing the curriculum	13
2.2.2. CAPS – Curriculum bondage	14
2.3. TEACHER PROFESSIONALISATION	17
2.3.1. What is meant by teacher professionalisation?	17
2.3.2. Teacher development	18
2.3.3. A shift from managerial professionalism to democratic professionalism	20
2.4. THEORISING AGENCY	21
2.4.1. Teacher agency	22
2.4.2. Teacher agency within a South African context	24
2.4.3. Structures and cultures as an influence on teacher agency	25
2.4.4. Collaboration as a way of developing teacher agency	26
2.4.5. Teacher identity	27
2.5. THEORETICAL LANDSCAPE: THE FORCE FIELD MODEL	28
2.6. CONCLUSION	30
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	32
3.1. INTRODUCTION	32
3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN FOR THE STUDY	33
3.3. EPISTEMOLOGICAL STANCE TAKEN IN THE STUDY	33
3.4. RESEARCH APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF TEACHERS TEACHING WITH A PRESCRIPTIVE CURRICULUM	34
3.5. A CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY FOR RESEARCHING TEACHERS TEACHING WITHIN A RESTRICTIVE CURRICULUM	35
3.6. SAMPLING OF PARTICIPANTS FOR THE STUDY	36

3.7.	DATA GENERATION PROCESS	37
3.7.1.	Descriptive essays	37
3.7.2.	Semi-structured interviews	38
3.7.3.	Focus group interviews	39
3.8.	ETHICS	40
3.9.	DATA ANALYSIS	42
3.10.	TRUSTWORTHINESS AND DEPENDABILITY OF DATA	42
3.11.	LIMITATIONS OF STUDY	43
3.12.	CONCLUSION	44
CHAPTER 4	DATA ANALYSIS	46
4.1.	INTRODUCTION	46
4.2.	A DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH SITE	46
4.2.1.	Source of information	46
4.2.2.	School location and composition	47
4.2.3.	The medium of instruction	47
4.2.4.	Involvement of the school governing body	49
4.2.5.	Learner performance	49
4.2.6.	Parental involvement	50
4.3.	A DETAILED PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY	50
4.3.1.	Profile 1: Shirley	50
4.3.2.	Profile 2: Dean	51
4.3.3.	Profile 3: Richard	52
4.4.	ANALYSIS OF DATA OBTAINED IN THIS STUDY	53
4.4.1.	Approach used in reporting of the findings of the research project	53
4.5.	THEME 1: THE NATURE OF THE CAPS CURRICULUM AS EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS.	53
4.5.1.	A highly structured and focused annual teaching plan	54
4.5.2.	Superficial learning in learners as an outcome of the CAPS curriculum	56
4.5.3.	From learning to getting things done	58

4.5.4. Concluding comments on the nature of CAPS curriculum as experienced	60
4.6. THEME 2: OPPORTUNITIES THAT THE CAPS CURRICULUM PROVIDES FOR TEACHERS	61
4.6.1. Precise, structured and uniform guidelines	62
4.6.2. Promotion of collaboration and clustering through the CAPS curriculum	64
4.6.3. Providing professional development initiatives through the CAPS curriculum	66
4.6.4. Concluding comments on the opportunities presented by the CAPS curriculum	68
4.7. THEME 3: CHALLENGES TEACHERS FACE WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CAPS	69
4.7.1. Teacher paralysis from curriculum bondage within CAPS	69
4.7.2. Compliance without consultation	71
4.7.3. Concluding comments of teacher challenges experienced within the CAPS curriculum	73
4.8. THEME 4: HOW TEACHERS FEEL ABOUT THE CAPS CURRICULUM	73
4.8.1. Teachers as technicians	73
4.8.2. Advocating for teacher involvement in policy development	76
4.9. A REFLECTION OF KEY ISSUES PRESENTED IN THIS CHAPTER	78
4.10. CONCLUSION	79
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	80
5.1. INTRODUCTION	80
5.2. A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR CONCLUSIONS THAT CAN BE DRAWN FROM THIS STUDY	80
5.2.1. What are teachers' experiences of implementing the CAPS curriculum within school education?	80
5.2.2. What agency do teachers have within the CAPS framework for school education?	81

5.2.3. How do teachers use their agency, if at all, in mediating the restrictions experienced in implementing the CAPS curriculum?	82
5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS IN LIGHT OF THE CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THIS STUDY	83
5.4. POSSIBLE AREAS OF EXTENSION OF RESEARCH	84
5.5. CONCLUSION	85
REFERENCES	86
APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER	93
APPENDIX B: REQUEST TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY	94
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER	97
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS	99

LIST OF TABLES

No.	Description	Page
3.1	Biographical data of participants	37
3.2	Data generation plan	39

LIST OF FIGURES

No.	Description	Page
2.1	The chordal triad of agency	22
2.2	The Force Field Model	30
4.1	Aster Primary School building	48
4.2	Aster Primary School grounds	48
4.3	A Grade 4 classroom in Aster Primary	49

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANA	Annual National Assessment
ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
C2005	Curriculum 2005
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement
EMIS	Education Management Information System
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union

CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE SCENE

1.1. INTRODUCTION

“The autonomy of teachers making a professional judgement in the interest of quality education is a fundamental building block of a vibrant and truly liberated education system. Anything less would be masked or disguised autocracy” (Samuel, 2008, p.14).

Samuel envisions teacher autonomy and professional discretion as an essential component of a transformational, renewed and flourishing education system. Teachers in this regard require freedom and flexibility to skilfully use their expertise to make decisions and informed judgements regarding teaching, learning and directing curricular practices. When these powers and privileges are limited or taken away by educational authorities, teachers are compelled to follow rigid directives that may impede the education process, change their roles/functions and impact on their professional autonomy, as is the case of the CAPS curriculum. This study is therefore an attempt at understanding teachers’ experiences and perceptions of implementing a prescribed school curriculum whilst considering the effect it has on their agency and autonomy in a professional capacity and within their classroom practices.

With the transition from apartheid education to our present education system, South Africa has been plagued by a number of curricular changes and educational innovations, with education being seen as a “weapon of transformation” (Msila, 2007). With the introduction of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) as a means of “going back to basics”, a detailed policy document followed and serves as a structured programme designed to provide teachers with specific and detailed guidelines (Harrop-Allin & Kros, 2014). These guidelines in the form of policy documents and annual teaching plans have been notably prescriptive and restrictive (Harrop-Allin&Kros, 2014; Msibi&Mchunu, 2013; Ramatlapana & Makonye, 2012). This study therefore provides teachers with a platform to express and share their illuminations and individual accounts of working within the CAPS curriculum and accounting for the various degrees of agency they utilise in their teaching practices when dealing with evolving educational challenges and demands.

1.2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher agency within the context of a prescribed school curriculum. This study centred on teacher agency within a prescribed curriculum and focused on maths teachers' experience of implementing the CAPS curriculum. This study further explored how teacher agency is used, if at all, in implementing of CAPS with a view of exploring what opportunities teachers, as professionals, have in curriculum decisions at classroom level.

1.3. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Since the dawn of democracy in 1994, the South African government has implemented a number of curricular changes and educational policies to provide quality education that is equitable for all South African learners (Ramatlapana & Makonye, 2012). After continued criticism about numerous curriculum revisions, the Minister of Basic Education announced the transition from National Curriculum Statement (NCS) to Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Msibi & Mchunu, 2013). The CAPS curriculum was intended to simplify the complications and challenges that were created by previous educational reforms by going "back to basics" (Harrop-Allin & Kros, 2014). Some of the complications and challenges related to the past school curriculum include an instrumentalised view of teaching and learning, a checklist approach of assessment and complex language which made meaning inaccessible (Harrop-Allin&Kros, 2014; Msibi&Mchunu, 2013).

CAPS is a policy document that consists of a policy statement for learning and teaching in South African schools. It is applicable for Grades R to 12 and every subject in each grade has a comprehensive and detailed policy document that stipulates what teachers need to teach and assess on a grade-by-grade and subject-by-subject basis (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

Msibi and Mchunu (2013, p.25) stated that "The overall implications for the recent curriculum changes are clear: a teacher-proof approach towards curriculum implementation is being advocated, with teacher autonomy being restricted". In short, the CAPS curriculum has reduced teacher agency and provided teachers with an oppressive and prescriptive curriculum.

My understanding of teacher autonomy stems from Fleming (1998, p.20) who defined autonomy as “the degree to which teachers have the desire to make curriculum decisions using personal initiative and intellectual engagement” . Teacher autonomy is therefore regarded as an essential component of a teacher’s professional life as teachers should be able to use their expertise to negotiate the curriculum and make judgements about the wellbeing of their learners.

1.4. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

With the introduction of CAPS, I feel a sense of heightened prescription. CAPS espouses a structured programme that includes content, format, pace and structure (in the form of workbooks for teachers), suggesting that teachers would need to implement it in a technicist approach which may compromise teacher professionalism and teacher autonomy. This study, therefore, explored the relationship between teacher agency and the implementation of the CAPS curriculum as viewed from the practising teachers’ perspective. I also have other reasons for conducting this research. The first being my stance as a teacher who has been personally affected by policy changes that have taken place in South Africa and the introduction of the CAPS curriculum. I personally have gone through numerous changes that have impacted on my teacher identity, classroom practices and learning/teaching styles. These changes have had effects on my professional life as a teacher and engaging in this study has been a way in which I have been able to deepen my understanding of the policy process and the way in which educational innovations impact on teacher agency. I am also of the belief that teachers drive the curriculum and policy and are ultimately responsible for the successful implementation of innovations. Therefore, with the introduction of the CAPS curriculum I find my role and function as a teacher in the classroom have changed significantly from previous educational reforms. I have now taken a back seat in the education process and find myself following directives as opposed to driving and steering the curriculum as I have previously done. This study has provided me with insights into the lives of three practising maths teachers as they negotiate the CAPS curriculum and explore the various degrees of autonomy and professionalism that they experience in their daily lives whilst implementing a prescribed school curriculum. This study was further motivated by my desire as a maths teacher to understand how teachers’ professional lives are affected, and how their agency is impacted as they manoeuvre through the mist that is the curriculum.

1.5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To investigate teachers' experiences of implementing the CAPS curriculum.
- To explore and understand the agency that teachers have within the CAPS framework for education.
- To investigate how teachers use their agency, if at all, in mediating the restrictions experienced in implementing the CAPS curriculum.

1.6. KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My study has addressed key research questions that have assisted me in understanding teachers' experiences of implementing the CAPS curriculum. I sought to explore and understand the agency that teachers have within the CAPS framework for education. I also investigated how teachers used their agency in negotiating the restrictions experienced in the implementation of the CAPS curriculum. The following research questions, therefore, guided my research.

1.6.1. What are teachers' experiences of implementing the CAPS curriculum within school education?

This question provided a platform for teachers to describe their experiences of working within the CAPS curriculum and provided them with an opportunity to meaningfully reflect on how they have engaged with this curriculum and its implementation. It also enabled teachers to account for their unique and diverse teaching experiences.

1.6.2. What agency do teachers have within the CAPS framework for school education?

By posing this question I was able to gain insight into how teachers feel about the nature of the CAPS curriculum and their perspective on the agency they may or may not possess. I was also able to determine whether they feel as though the CAPS curriculum provides them with the flexibility to act as autonomous professionals or whether they deem it as being restrictive and undermining their professional capability.

1.6.3. How do teachers use their agency, if at all, in mediating the restrictions experienced in implementing the CAPS curriculum?

This question enabled me to ascertain the degree to which teachers are able to use their agency, if at all, in dealing with curricular challenges and evolving educational demands. It also provided me with a contextualised understanding of their agency, and how this shapes teaching and learning in their respective classrooms.

1.7. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

1.7.1. Agency

Agency is directly linked to structures (rules, resources) and cultures (values and relationships). Pantić (2014, p.4) states that “Agency depends on structures and cultures which can either foster or suspend it, but also contributes to the elaboration (transformation or reproduction) over time”. Agency is therefore shaped by structures and cultures, which either enable or constrain it.

When linked to the CAPS curriculum which is considered a structure of schooling, teachers can ultimately exercise very little self-government as there are clear guidelines and demands that need to be fulfilled (Ramatlapanana & Makonye, 2012). This structure therefore constrains teacher agency. It is therefore important to consider how structures and cultures can effectively influence teacher agency and to what extent.

Agency can be related to education and specifically to teachers. Campbell (2012, p.183) defined teacher agency as “The capacity of teachers to use their professional discretion in their pedagogical and curricular practices, alongside their accountability to the state, which generally maintains the overall authority for educational policy”. In short, teacher agency provides teachers with the freedom and flexibility to skilfully use their expertise to make decisions and informed judgements regarding teaching and learning or, as Campbell notes, to direct curriculum practices. Teachers do not deviate from educational policies or innovations but rather find ways to support the curriculum or educational innovation.

Numerous authors and educational experts (Pantić, 2014; Long & Lampen, 2014; Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2012) have highlighted that agency is in fact an essential component of teachers’ professional lives. The question, however, is to what degree should teachers exercise agency and how can we, as researchers; ascertain if they have the capability to do

so? This study has therefore been an opportunity to explore such questions. Agency, and more specifically teacher agency, forms the foundational construct that guided this study, both methodologically and analytically, as I explored how teachers navigate the CAPS curriculum structure during their teaching practices, with a view to illuminating their teacher agency, or lack thereof.

1.7.2. Policy shifts

1.7.2.1. CAPS: Curriculum bondage

Msibi and Mchunu (2013) stated that CAPS is a “teacher proof” curriculum that is misguided, and the Department of Education and the South African government should focus on ensuring that teachers’ voices are not lost and that they are provided with agency. A “teacher-proof” curriculum is designed in a cookbook fashion so that every teacher who uses the curriculum will obtain the same results. It is also designed to ensure that the teacher’s control on curriculum development is reduced.

They believe that the prescriptive, fast-paced nature of the CAPS curriculum does not consider the varied learning rates and abilities of learners and also being governed by strict time means that often learning that takes place is superficial.

Whilst many teachers and educational experts (Harrop-Allin&Kros, 2014; Msibi&Mchunu, 2013; Ramatlapana & Makonye, 2012) have criticised the authoritarian nature of the CAPS curriculum, the deeper question is whether teacher autonomy is restricted by the curriculum due to under-qualified, ill-qualified teachers or under-prepared teachers. These questions were the subject of my study as I explored what opportunities teachers have within the CAPS framework to exercise their agency as teachers, and if such opportunities do exist, how teachers use these opportunities.

1.7.3. Teacher professionalisation

Msibi and Mchunu (2013, p.21) explained teacher professionalism as “an ethical conviction from teachers in supporting, understanding and promoting learners who are diverse in their needs and aspirations, a commitment towards the advancement of the profession itself and the ability to master one’s own knowledge base, while simultaneously learning from others”. They maintained that teacher professionalism is directly linked to the curriculum which determines the role and function of the teacher in the classroom.

They advocated for teachers to be curriculum developers and professionals in their workplace as imposing a packaged curriculum (CAPS) will not address educational challenges that teachers face but would rather focus on restricting teacher autonomy and deprofessionalising teachers.

Teacher deprofessionalisation refers to the deskilling of teachers by reducing their role to technicians, following rigid directives rather than exercising professional discretion and judgement. The CAPS policy is an example of such rigid directives and can be viewed as a deprofessionalising opportunity imposed by the state. This study, therefore, attempted to explore whether teachers are, or are not being deprofessionalised through the CAPS school curriculum. Teacher agency has been linked to teacher professionalism and if CAPS is restrictive to the point of being a technician, teacher agency would be compromised. Hence, through this study I attempted to explore whether teachers do have agency within the CAPS curriculum, and if so, what are these agencies and how do teachers use these agencies in their teaching practices.

Msibi and Mchunu (2013) advocated for teacher professionalism to be prioritised. They highlighted the need for teachers to be provided with appropriate support and said that stakeholders should focus on skilling teachers and providing them with the necessary expertise to act as professionals. They believe that this is a key feature of educational transformation. Hence it is imperative that teachers preserve their professionalism to promote educational transformation. Hence, this exploratory study is crucial to inform us of the status of teacher professionalism within the CAPS curriculum framework.

1.8. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Samuel (2008) Force Field Model offered me a framework to understand how teachers mediate the various forces that operate within a school system; the model emphasises the need for teachers to be autonomous professionals within this force field. Samuel (2008) explained that there are various forces that “push and pull” teachers’ roles and identities in different directions. These forces include their biography, context, institutional setting and programmatic forces.

The focus of my exploratory study was specifically on biographical and programmatic forces. Biographical forces refer to a teacher’s background and their own personal life experiences which shape their identity and inform their practices. Teachers carry with them

their identities, experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes and biases. This gives them meaning as individuals and is a means of understanding the learners that they teach. Teachers' identities are linked to their agency as individuals and ultimately influence their practices and the decisions that they make. I use teachers' narratives as a way of understanding the biographical forces that shape their identity and how this influences the way in which they exercise agency.

The programmatic forces refer to curriculum interventions. This includes sequencing, content/concepts and the overall path that the practice of teaching and learning should follow. This force appears in everyday practices and helps re-enforce the quality and nature of teaching and learning that take place in schools. Programmatic forces may have a positive or negative impact on a teacher. In my study, the CAPS curriculum served as a programmatic force to provide insights into how teachers feel about the restrictions and challenges that they face with curriculum implementation. I also gained an understanding of how this force influences my participants' classroom practices.

1.9. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this study I made use of the qualitative method that is situated within an interpretive paradigm. "Qualitative research typically studies people or systems by interacting with and observing the participants in their natural environment (in situ) and focusing on their meanings and interpretations.... The emphasis is on the quality and depth of information" (Nieuwenhuis, 2010, p.51). In this study I observed teachers in their natural settings, that is, their classroom, to understand how they make sense of their teaching practices, and how they account for what they are doing in their classroom, hence the adoption of qualitative study. This is a suitable approach because I, as an interpretivist researcher, intended to gain an understanding of the participants' personal and professional lives by engaging with them.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p.21) explained that the interpretive paradigm is "characterized by a concern for the individual, aims to understand from within the subjective world of human experience, focuses on actions to ascertain the intentions of actors to share experiences". My study aimed to focus on understanding my participants, their experiences and how they make meaning; an interpretive paradigm was therefore suitable.

I selected a case study approach as my research methodology as I believed that it would help me generate rich, thick data on my participants as they accounted for their teaching practices in their respective classrooms. A case study approach also provides opportunities for the researcher to get close to the participants in the study and to meaningfully converse and engage with them as a means to illicit valuable data. Cohen et al. (2011, p.81) explained that “Case studies represent reality and give a sense of being there”. Therefore, selecting a case study approach of generating data provided opportunities to meet participants in their natural setting and respective classrooms. It also allowed for me to gain a wide range of information and data by being immersed in the lives and realities of the participants. Furthermore, opting for a case study approach also provided me with opportunities to work with the selected maths teachers in close proximity and thereby adding a human element to the study. It also created numerous opportunities for the researcher and participants to engage meaningfully with face-to-face discussions and interviews about the focus of the study and other relevant issues pertaining to the study.

1.10. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

This study utilised participants that have been in the field of education for more than two decades. It would therefore not provide much clarity or insight to teachers that have just entered the profession as well as novice teachers. It was also a small scale study that has only been able to illuminate and highlight issues and ideas that some maths teachers have raised and their experiences/perceptions of implementing the CAPS curriculum.

As I am also a maths teacher I am aware of some of the biases and opinions that I may hold and I therefore am unable to guarantee the effect this may have unintentionally had during the generation of data. Furthermore, the views that are expressed in this study are merely the views of some maths teachers and have excluded the voices and views of department officials, maths subject advisors, policy makers and various other educationists. Therefore it is comprised of only the views and opinions expressed by micro-level players in education and it excludes views and the vision of macro-level players.

1.11. OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The following is an outline of my study which was to explore teacher agency within the context of a prescribed school curriculum. My dissertation consists of five chapters.

Chapter 1 has set the scene and introduced my study. It offered an explanation as to why this study was conducted and the significance of the study to me. I explained the focus and purpose of the study and provided the research questions. I also provided a review of related literature and discussed the theoretical framework and research methodology.

Chapter 2 provides a literature landscape for the study and discusses the theoretical framework.

Chapter 3 highlights the research design and the methodology selected for the study.

Chapter 4 provides the detailed findings and analysis of the data.

Chapter 5 concludes the study and provides a summative understanding of my entire understanding of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL LANDSCAPE

2.1. INTRODUCTION

“Rather than agents of change, it is increasingly evident that many directives from central authorities frame teachers as agents to be changed (Samuel, 2008, p.6).

This chapter provides a synthesis of selected national and international literature on curriculum genesis within the South African education system since democracy, teacher professionalisation and teacher agency as a means of understanding the relationship that exists between teacher autonomy and a prescribed school curriculum. The key concepts under review were the main focus of this research study and the chosen focal areas that arose as a result of the critical research questions of this study which was directed at understanding teacher agency within a prescriptive state school curriculum. The theme of this literature review is to explore and understand the agency that teachers possess within the CAPS framework of education.

The first section of this chapter focuses on school curriculum genesis in South Africa and highlights various policy changes that have taken place in post-apartheid South Africa. The South African school system has experienced several iterations of curriculum reforms since 1998 with the latest being the CAPS curriculum implemented in 2012. The genesis to CAPS would provide an analysis of what issues were identified, critiqued or strengthened and how these issues influenced the refinement of the school curriculum and the outcomes of these refinements. The CAPS curriculum has been noted for its restrictive attribute and this study attempted to explore how this restrictive curriculum is experienced by teachers.

The first section of this chapter focuses on curriculum genesis in South Africa and highlights various policy changes that have taken place in post-apartheid South Africa. The second section describes research that focused on teacher professionalisation. This has been explored as a means of understanding the decision-making powers and freedom teachers possess within CAPS to act in the best interest of learners and to gauge if teachers are provided with adequate opportunities to utilise their professional discretion during the process of teaching and learning.

The third section seeks to understand the concept of teacher agency. Teacher agency has been reviewed as policy shifts in South Africa have had various impacts on the degree of agency that teachers experience within their classrooms. With the transition to CAPS, the researcher aimed at understanding if teacher agency has been enhanced or restricted with the introduction of this educational innovation. The final section of this chapter outlines the theoretical framework for the study.

2.2. SCHOOL CURRICULUM GENESIS WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL SYSTEM SINCE DEMOCRACY

Political changes that occurred in South Africa in 1994 contributed to the introduction of a new education system in 1997 known as Curriculum 2005 (C2005). Cross, Mungadi and Rouhani (2002, p.171) explained that “the South African government has placed emphasis on the introduction of policies and mechanisms aimed at redressing the legacy of a racially and ethnically fragmented, dysfunctional and unequal education system inherited from apartheid”. Outcomes based education (OBE) was the underlying philosophy behind C2005. Botha (2002) highlighted that OBE promised to improve the quality of education in South Africa, to create a learner-centred ethos and to ensure that schools were more accountable and responsible in ensuring success and effectiveness. Msibi and Mchunu (2013) identified key features of OBE which include an emphasis on knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, the replacement of school subjects with learning areas, the teacher as a curriculum designer, and the promotion of learner-centred pedagogy. Teachers under this new curriculum had to change the way they taught and acquire new teaching strategies/methods.

OBE has its roots in the United States of America and Australia and includes the work of Tyler and Bloom. Fakier and Waghid (2004, p.55) maintained that “OBE assumes that all students have the capacity to learn and succeed whether gifted, disabled or in-between”. This meant that learners who were previously disadvantaged by apartheid education now had equal opportunities to succeed and to be provided with a higher quality of education. Despite C2005 having high expectations among the public and promising equal learning opportunities for a country that had been previously segregated, it failed to deliver the promises to its nation since inception.

Jansen (1998), Botha (2002) and Cross et al. (2002) affirmed that curriculum reform in South Africa, namely OBE, was politically charged and did not take into consideration

classroom realities and therefore cannot be successful or transformational. Jansen (1998) found many criticisms of OBE and outlined ten major reasons why OBE would have a negative impact on South African schools. Some of his main concerns were that the language associated with OBE was too complex which made meaning inaccessible for most teachers. Furthermore, OBE increased the administrative tasks of teachers, trivialised curriculum content and required the training and retraining of teachers; yet no adequate support, guidance and training had been provided to teachers.

Ramatlapana and Makonye (2013) explained that teachers were provided with too much freedom and flexibility when teaching the curriculum. They had the freedom to design the curriculum and were free to teach as they saw fit. The authors contended that “this freedom seemed counter-productive as learners constantly performed poorly in national school assessments and also international comparison achievement tests” (p.8). The freedom and autonomy provided to teachers in this regard seemed to have negatively impacted on the quality of teaching and learning that took place and failed to address educational challenges and inequalities that had been created through an apartheid dispensation. Botha (2002) contended that OBE seemed both ambitious and visionary, but not realistic.

C2005, a quick fix in educational transformation, very quickly began exposing its numerous cracks and flaws, thus requiring the attention of the Department of Education. As a result of the criticisms highlighted, Curriculum 2005 was reviewed by a Committee led by Linda Chrisholm. They found that C2005 had far too many challenges and was unable to fulfil the expectations of our nation. This gave rise to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS).

2.2.1. RNCS – Reinventing the curriculum

The review of C2005 in 2000 led to the establishment of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) in 2002. The revised curriculum addressed many of the deficiencies of C2005. Chrisholm (2005a, p.87) highlighted the following:

The Review Committee proposed the introduction of a revised curriculum structure supported by changes in teacher orientation and training, learning, support materials and the organisation, resourcing and staffing of curriculum structures and functions in national and provincial education to address these issues. Specifically it recommended a smaller number of learning areas, including the reintroduction of History and the development of a

National Curriculum Statement which would promote conceptual coherence, have a clear structure and be written in clear language, and design and promote the values of a society striving towards social justice, equity and development through the development of creative, critical and problem-solving individuals.

The Revised National Curriculum Statement was aimed at introducing a system of egalitarian pedagogy in South Africa that was rights-orientated and outcomes based. Msila (2007, p.151) explained that “the goals of this system are to create a new South African identity that encompasses critical consciousness, to transform South African society, to promote democracy and to magnify learner involvement in education”. This is therefore closely aligned to the South African Constitution. The RNCS also promoted the new roles that teachers were required to play in education. These roles included being mediators of learning, interpreters and designers of Learning Programmes and material, leaders, administrators and managers, scholars, researchers and lifelong learners, community members, citizens, and pastors, assessors and Learning Area of Phase Specialists (DoE, 2002, p.3). These roles were dramatically different from those under apartheid education and seemed very unrealistic as they did not take into account contextual realities and the impracticalness of this innovation.

Despite what it promised to deliver, the RNCS failed to solve the crisis in education that plagued South Africa and after numerous criticisms the Minister of Basic Education announced the end of RNCS and introduced a repackaged curriculum known as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS).

2.2.2. CAPS– Curriculum bondage

In 2010 the Minister of Basic Education announced the end to RNCS and the introduction of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) which was to be gradually implemented in the Foundation Phase in 2011 and then fully implemented in all grades in 2012. CAPS is a policy document that consists of a policy statement for learning and teaching in South African schools. It is applicable for Grades R to 12 and every subject in each grade has a comprehensive and detailed policy document that stipulates what teachers need to teach and assess on a grade-by-grade and subject-by-subject basis. Ramatlapana and Makonye (2013, p.8) maintained that “it appears that the CAPS curriculum is too prescriptive and encroaches on and restricts teachers’ professional autonomy”. They

criticised the restrictive nature of the CAPS curriculum as they believe that a *one-size fits all* curriculum is not appropriate or realistic for all learners.

Correspondingly, Msibi and Mchunu (2013) highlighted the following three problematic features of the CAPS curriculum:

- Work schedules that provide little leeway and stipulate the content and concepts that teachers need to cover. All learners are therefore expected to cover the same material, in the same term, in the same week across the country.
- Prescribed workbooks and textbooks that limit teacher agency in the classroom context.
- Content-driven policy documents and schedules that undermine teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and position teachers as deficit.

They explained that the introduction of a teacher-proof CAPS curriculum reduces the work of teachers to mere technicians and compromises teacher agency.

Harrop-Allin and Kros (2014), however, offered a differing perspective of the CAPS curriculum. Whilst highlighting that the CAPS curriculum is in fact rigid, they acknowledged the Department of Education's effort to provide a curriculum that can be followed by even poorly educated teachers. They explained that being told what to teach is actually a relief to many teachers as South Africa has an abundance of teachers whose own education is poor due to being educated under Bantu Education or Christian National Education.

Similarly, Jansen (2001) addressed the concept of teacher identities and highlighted the disconnect between policy images and the personal identities of teachers. He maintained, more than a decade and a half ago, that if teachers were provided with a voice for policy change and greater agency, they would be inefficient and incapable of acting as they would not know what to do. He explained that many teachers in South Africa lack proper training and their own knowledge base and skill set are poor, and therefore they are restricted professionals.

The prescriptive nature of the CAPS curriculum and the strict monitoring of implementation by government and department officials ensure a high degree of teacher

accountability. Sloan (2006, p.119) noted the positive aspects of accountability. He maintained that “accountability has helped, in some cases forced, teachers to deliver more focused, higher-quality, more equitable instruction”. I agree with his inference yet I believe that a teacher can only be truly accountable to a policy if they have been involved in its development. Similarly, Bantwini (2010, p.90) explained that “teacher involvement in the conceptual and development stages of the reforms is advised. This will help them understand the fundamentals of the new curriculum, and its necessity as well as the expected outcomes”. He contended that in a South African context a group of teachers can be appointed to liaise between them and policy makers. This will result in teachers taking ownership of the new reform and provide autonomy. Teachers in this regard are actively involved.

Consequently, Kridel (2010) highlighted the idea that teachers are both central and an integral part of the curriculum. According to Kridel (2010), the teacher as curriculum maker is a concept that was introduced to education by Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin in 1990. It is based on the assumption that a classroom is a place in which teachers are able to utilise their professional discretion to negotiate the curriculum. This is done to ensure that the diverse needs of learners are catered for and the requirements of the curriculum are being satisfied.

Teachers in this regard are active agents that possess the expertise, skills and capacity as professionals to manoeuvre the curriculum to fit their particular context ensuring that they do not stray from curricular requirements. Thus teachers are autonomous individuals that are not restricted or governed by the curriculum.

In South Africa over the last two decades, there have been many policies and curricular changes implemented to bring about educational reform and transformation. As explained by Jansen (2001), a serious problem facing educational change is the disconnect between policy visions and practical realities in schools and classrooms in South Africa.

CAPS specifically has deprofessionalised teachers by providing them with a teacher proof curriculum that is prescriptive and oppressive. This has resulted in the loss of teacher voice and autonomy. As highlighted by Msibi and Mchunu (2013), designing and implementing CAPS as a “teacher proof” curriculum simply adds to the dysfunction and does not sufficiently address educational challenges faced in South Africa.

I believe that teachers are not merely curriculum implementers but are central to the curriculum and therefore should have some decision-making powers to adapt and negotiate the curriculum based on their context. Teacher agency can be used as a tool for supporting the curriculum and ensuring that a high quality of teaching and learning takes place. These factors contribute to the development of teachers and an improvement and betterment in their practices. For the CAPS curriculum to reach its full potential and be a prosperous educational reform it has to be less prescriptive and allow for teachers to utilise their discretionary powers in implementation whilst promoting teacher autonomy.

2.3. TEACHER PROFESSIONALISATION

South Africa's first democratically elected government had the daunting and challenging task of transforming apartheid education from a discriminatory and authoritarian education system to an inclusive and equal one. In order to bring about educational change, numerous curricular policies have been implemented over the last two decades. These policies have required a significant shift to extended professionalism (Harley, Barasa, Bertram, Mattson & Pillay, 2000), yet stakeholders have not provided teachers with the appropriate support and training to ensure that they are able to conduct themselves as competent individuals (Msibi&Mchunu, 2013). The skilling of teachers is a key feature of educational reform as it provides teachers with the necessary expertise to act as autonomous professionals and ensures that they are able to deal with evolving educational demands within the landscape of continuous change.

2.3.1. What is meant by teacher professionalisation?

Maxcy (1991, p.160) explains:

“Educational professionals ought to have the power to form directives for action with regard to problems arising out of the exercise of their skills and expertise. Teaching professionals ought to have the power to make policy and policy decisions. By professionalism, I have in mind power being placed in the hands of educators such that they may possess leadership in policy and decision making affecting learning in schools”.

Maxcy(1991) argued that teachers should have decision-making powers and the freedom and flexibility to act in the best interest of the learner. Maxcy described the teacher as an

autonomous individual that possesses the skills and capability to direct curriculum and policy practices.

Correspondingly, Webb (2002) conceptualised teacher autonomy as teacher power. He explained that teacher power ultimately refers to teachers' professional discretion and the exercise of professional autonomy which can be considered the foundation upon which to professionalise teaching. He advocated for teacher development initiatives that provide learning opportunities for teachers to help develop their professional discretion instead of eliminating and restricting their teacher power.

Similarly, Msibi and Mchunu (2013, p.21) explained teacher professionalism as “an ethical conviction from teachers in supporting, understanding and promoting learners who are diverse in their needs and aspirations, a commitment towards the advancement of the profession itself and the ability to master one's own knowledge base, while simultaneously learning from others”. They maintained that teacher professionalism is directly linked to the curriculum which determines the role and function of the teacher in the classroom. They advocated for teachers to be sufficiently trained in order to develop and maintain professional discretion which can be used to act in the best interest of the learner and to improve the quality of teaching and learning in South African schools.

Fullan (1993) explained that teacher professionalism is an untapped resource for radical improvement in education. He believes that continuous teacher development is essential.

As noted by various scholars and educational experts (Fullan, 1993; Harley et al., 2000; Webb, 2002; Msibi&Mchunu, 2013), teachers should have the freedom and competency required to exercise their professional discretion and act in the best interest of their learners as well as make judgements about teaching and learning. In order for South African teachers to become more professional, the necessary support and guidance needs to be provided by various stakeholders. The skilling of teachers is an important facet of educational reform and this can be done through teacher development initiatives.

2.3.2. Teacher development

Education is dynamic and the constant change in educational policies in South Africa leaves many teachers ill equipped or inadequately prepared to deal with challenges that so often present themselves in our complex classroom contexts. Teacher development is

central to any educational reform intended and can be utilised as a means of improving the quality of teaching and learning that takes place.

Teacher development can also be used as a means to better the practices of teachers and help with their personal growth and development which will ultimately enhance their autonomy.

Evans (2002, p.131) defined teacher development “as the process whereby teachers’ professionalism and/or professionalism may be considered to be enhanced”. She explained that enhancing professional development in teachers will foster the proficiency of their instruction and practices as well as promote learner achievement. This is in fact the change in education that we hope to achieve.

Bell and Gilbert (1994) viewed teacher development as teachers learning rather than teachers changing. Learning is referred to as the development of beliefs, ideas, feelings and classroom practices. Learning is seen as a process of inquiry. They advocated for teacher development initiatives that focus on teacher learning as opposed to teacher change. They believe that the main purpose of teacher development is empowerment. Teachers need to feel liberated and to take ownership of their development as well as to have autonomy in their daily practices.

New policies and curriculum changes impact on the teaching and learning that take place in schools as well as the context under which teachers find themselves. In order for teachers to cope with the demands and challenges that they face, there is a need for teacher development. As Knight (2002, p.230) explained, “Continuing professional development is needed because initial teacher education cannot contain all of the propositional knowledge that is needed and certainly not that procedural, ‘how to’ knowledge which grows in practice”. Clearly there is a need for ongoing teacher development that supports teachers and helps them develop the necessary skills and competencies required to be autonomous professionals.

Msibi and Mchunu (2013, p.31) argued that “professionalism is at the heart of our problems, and that unless we address this, our education system will likely not to improve”. Stakeholders therefore need to provide opportunities for teachers to develop and enhance their autonomy as well as use their professional discretion for managing their classrooms and dealing with policy shifts within the landscape of continuous change. This

is ultimately a progressive way forward as we professionalise teachers and transform our education system.

2.3.3. A shift from managerial professionalism to democratic professionalism

Policy changes in South Africa have resulted in the Department of Basic Education conducting workshops in an attempt to provide guidance to teachers with the implementation of educational innovations. Workshops often receive harsh criticism as they usually take place over a short period of time, are content driven, lack follow up and do not give teachers time to process the concepts/content covered. This results in the unlikelihood of a change or advancement in practice (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Andree, Richardson & Ophanos, 2009).

These workshops employ the cascade model of learning, which is classified as managerial professionalism. Day and Sachs (2004, p.6) highlighted managerial professionalism to be “system driven, externally regulated, driven by a reform agenda, having a political end and seeking control and compliance”. This type of training is aimed at strengthening the governmentality mode practised by stakeholders and is ultimately ineffective as teacher learning is not being promoted but rather teacher compliance is promoted.

What is needed however is democratic professionalism. Day and Sachs (2004, p.7) described democratic professionalism as “profession driven, moving beyond the reform agenda, collegial, promoting activism and emphasising collaboration”. This type of professionalism promotes collaboration and co-operation between teachers and other educational stakeholders (teachers, learners, stakeholders, community members, etc.). Teachers have a responsibility that goes beyond the classroom and they are encouraged to contribute towards the school, students and community. When collaborative cultures are created teachers are able to network with one another and form professional learning communities.

Shulman (1997, p.515) explained that “when teachers collaborate they can work together in ways that scaffold and support each other’s learning and in ways that supplement each other’s knowledge”. Collaboration ensures that the tradition of teachers working in isolation and in silence no longer takes place. Rather, the focus shifts to teachers working together collectively to achieve common goals. Teachers receive support, encouragement and advice from one another. Discussion of challenges facing teaching and learning and

how they can be overcome forms part of teacher collaboration and teachers are able to develop autonomy and work as professionals.

In a democratic nation there is a strong need for democratic professionalism which can be used to bridge the gap between policy makers and practitioners. Teacher development is an effective tool for encouraging teacher learning, teacher empowerment, increasing motivation/morale, and elevating the professionalisation of teachers. These factors play a critical role in educational transformation. Promoting teacher professionalisation should be a priority of policy makers as bureaucratic forms of control merely add to the dysfunction and disconnect. Pearson and Moomaw (2005, p.39) profoundly explained “teachers must have the freedom to prescribe the best treatment for their students as doctors/lawyers do for their patients/clients; and the freedom to do such has been defined by some as teacher autonomy” . Autonomy is ultimately the true mark of a professional and should therefore be a key feature of educational transformation in our country.

2.4. THEORISING AGENCY

Lipponen and Kumpulainen (2011, p.812) explained the idea that education should support people to develop their agency is a longstanding assumption in Western societies. They defined agency “as the capacity to initiate purposeful action that implies will, autonomy, freedom and choice”.

Similarly, Rose(2005) described agency as the extent to which a person feels in control of their actions. Agency thus ensures that individuals have the freedom to make choices and have the capacity to act. Robinson (2012, p.233) maintained that “agency seems to be about internalising choices, about analysing and reflecting, based on past experiences and future trajectories”. Agency in this regard therefore seems to incorporate reflexivity, the self and taking action.

Priestley, et al. (2012, p.3) view agency as something that people do as opposed to something that people have. They contended that “viewing agency in such terms help us to understand how humans are able to be reflexive and creative, acting counter to societal constraints, but also how individuals are enabled and constrained by their social and material environments”.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) identified three dimensions of agency, the iterative, the projective and the practical evaluative which constitute the chordal triad of agency. The iterative element of agency is about making choices based on past experiences. The projective element is concerned with making choices based on future trajectories, achievements and concerns. The practical evaluative focuses on making a choice from contrasting trajectories in response to demands, predicaments and uncertainty. Agency is consequently temporal and spatial as it is linked to the past, present and future. According to Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p.194), “agency is always a dialogical process by and within collectively organized contexts of action”. Agency is therefore a combination of time and context in this view.

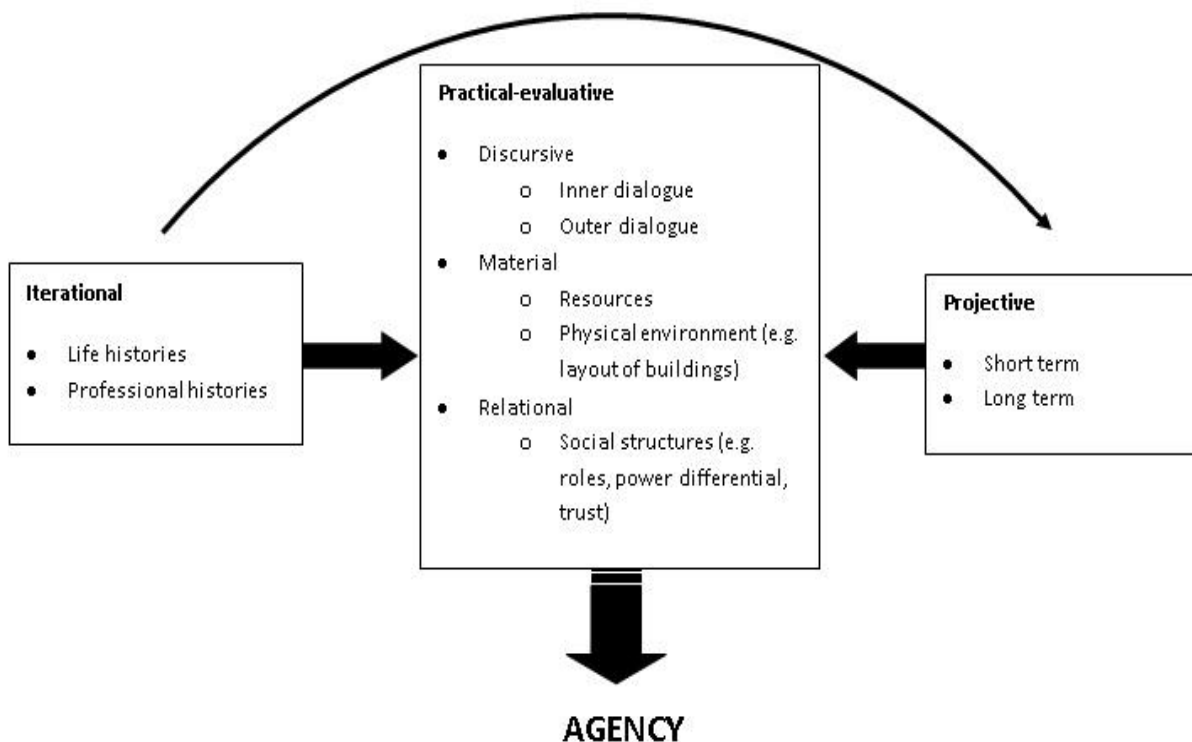


Figure 2.1: The chordal triad of agency

Source: Adapted by Priestly, Biesta and Robinson, 2012.

2.4.1. Teacher agency

Agency can also be related to education and specifically to teachers. Campbell (2012, p.183) defines teacher agency as “The capacity of teachers to use their professional discretion in their pedagogical and curricular practices, alongside their accountability to the

state, which generally maintains the overall authority for educational policy”. In short, teacher agency provides teachers with the freedom and flexibility to skilfully use their expertise to make decisions and informed judgements regarding teaching and learning within a framework that guides their practices. Teachers do not deviate from educational policies or innovations but rather find ways to support.

Correspondingly, Hilferty (2008, p.167) explained that “teacher agency refers to the power of teachers (both individually and collectively) to actively and purposefully direct their own working lives within structurally determined limits”. Agency in this regard is constructed through the individual and collective action of teachers as they negotiate within the parameters defined by structures and cultures. Similarly, Lawson (2004) advocated for the development of critical autonomy. He explained this as an essential component of developing teacher autonomy and empowerment. He contended that critical autonomy is “the ability to think for one’s self, the ability to use theory as a guide to action, and crucially, the ability to evaluate the circumstances of one’s life, including the structural forces around us” (p.4).

Fleming (1998, p.20) explained that “teacher autonomy is commonly used to describe the degree to which teachers make independent curriculum decisions, especially in the context of sweeping societal change and government policy initiatives”. Teacher autonomy in this regard rests upon the assumption that teachers have the ability to make informed decisions about the curriculum by using their personal initiative and intellectual engagement.

Long and Lampen (2014, p.4) described teacher agency as “the dynamic competence of human beings, and here, of teachers to respond to needs in their environment, the classroom and the school environment”. They believe that teacher agency is a “keystone” for preparing teachers to deal with their multiple roles and challenges faced in education. I concur with their sentiments as I believe that providing teachers with agency is an essential component for quality education.

Pantić (2014) identified four defining components of teacher agency. These comprise a sense of moral purpose, competence, autonomy and reflexivity. She advocated for teacher agency as she believes that teachers possess the expertise and capability to make decisions about their professional practices and wellbeing of their learners.

As highlighted by numerous authors and educational experts (Campbell, 2012; Hilferty, 2008; Lawson, 2004; Fleming, 1998; Long & Lampen, 2014, Pantić, 2014), agency is in fact an essential component of teachers' professional lives and teachers should ultimately be provided with the freedom and flexibility to make decisions regarding the curriculum and the teaching and learning that take place in their diverse contexts. Teachers require a greater degree of agency within the CAPS curriculum and to be provided with greater opportunities to freely make decisions about teaching and learning as ultimately they are responsible for educating learners in their respective schools. Teachers therefore need to be able to negotiate and adapt the curriculum to suit the individual needs of their learners as well as take into consideration their unique context in order for quality education. Teachers are key players during the learning process and transfer of knowledge and information and should therefore be treated as professionals capable of making informed choices based on assessing situations and evaluating their context.

2.4.2. Teacher agency within a South African context

South Africa has experienced numerous shifts in policy and practice over the last two decades. These policies have had a significant impact on the degree of agency that teachers have in their various classrooms. The most recent policy revision is the transition from National Curriculum Statement (NCS) to Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) that was introduced in 2012. CAPS is notably a highly structured policy in terms of what to teach and how to assess. This policy has arguably restricted teacher agency and limited the autonomy of teachers in South Africa. The CAPS curriculum was introduced as a curriculum reform targeted at going "back to basics" to ensure that challenges faced by previous innovations are rectified and that simplifying the curriculum would address some of the challenges faced in our education system (Harrop-Allin & Kros, 2014).

Msibi and Mchunu (2013) stated that CAPS is a "teacher proof" curriculum that is misguided, and the Department of Education and the South African government should focus on ensuring that teachers' voices are not lost, that they are provided with agency. They believe that the prescriptive, fast-paced nature of the CAPS curriculum does not consider the varied learning rates and abilities of learners and being governed by strict time means that often learning that takes place is superficial. They further added that limiting the autonomy of teachers will ultimately not improve the state of education in South Africa but simply add to the dysfunction.

Correspondingly, Ramatlapana and Makonye (2012) highlighted that the CAPS curriculum is too dictatorial and demands uniformity in the form of sequencing of concepts, time allocation, textbooks, workbooks and standardised testing (Annual National Assessment). They explained that this uniformity is strictly monitored by government officials, which compromises teacher autonomy. They contend that “Quality education is enhanced through respecting and taking into concern the tensions teachers face such as their professional autonomy as they implement the curriculum” (p.24). Therefore, teacher autonomy is depicted as a key feature of educational transformation.

While Msibi and Mchunu (2013) and Ramatlapana and Makonye (2012) have argued for teachers’ voices and agencies in the school curriculum, others (Jansen, 2001; Harrop-Allin&Kros, 2014) are of the view that because of the poor educational background of a large number of teachers in South Africa, they are not able to make curriculum decisions. They thus suggest that a compromise should be a way for the South Africa schooling system, where teachers who can and are able to make agentic decisions be allowed to do so, while those that need the support are provided with the necessary curriculum guidance as in the case of the CAPS curriculum. Curriculum maturity is one possible way of promoting teacher agency within a restrictive curriculum, where, over time, teachers who are dependent upon curriculum structure would then develop their agentic competence within a curriculum framework that is considered to be restrictive.

Various literature sources on the CAPS curriculum have highlighted the idea that this curricular reform is indeed restrictive and compromises teacher agency and autonomy. However, what has been noted is the Department of Education’s realisation that many teachers in South Africa require a curriculum that is teacher-proof and presented in a cookbook fashion. The focus should now be on professionalising teachers as a platform for developing their agency.

2.4.3. Structures and cultures as an influence on teacher agency

Agency is directly linked to structures (rules, resources) and cultures (values and relationships). Pantić (2014) stated that “Agency depends on structures and cultures which can either foster or suspend it, but also contributes to the elaboration (transformation or reproduction) over time”. Agency is therefore shaped by structures and cultures, which either enable or constrain it.

Similarly, Priestley, et al. (2012, p.197) explained that “Agency can be understood in an ecological way that is strongly connected to the contextual conditions within which it is achieved and not merely a capacity or possession of the individual”. They advocated that agency is not merely a person’s capacity to act but rather is connected to the environment and context which is a determining force.

When linked to the CAPS curriculum which is in fact a structure, teachers can ultimately exercise very little self-government as there are clear guidelines and demands that need to be fulfilled (Ramatlana & Makonye, 2012). This structure therefore constrains teacher agency as teachers possess limited decision-making powers and are required to follow rigid directives that are laid out in the form of policy documents, annual teaching plans, standardised tests (ANA) as well as workbooks. This leaves little room for the teacher to be autonomous or to have the freedom to move away from the prescribed guidelines. It is therefore important to consider how structures and cultures can effectively support teacher agency and to what extent.

2.4.4. Collaboration as a way of developing teacher agency

Pantić (2014) highlighted that agency is always collective. She added that collaboration is therefore essential and, this allows teachers to take responsibility for improved learning. She suggested the formation of communities of practices or professional learning communities as a means for exchanging expertise, collective action, reflection and decision making. Brodie (2013) stated that professional learning communities are groups of teachers working collaboratively, sharing their ideas, expertise and teaching methods to improve teaching and learning. Teachers in professional learning communities provide one another with support and enhance one another’s learning.

Robinson (2012) explained that strong collegial relationships help teachers construct agency and negotiate policy requirements to fit practices. Teachers are therefore useful tools for one another and if stakeholders, policy makers and professional teacher organisations collaborate, education can be transformed.

Similarly, Long and Lampen(2014) advocated for collaboration and the formation of professional teacher organisations. They believe that these organisations play a crucial role in creating an atmosphere of trust and through this trust agency can be affirmed. They further added that “Professional teacher organizations are in a position to stimulate and

facilitate discussion among teacher educators in order to oppose fragmentation and enhance coordination from within the community of teacher educators”. They believe that in this way teachers can maintain their autonomy and be both proactive and adaptive to needs and changes. Ketelaar, Beijaard, Boshuizen and Den Brok (2012) further added that collaboration can help prevent teachers from ending up on an island in their schools where nobody can actually reach them.

These contributions by the above mentioned researchers suggest that teacher agency is a social competence, influenced by not only time and context, but also by collaboration amongst peers. The collaboration reinforces shapes, contextualises and builds confidence in teachers to act and account as agentic professionals, even within curriculum structures and processes.

2.4.5. Teacher identity

Lawler (2008) explained that people have multiple identities because they take on many different roles (mother, wife, and teacher) simultaneously. He further added that whilst a group of people may identify as being teachers, they are all still unique as they all lead very different lives. Thus no two teachers can be exactly the same. Given that, teachers in South Africa have very contrasting identities that impact on their meaning making with regard to their work.

Samuel (2008, p.9) explained that “the identity of teachers is a kaleidoscope of many permutations: race, class, gender, language, age and stage of career”. He further added that no uniform identity of being a teacher is therefore possible. Correspondingly, Jansen (2001) explained that teachers are not the same. He organised his conception of teacher identities around three specific categories that are unique to each individual teacher. He stated that “teacher identities could be described as the way teachers feel about themselves professionally, emotionally, and politically given the conditions of their work” (p.242).

The professional basis of teacher identity, according to Jansen (2001), refers to teachers understanding their capacity to teach which is based on their subject matter competence, training, and qualifications. The emotional basis refers to the teachers’ capacity to endure the emotional demands made as well as pressures and stresses that occur within the profession. The political basis is determined by how teachers act on their values, morals, backgrounds, beliefs and professional interests within the context of continuous change.

These issues are pertinent given the current conditions that practising teachers in South Africa face. Lawler (2008) explained that expecting teachers to implement new policies, and to take on new/different roles and understanding, ignores the fact that teachers need to first shift their own identities and understanding of who they are, and their beliefs about teaching and learning. When considering the CAPS curriculum, teachers' work has become intensified as they familiarise themselves with the contents of the policy document, annual teaching plan and assessments. As previously noted, the CAPS curriculum is in fact prescriptive in terms of policy and pedagogy. Furthermore, this shift in policy has failed to consider the various identities of teachers and has impeded the professionalism of teachers as they lack autonomy within their classroom practices.

Jita and Vandeyar (2006) highlighted the gap in policy and practice that exists in many South African schools. They explained this as “the disjuncture between the demands that policy makes on teachers and the personal identities of these teachers with regard to their work” (p.41). This means that identity ultimately becomes a balancing act for teachers as they juggle agency, institutional regulations and their own teaching practices. Policy images should ultimately focus on considering various/multiple teacher identities, as opposed to romanticising the notion of an “ideal teacher”, as by doing so teachers can become emancipated agents of change.

2.5. THEORETICAL LANDSCAPE: THE FORCE FIELD MODEL

The focus of this study was to explore teacher agency within the context of a prescribed school curriculum. Thus it was necessary to use a theoretical framework that would enable this study questions to be answered. While theoretical models on agency and teacher agency do exist (see Section 2.3), the focus of this study did not specifically fall on teacher agency. Rather the focus was on teachers' experiences of teaching within a restricted curriculum, that of CAPS, thereby shifting the emphasis to explaining how teachers experience this curriculum and through this explanation, how it influenced their teacher agency. Hence a more teacher experiential theoretical module seemed more appropriate for this study. Samuel's (2008) Force Field Model was therefore, selected as the base theoretical model that guided this study. This section describes Samuel's (2008) Force Field Model which offered a framework to understand how teachers mediate the various forces that operate within a school system and the model emphasises the need for teachers to be autonomous professionals within this force field.

Samuel (2008) explained that there are various forces that “push and pull” teachers’ roles and identities in different directions. These forces include an individual’s biography, context, institutional setting and programmatic forces. The Force Field Model provided the scope of understanding how various forces impinge on the autonomy of teachers within their working environment. My study explored and understood how teachers use their agency in mediating the restrictions experienced in implementing a prescribed school curriculum and therefore drew on literature and theory as espoused by Samuel (2008).

Samuel (2008) explained that the various forces that push and pull teacher identities have ideological and theoretical positions about what teachers’ roles and identities should be. He identified four key forces that impact on teachers, roles, namely biographical, contextual, institutional and programmatic forces. Biographical forces refer to the personal lived experiences of teaching and learning that the individual has experienced. These forces also consist of racial, cultural, religious and social experiences/settings where teaching and learning were negotiated. Teachers therefore bring in experiences via their biographical history. Samuel (2008) highlighted that the contextual force incorporates the macro-social, political and cultural environment in which teachers find themselves. Context plays a major role in determining the agency of the teacher as it determines whether the autonomy of the teacher is strengthened or compromised.

Samuel (2008:13) explained that institutional forces come from the “lived biography of certain institutional settings”. He further explained that teachers either live or learn within certain institutional settings which are inspired by the vibe and ethos of the institution and this therefore impacts on their self-concept, role and identity. The programmatic forces according to Samuel are interpreted as a “curriculum intervention force” that constitutes the teaching and learning of the curriculum as well as the sequence, content and direction of practices. This force can positively or negatively influence the teacher and occurs in everyday teaching practices.

I have further added a fifth dimension to Samuels’s existing model and propose that the professional force be considered. The professional force refers to the teacher’s own professional training and content knowledge which ultimately impacts on the identity of the teacher and can be seen as a force that either impedes or enhances their professional autonomy.

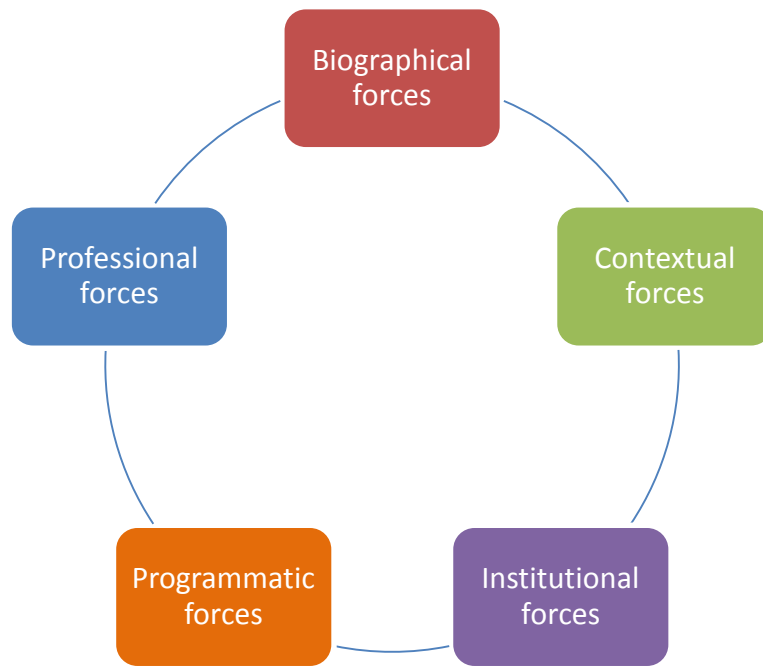


Figure 2.2: The Force Field Model

Source: Adapted from Samuel, 2008.

As the study was located within an interpretive paradigm, this amended model helped me understand how teachers in the study were able to negotiate the various forces within the school and classroom setting. Therefore, the dimensions in Samuel’s (2008) Force Field Model allowed for the use of a case study approach as it assisted me in gaining a multidimensional understanding of the participants’ experiences. The case study approach helped me explore teachers’ experiences of implementing the CAPS curriculum and provided me with a holistic understanding of their individual situations. It ensured that the participants’ individual experiences and understanding of the phenomena were clearly expressed and that through the interview process their voices were heard and I was able to draw from their realities.

2.6. CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed in this chapter has illustrated the need for teachers to be provided with opportunities to exercise their agency as they are in the centre of the force field. It also draws attention to the fact that the curriculum, teacher professionalisation and teacher agency constitute teachers’ daily experiences and classroom realities.

With the literature review as the background for this study I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers have engaged with the CAPS curriculum and the degree to

which teachers use their agency when dealing with the demands of curricular and educational challenges that present themselves in a transforming South African context.

The following chapter provides a detailed discussion of the research methodology employed for this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to explore and understand the agency that teachers have within the CAPS framework for education. I examined teachers' experiences of implementing the CAPS curriculum and explored the various ways that teachers use their agency in mediating the restrictions experienced in implementing the CAPS curriculum.

In the previous chapter, I provided a synthesis of literature on curriculum genesis, teacher professionalisation and teacher agency as a means to explore the relationship between teacher agency and a prescribed state curriculum. This chapter documents the research design and methodology employed for this study. It includes: the research design and the reasons for the selection of participants; data generation techniques and strategies that were employed in this study and the instruments that were utilised as well as the process of data analysis and sampling. Thereafter, ethical consideration, trustworthiness and dependability issues are discussed. The shortcomings, limitations and significance of the study are addressed at the end of this chapter.

The three key research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are teachers' experiences of implementing the CAPS curriculum within school education?
2. What agency do teachers have within the CAPS framework for school education?
3. How do teachers use their agency, if at all, in mediating the restrictions experienced in implementing the CAPS curriculum?

The chapter commences with an explanation for the epistemological stance taken in this study. In brief, the study was located within an interpretivist epistemology, attempting to understand how teachers make sense of their daily teaching practices within the CAPS curriculum framework. The chapter then extends to present an account of the methodological decisions taken in producing the data and the reasoning behind these methodological decisions. The chapter concludes with a presentation of research ethics followed in producing the data and the limitations experienced through this data production process.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN FOR THE STUDY

Research design, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), is a blueprint for a research process to achieve a particular research purpose. It includes the epistemological stance taken by a researcher in researching a phenomenon, the methodology and methods of producing data for the study and the identification of the participants or source of information. The research design for this study is presented in the sections that follow.

3.3. EPISTEMOLOGICAL STANCE TAKEN IN THE STUDY

According to Cohen, et al. (2007), epistemology is associated with the nature and forms of knowledge and the assumptions thereof in producing such knowledge. Scotland (2012, p.9) explained that “epistemological assumptions are concerned with how knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated, in other words, what it means to know”. While acknowledging that there are several dominant epistemological stances in the knowledge production process, each with its own assumptions, concepts and processes, a particular vantage point allows one to explore a phenomenon through a particular lens that defines what that nature of knowledge is. In this study I took on an interpretivist paradigmatic stance in viewing the experience of teachers teaching a school curriculum within the CAPS framework.

My study, which aimed at exploring teacher agency within a prescribed school curriculum, lent itself to an interpretive paradigm. Creswell (2009, p.8) explained that “Interpretive methodology is directed at understanding phenomenon from an individual’s perspective, investigating interaction among individuals as well as the historical and cultural contexts which people inhabit”. Interpretive research focuses on what is meaningful and relevant to participants in the study and how those whom they study experience, perceive and interpret daily occurrences in their lives.

Cohen, et al. (2011) explained that the main tenet of interpretivism is to “understand, explain, and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants” (Cohen, et al., 2011, p.17). The interpretive paradigm is therefore aimed at understanding rather than explaining (Scotland, 2012). This type of research focuses on understanding things through the lens of the participants.

The interpretive paradigm was therefore a suitable choice as my study aimed at understanding the agency that teachers possess within implementing the CAPS curriculum

and the degree to which teachers are able to use their agency if at all, in dealing with curricular challenges and evolving educational demands. Cohen, et al. (2011) explained that the interpretive paradigm is characterised by a concern for the individual. The area of concern in my research design was the teacher. The interpretive paradigm also lends itself to a view of understanding “the world of human experience” and in this case I focused on understanding teachers’ experiences of implementing a prescribed school curriculum. This study further rests upon an ontological belief that humans have the ability to create meaning and make sense of their individual worlds as well as the assumption that both teachers and events that occur are in fact unique which results in the creation of multiple realities and interpretations of events (Neuman, 2006).

3.4. RESEARCH APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF TEACHERS TEACHING WITH A PRESCRIPTIVE CURRICULUM

Qualitative

Taking on an interpretivist epistemology for the study suggests that in order to understand the subject world and experiences of teachers, the research approach best favoured would be a naturalistic research. Naturalistic research is therefore qualitative in nature.

Merriam (2002, p.3) stated that “the key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world”. It is believed that the world or reality for that matter is not a fixed or measurable phenomenon, there are multiple realities and interpretations that exist. My research design followed a qualitative approach as it allowed for exploration and an understanding of the teacher and his/her experiences of teaching a school subject within a prescribed school curriculum. A qualitative design allowed me to understand my participants and how they perceive the world, and to listen to their views as a means of understanding their classroom practices and their methods of manoeuvring through the mist that is the CAPS curriculum. Since teachers were the subject of exploration within a particular context, the selection of an appropriate research methodology was crucial. There are several methodologies that one can select that would produce the kinds of data needed to understand the teachers’ experiences of teaching within a restrictive curriculum. Such methodologies include a case study methodology, an ethnographic study or a narrative inquiry methodology. I chose the case study methodology as the most appropriate research methodology for this study.

3.5. A CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY FOR RESEARCHING TEACHERS TEACHING WITHIN A RESTRICTIVE CURRICULUM

Crotty (1998, p.3) explained that “methodology is the strategy or plan of action which lies behind the choice and use of particular methods”. It accounts for more than just the choice of instruments that produce the data. It is philosophic, in that it has certain assumptions about the nature of knowledge and allows particular interpretations of the findings. Methods are more technical and are, therefore, the techniques and procedures used to collect information and process it into data (Crotty, 1998). The case study methodology was selected for this study because case studies allow one to explore a phenomenon in the context within which that phenomenon exists, that is, an exploration that allows one to understand the phenomenon as bounded by its contextual influences.

Bassey (1995, p.75) stated that “case studies are singulars, involving the systematic description of a unique situation, so as to bring out its characteristic features”. According to Bassey (1995), case studies are not used to make general conclusions or predictions about the schooling system or education but due to their descriptive nature they can be related to other situations. Case studies often present real people in real situations and are therefore easier to comprehend than abstract theories.

According to Cohen et al. (2011, p.106), “the purpose of a case-study is to probe deeply and to analyse intensively, the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life-cycle of the unit, with the view to establishing generalization about the wider population to which it belongs”. A case study methodology was deemed a suitable choice as it is typically used “when exploring an area where little is known or where you want to have a holistic understanding of the situation, phenomenon, episode, site, group or community” (Kumar, 2011, p.127). In this regard, the case study was a school, that of Aster Primary School, which afforded me an opportunity to engage with mathematics teachers and explore their experiences and perceptions of implementing the CAPS curriculum. I was able to probe teachers to find out their individual experiences and interpretations of the agency they possess, or lack thereof, when implementing a prescribed school curriculum and within the influences peculiar to that school, making it a bounded unit of exploration.

3.6. SAMPLING OF PARTICIPANTS FOR THE STUDY

I used purposive sampling for the selection of participants. Cohen, et al. (2011, p.156) explained this as “researchers hand-pick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality or possession of particular characteristics being sought. In this way, they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs”. In this study, I needed teachers who had taught across several school curriculum frameworks and who would thus be able to compare their teaching experiences with a view to illuminating the issues that are particular to teaching within a restricted curriculum. Having experienced several curriculum frameworks, these participants would be able to discern crucial information to assist me in understanding the teachers’ practices and feelings within a restrictive curriculum.

I decided to use three participants from my own environment that I am familiar with. Creswell (1998, p.11) highlighted the need to find participants “who are accessible and willing to provide information as well as those who can shed light on issues being explored”. Three teachers were deemed to be appropriate for a study of this scale as I sought for depth of information and relevance to my study. Having three teachers in my sample would ensure this level of depth of data. The selected teachers have the necessary knowledge, experience and expertise required to adequately answer each research question. Two of the teachers are experienced teachers who have taught across different school curriculum policies, and the third teacher has some managerial experience of school education and could provide some managerial discourses to understanding this phenomenon. The sampling of experienced teachers would ultimately elicit rich data as these teachers have the ability to speak confidently about their teaching experiences as a result of their wisdom and provide a deep well of data. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) explained that purposive sampling is done to increase the usefulness and benefit of the data that is generated in the sample. As a result, purposive sampling appeared to be a suitable choice and assisted in generating rich data.

Table 3.1: Biographical data of participants

TEACHER	QUALIFICATION	YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE
Shirley	Higher Education Diploma	24 years
Richard	Bachelor of Arts Degree in Human Movement Studies. Higher Education Diploma	23 years
Dean	Bachelor of Pedagogics in Commerce	25 years

3.7. DATA GENERATION PROCESS

Having identified the participants for the study, the next step was to establish the most appropriate means of producing relevant and deep data that would allow me to answer my research questions. I therefore selected three data generation methods to provide the depth of data required for understanding their teaching practices and the feelings of teaching within a restricted curriculum. These instruments include a descriptive essay, semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview.

3.7.1. Descriptive essays

McCarthy (1998, p.5) explained that “descriptive writing is a domain of writing that develops images through the use of precise sensory words”. Descriptive essays in this research study provided a clear representation of teachers’ experiences and communicated necessary details for the researcher.

Participants were asked to write a descriptive essay based on their illuminations (accounts) of their experiences in implementing the CAPS curriculum in their classrooms. Throughout the use of descriptive essays, participants presented their experience of teaching within a restrictive curriculum allowing them to determine what they wished to write about and how to write about their experiences. This essay served as a rich data source as it allowed the participants latitude to present their experiences in nuanced ways that captured their thoughts, feelings, struggles and their experiences in dealing with CAPS in their teaching practices. This helped participants to paint a clear picture for me and provided me with valuable insights into their classroom practices. I also chose to include a writing method for data production as some teachers are less articulate, a limitation noted through

interviews, as a means of data production. By affording the participants the opportunity to write down their thoughts, feelings, experiences and practices, this noted limitation in data production was minimised.

3.7.2. Semi-structured interviews

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p.118), interviewing is “one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand fellow humans”. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), semi-structured interviews involve pre-determined questions as well as allow for additional questioning, probing participants’ reasoning and interpretations. A friendly and relaxed atmosphere was created which allowed participants to respond fully and make meaningful contributions and valuable insights.

Each of the teachers was interviewed through a semi-structured process, where the leading questions were developed around three areas, the first being the views on the CAPS curriculum, the second on their experiences of teaching within the CAPS curriculum and their third on how they exercised agency within their teaching practices. The probing questions were to seek clarity and depth of information on their responses to these leading questions. The interviews also served to bring credibility of data for this study as it would be a second process of gaining insights into the phenomenon of teacher agency that the essay may not present.

I found semi-structured interviews an appropriate choice as, according to Maree and Pietersen (2010), participants were more likely to provide detailed responses and experiences which would ensure the generation of rich, thick data. This rich, thick data was made possible through the probing questions that sought for more details and to clarify information for analysis purposes. Teachers were asked to share their experiences, perceptions and opinions regarding the CAPS curriculum for maths as well as their concept and understanding of agency and how they are able to utilise it to mediate the various challenges and restrictions they faced when implementing the CAPS curriculum. All the interviews were voice-recorded after permission had been granted by the participants. This also provided me with an opportunity to gather biographical information about each participant.

3.7.3. Focus group interviews

According to Creswell (2005, p.215), “focus groups can be used to collect shared understandings from several individuals as well as to get the views from specific people”. Open dialogue can be used to elicit valuable information, and allow for participants to make meaningful contributions. The focus group interview facilitated an organised discussion around my research questions and teachers’ experiences. It also provided a suitable platform to further insights by participants as influenced through engagement with other participants. Each participant began the focus group interview by sharing their descriptive essay; this was used as a starting point of the discussion. Focus group interviews do have a tendency to influence other participants in their thinking, explication and review of their teaching practices that could relate to teacher agency. Teacher agency may not necessarily be an accessible concept to the teachers and the focus group may bring about a clearer understanding of this concept which will then provide a platform for the participants to think deeply and respond appropriately. The focus group interview is also an opportunity for participants to engage with their colleagues to discuss critical issues that affect their classroom practices, teaching and learning. This dialogue also exposes differing and similar viewpoints and can provide insights that may have not appeared in the semi-structured interviews. Focus group interviews were also voice recorded after permission had been sought from and granted by each participant.

Table 3.2: Data generation plan

Research question	Data generation method/ instrument	Participants and how selected	Data source	Anticipated analysis	Timeline
1. What are teachers’ experiences of implementing the CAPS curriculum within school education?	Descriptive essay	3x Primary school mathematics teachers. Purposive sampling.	Teachers	Thematic analysis	Each participant to write one descriptive essay. A two week period is given.

Research question	Data generation method/ instrument	Participants and how selected	Data source	Anticipated analysis	Timeline
2. What agency do teachers have within the CAPS framework for school education?	Semi-structured interviews	3x Primary school mathematics teachers. Purposive sampling.	Teachers	Narrative analysis	1x semi-structured interview per participant.
3. How do teachers use their agency in mediating the restrictions experienced in implementing the CAPS curriculum?	Focus group interviews	3x Primary school mathematics teachers. Purposive sampling.	Teachers	Thematic analysis	1x focus group interview.

3.8. ETHICS

Cohen, et al. (2011) pointed out that researchers should be mindful of the effect that their research has on their participants and that they have a social responsibility to safeguard the dignity of the participant/s. This would ensure that the research conducted was done so in an ethical manner. Before the data generation process commenced, I sought permission in writing from the gatekeeper of the institution as well as each participant in the study. The consent letters clearly stated the purpose of the study, name of the researcher, supervisor and necessary contact details. I treated the signed consent forms with the utmost care and discretion.

After ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Ethical Clearance Committee I then began the process of contacting each participant and confirmed their participation and permission to partake in my research study. After having explained the purpose and nature of the study, their rights as a participants and what their participation would involve, I presented them with the consent letter confirming my brief

explanation, after which they signed the consent return letter. The participants were then given the descriptive essays to write and were given two weeks to do this. The descriptive essays were then followed by an appointment date for an individual semi-structured interview regarding, date, time and venue. After all three semi-structured interviews had been concluded, participants were then contacted again and a date, time and venue was scheduled for the focus group interview.

Josselson (2007) explained that researchers are ethically bound to consider that a person's identity should not be revealed as this could tarnish their reputation or cause them distress. Bearing this in mind, my study has ensured the anonymity of the participants and the school as I have used pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality of all those involved in my study. Before the interview process commenced participants were informed verbally about their right to confidentiality and anonymity. They were also informed that their contribution to this study was also completely voluntary and that they were able to withdraw from the study at any point. I assured them that they had a right to privacy and allowed each participant to choose a pseudonym. I then explained to each participant that their contribution to the study was meant to obtain insights to their experiences and perceptions of implementing the CAPS curriculum and that their individual accounts were not used as a means of evaluation or supervision. I then personally conducted each interview to ensure quality of the data generated and to ensure that all the questions and probing followed according to plan.

My study did not focus on sensitive issues and did not elicit painful or traumatic memories or experiences for my participants. Participants were also informed that they did not have to answer any question/s that they did not feel comfortable with. I also ensured that the data generated from the interviews was private and participants were provided with opportunities to identify things that they may want to omit from the study. In order to encourage honesty I explained to each participant that the information that they would provide to this study would not be used for any other purpose.

Diener and Crandall (as cited in Cohen, et al., 2011, p.78) defined informed consent as “the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of the facts that would be likely to influence their decisions”. The principle of informed consent was applied for my study. Participants received consent letters that they were required to sign and were provided with opportunities to ask any questions that

they had about the study. I also asked for permission from each participant to audio record their interview responses. All of the participants willingly agreed to being recorded and they signed the informed consent forms.

All interviews in this study were then recorded and I transcribed them personally. It was not an easy task to find suitable times and venues for the interviews as many participants lead busy lives and have personal commitments. All interviews were conducted after the school day had ended and even though the participants were often tired, they used this platform to provide valuable insights and as a means to express their ideas and concerns about the state of education in the country.

3.9. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis in qualitative research refers to “the process of breaking up or segmenting the data into parts and reassembling the parts again into a coherent whole” (Boeije, 2009, p.76). Once the data generation process was completed I transcribed the audio recordings of each interview. At no point in the raw interview did I mention the name of the participant, I maintained their anonymity. Transcribed data from each interview was then analysed and categories that emerged were identified. Data that was irrelevant or did not pertain to my research focus was ignored. I revisited each individual transcript numerous times before identifying key ideas and themes and then proceeded to code them. According to Henning (2004, p.105), codes are “segments or units of meaning”. Once I had completed the process of coding, I grouped the information into four main categories. These included: the nature of the CAPS curriculum as experienced by teachers, opportunities that the CAPS curriculum provided for teachers, challenges teachers face with the implementation of CAPS, and how teachers feel. During this process I found that I had to constantly move back and forth between the raw data, the codes and the categories as new ideas were uncovered. I then drew conclusions, made arguments and offered explanations based on the claims of teachers.

3.10. TRUSTWORTHINESS AND DEPENDABILITY OF DATA

In any type of research that is done, the quest for quality is pursued. To ensure quality and trustworthiness in my study I used member checking. Creswell (2009, p.191) explained this as a process whereby “the final report or specific description or themes are taken back to the participants”. I ensured that the participants were involved in my study by ensuring

that they were actively involved in the ongoing process of data analysis and I checked with them to ensure that we were in agreement with my representations of their experiences. Triangulation took the form of using a variety of data generation methods which included descriptive essays, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews, which collectively assisted me in gaining a multifaceted perspective of my research focus.

Loh (2013) stated that for research or a study to be trustworthy it must meet the standards of verisimilitude. This means that the descriptions of teachers' individual accounts must be believable and the audience should be able to identify the similarities and/or differences of their own experiences. To ensure verisimilitude I provided opportunities for participants to analyse their transcripts, and comment on it. They were given an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of their transcripts and to verify comments and quotations. This ensured that their narratives are a true reflection of their experiences. I also had audio recordings of each interview to ensure that my study is credible and trustworthy.

3.11. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

All research studies face limitations and have certain shortcomings and pitfalls. Researchers should expect to encounter challenges when generating or analysing data. Bearing this in mind, I have been reflective and considered possible limitations and ways in which I skilfully managed them.

This is a small scale qualitative study that is personal, subjective and contextual. Due to these factors this study cannot be generalised across South Africa or internationally. It does, however, offer some ideas and insight to those who are interested in this topic or field of study.

A limitation was the selection of a suitable and convenient venue to conduct the interviews. I had to consult each participant and discuss the location/s that would make them feel comfortable and at ease. I asked them for suggestions and included them in this decision-making process. However, it was not always easy for everyone to meet even when times and the venues had already been decided. Often interviews had to be postponed as participants had to attend staff meetings, workshops or had personal or other commitments to attend to.

Time was another limitation. The selected participants lead busy lives and are actively involved in their community and have various responsibilities and commitments. This means that their time is valuable and limited. Due to these factors participant availability was an issue and scheduling interviews was challenging. Interviews were, therefore, done over a period of two months, instead of the planned one month. Flexibility of time is, therefore, a key variable in data collection and in keeping to the plan of interviewing the selected participants.

Aster Primary School is also geographically located in the midst of a busy and lively community and within an industrial area. Heavy traffic surrounds the school and noise from police sirens, music from taxis and the sounds from the traffic and street vendors hampered the clarity of the audio recordings of the interviews. Using my smart phone as a second recording device in the second and subsequent interviews proved to be most beneficial. The main recorder was placed closer to the participant, while my smart phone was placed closer to me. In this way, the clarity issue was resolved.

I also acknowledge that I hold certain biases and had my own personal interests in conducting this research and it is therefore essential that the reader is aware of my position in the study. I therefore employed the concept of bracketing. Tufford and Newman (2012, p.80) stated that “bracketing is a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process”. The method of bracketing that I selected was the writing of memos which I did throughout data generation and analysis. I did this as a way of reflecting upon and examining the data. This led to valuable insights and was a platform for me to acknowledge and be more aware of the presuppositions I have about the phenomena.

3.12. CONCLUSION

The methodology chapter has provided a detailed description of the research design employed and data generation techniques that were utilised in this study. I presented an argument for the use of a qualitative method of data generation as the most suitable method of addressing the critical questions posed in the study. I then provided a detailed explanation of the sampling procedure and discussed the research instruments selected to generate data for this inquiry. I also discussed the ethical procedures that were carefully adhered to during the study and explained the limitations and challenges that I faced.

In the chapter that follows, I present details of how I analysed the data that was generated.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I provided a detailed description of the research methodology employed to produce the data for this study. I explained my selection of an interpretive paradigm as my epistemological positioning in this study and the narrative inquiry as the research methodology. I highlighted the research design, selection of participants and the instruments that were utilised in the study to provide the empirical evidence for the analysis and findings of this study.

In this chapter the focus is on the presentation, interpretation and analysis of the data that was obtained through the data generation process of this study. The chapter begins with an introduction of Aster Primary School as the research site. It then identifies the school location/composition and involvement of the school governing body and parents respectively as well as the source of information, namely three experienced teachers.

Data was generated from three primary school mathematics teachers, Shirley, Dean and Richard, and was then analysed. Such primary sourced data are presented in italics, while literature sourced information is presented within inverted commas. The reporting of the findings that emerged from the experiences of these three teachers assumed a thematic-based approach as the perceptions of each participant were explored. The data generated was then analysed and grouped into the following four themes: the nature of the CAPS curriculum as experienced by teachers, opportunities that the CAPS curriculum provided for teachers, challenges teachers face with the implementation of CAPS, and how teachers feel. An attempt was then made to draw differences, similarities and variations between the emergent themes cited in the literature review and those generated in the data.

4.2. A DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH SITE

4.2.1. Source of information

The deputy principal and the school clerk provided a rich source of knowledge and information relating to the school dynamics in terms of its location, composition, description, statistics and additional general information. The information generated below was obtained from the deputy principal and the clerk, as well as from the Education

Management Information System (EMIS), prior to the descriptive essays and interviews. EMIS forms contain detailed information and statistics relating to school learner and educator population, racial composition of the school, the home language of the learners and teachers as well as other important information.

4.2.2. School location and composition

The research study was conducted at an all-girls urban primary school which caters for learners from Grades R to 7. It is situated in KwaZulu-Natal and is located in a suburb in Durban and is classified as a public school. The staff comprises 17 level one educators, three heads of department (1 assigned to the foundation phase and 2 assigned to the senior phase), a deputy principal, and a principal as the head of the institution.

4.2.3. The medium of instruction

Ninety-eight percent of the learners come from backgrounds where English is not their mother tongue. The mother tongue languages are comprised mainly of IsiZulu or isiXhosa. This school is an English medium school and a serious language barrier often prevails between the medium of instruction and the learners' communicative competence.

Aster Primary School is set against a poor-socio economic background. Many learners emerge from child-headed households, are orphaned, and are raised by parents/grandparents that survive on a social grant. The school is also severely under-resourced and learners therefore have limited access to computers, textbooks, a functional library, a laboratory or sporting equipment.



Figure 4.1: Aster Primary School building



Figure 4.2: Aster Primary School grounds



Figure 4.3: A Grade 4 classroom in Aster Primary

4.2.4. Involvement of the school governing body

The school governing body should mainly be responsible for policy governance and the overall running of the school. The school governing body at Aster Primary, however, is inactive and therefore has not been able to carry out their allocated duties and responsibilities. School governing body meetings have not been held regularly, attendance has been poor and they have not been instrumental in any fund-raising initiatives, promoting the best interest of the school or maintaining school property. As a result, the school management team and educators work closely together to ensure that the school is functioning, flourishing and that high quality education is provided to learners.

4.2.5. Learner performance

The performance and progress of learners at Aster Primary School has been erratic over the last three years. The Annual National Assessment (ANA) results have been below average and the school has struggled to improve results despite their various intervention programmes and attempts to elevate the grades. Many learners battle with basic literacy and numeracy skills and this has been noted as one of the many struggles that they face.

4.2.6. Parental involvement

The parent component consists mainly of unemployed individuals who usually survive on a social grant. Parents that are employed usually do domestic work and do not have a steady income. Many parents' own education is also very poor and they are often illiterate. As a result, parents are unable to be actively involved in their children's education and parental support is thus limited. Many parents also work away from home and learners are left in the care of their grandparents. It is therefore challenging to communicate with them and discuss learner progress or problems experienced. Educators are often solely responsible for the holistic development of the child.

These are children that are coming from homes where they are not living with their biological parents. The parents are either working out, putting food on the table. They are living with grandparents and as a result they are becoming parents again. When you need to interact with the parents they are unavailable and if you need to sort out for example homework issues and so on. It is very, very challenging!!! (Dean)

4.3. A DETAILED PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

4.3.1. Profile 1: Shirley

Shirley has 24 years of teaching experience and has been a senior teacher at Aster Primary for the past two decades. Shirley is a Grade 6 mathematics teacher and explained that mathematics was one of her favourite subjects in school.

She attended Springfield College of Education and graduated with a Higher Education Diploma. She specialised in Music but was never afforded the opportunity to teach music as it was eventually phased out of schools and was no longer an examinable subject, so from her initial posting she taught mathematics.

Shirley describes herself as an accommodating teacher. She listens to her learners and by doing so is able to identify their needs. She encourages open communication and uses various ways to get through to her learners. She believes that she is very compassionate and nurturing and tries her best to make a difference in the lives of her learners. She explains that she is a caregiver amongst her learners and offers them support, guidance and assistance.

Shirley constantly attends various workshops in the learning areas that she teaches and values professional development. Teaching is her passion and she strives to provide the best possible learning experience for her learners and to evolve as a teacher.

By negotiating with the biographical forces Shirley makes meaning of her professional work. Her identity as a caregiver among her learners provides her with a clearer understanding of her learners. Her learners are ultimately her main priority and providing them with quality education is of the utmost importance.

4.3.2. Profile 2: Dean

Dean is an experienced maths teacher and has been at Aster Primary for the last 23 years. He attended the University of Durban Westville and obtained a Bachelor of Pedagogics Degree in Commerce. He is a seasoned teacher and has been in the profession for 24 years. He attended numerous mathematics workshops and has read widely. Dean therefore considers himself an “expert” in the field.

He stated that he is a passionate teacher and his driving force is knowing that a good education can help provide a brighter future and better life for his learners. He explained that he has seen the fruits of his labour and that many of his learners are performing well at university and have become independent, successful professionals that occupy key positions in society. This is what gives him great pleasure and keeps him motivated.

Dean is an ardent supporter of the South African Democratic Union (SADTU). He believes that teachers need to be provided with the recognition and respect that they richly deserve. He has served as the school site steward for a number of years and takes a keen interest in the welfare of teachers. He describes himself as a strong and determined activist that has been empowered through the union.

Aside from being an activist, there are many extracurricular and co-curricular activities that he is involved in. He also explained that he has adopted multidimensional roles as a teacher. He considers himself a safety/security officer, networker, counsellor and community worker. These numerous roles have shaped his teaching experience and have influenced his own teaching and learning greatly.

Samuel (2008) argued that the biographical forces play a significant role in teacher identity. Dean draws meaning from his past experiences and his community as he is an

activist and has adopted multidimensional roles as a teacher. The professional force also plays a role in Dean's work as he considers himself an expert in the field of maths and explains that he has a wealth of knowledge and experience in teaching of this subject.

4.3.3. Profile 3: Richard

Richard is an exceptionally experienced maths teacher. He has been in the profession for 22 years and completed a B.A Human Movement Studies Degree at the University of Durban, Westville. He is an enthusiastic teacher who has always had an interest in working with children.

At Aster Primary he is regarded as a "father figure" to many of the learners. He has a good rapport with them and has a particular interest in working with learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. He explained that he treats his learners with respect and dignity and as a result is able to guide them and emphasise the importance of hard work and discipline.

Richard is actively involved in a local maths cluster and uses this platform to network with teachers from other schools, share ideas and continue to improve and grow as a teacher. Networking has helped him keep abreast with current trends in education, achieve academic excellence and fulfil his desire of being a successful teacher.

He also identifies himself as a lifelong learner and knows that every day at school presents a new learning experience for him. He is able to learn from his superiors, colleagues and learners; this ultimately shapes him as a teacher. He is also currently enrolled at the University of South Africa and is furthering his studies within the field of education.

The programmatic forces brought about by the CAPS curriculum have affected Richard's professional work. The implementation of CAPS and the excessive demands of the policy document and annual teaching plan have resulted in Richard joining a local maths cluster. In order to make meaning of his work, he networks with neighbouring schools and enjoys the support and assistance from other maths teachers.

4.4. ANALYSIS OF DATA OBTAINED IN THIS STUDY

4.4.1. Approach used in reporting of the findings of the research project

This study employed a thematic-based approach to data presentation and analysis. Data generated from interviews and descriptive essays as well as topics that emerged were utilised as a basis for identifying recurring themes. Experiences of the selected participants, researchers in this field of study, educational experts/authors and those of the researcher in this study were carefully documented, analysed and broadly categorised. This initial categorisation formed the framework to work with the data produced through the data collection instruments. The broad categories were further refined, as the data was mined in terms of the research questions that framed this study, to produce four themes that are coherently interconnected and provided the analytical framework for this data analysis.

Recalling that the data was produced through three data production methods, viz. descriptive essay, semi-structured interviews with each of the participants and a focus group involving all three participants, the rich data produced provided me with the opportunity to contextualise the participating teachers' views about the CAPS curriculum, thus taking on a thematic analysis strategy for the data analysis. The data obtained from the participants was, therefore, analysed and understood within the context of the teachers' teaching experiences, the school context and the prescript of the CAPS policy framework.

What follows is a synthesis of the four emergent themes in this research study.

4.5. THEME 1: THE NATURE OF THE CAPS CURRICULUM AS EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS

The nature of a phenomenon is generally never neutral. How one describes a phenomenon depends on a range of things, including their experience of the phenomenon, their personal backgrounds, the context, etc. as this study points to. While the CAPS curriculum is clearly spelt out in the policy document, this theme focused on how the participating teachers experienced the CAPS curriculum and from their experiences had presented their account of the nature of the CAPS curriculum. Hence, this theme tells the story of the CAPS curriculum as experienced, rather than as espoused. Participants provided their own personal accounts, experiences and views of the CAPS curriculum as a basis and highlighted positive aspects and possible pitfalls of the nature of the CAPS curriculum and the impact it has in their respective classrooms.

4.5.1. A highly structured and focused annual teaching plan

The CAPS policy document was designed to assist teachers by providing them with precise guidelines that specify the content and topics that need to be taught grade by grade and term by term. Each school subject has an annual teaching plan which is a yearly plan that stipulates content and concepts per term and how much time should be spent on them and the sequencing of teaching the content. It also indicates the assessment and examination dates which need to be adhered to.

Participants in this study have differing experiences and perspectives of the utility and practicality of the annual teaching plans for maths. Richard and Shirley find that it provides clear guidelines for teachers and is a valuable tool. Dean on the other hand finds it to be idealistic, and highly structured with little room for manoeuvring, and he therefore regards it as a prescriptive and stifling teaching plan.

The good thing that I like about the CAPS curriculum is that it has like a so called syllabus an annual teaching plan which I am in favour of. (Richard)

I think that CAPS provides more confidence to me as a teacher. (Shirley)

Richard explained that he is in favour of the annual teaching plan as it acts as a road map that guides teachers in terms of the specific content and concepts that need to be covered and the time frame in which it needs to be done. This provides structure and guidance for the teacher.

Similarly, Shirley added that by having content that is clearly laid out provides greater focus and teachers are aware of what they need to concentrate on. She also views the uniformity of the curriculum as a positive aspect as all teachers in a particular grade will be teaching the same aspects irrespective of where they are teaching and learners that are in different provinces will be taught common content and concepts at the same pace within the same time frame.

Shirley found that previously with C2005, RNCS, NCS content was not explicitly laid out and that led to much confusion. Teachers were required to develop their own work schedules and needed to unpack and interpret the curriculum on their own, which was extremely problematic. CAPS however is far more structured and focused and in this regard more valuable and useful to the teacher.

Each learning area has an annual teaching plan (ATP). Some topics contained in the ATP take much longer to cover and educators are given a duration. It instructs the teacher how to teach and there is no room for manoeuvring it when faced with contextual factors. The CAPS curriculum following from the annual teaching plan does not allow for an educator to absent him or herself from school for personal or other reasons. The educator in my opinion is not allowed to fall ill. Educators are treated in a robotic manner. (Dean)

It is interesting to note how Richard and Shirley express their views on the nature of the CAPS curriculum. The interesting aspect of this is located in the abstraction to teachers, somewhat removing themselves from this abstraction. Words like *does not allow for an educator...* or *the educator in my opinion*. This is important to note, considering that these participants are experienced teachers who have taught mathematics for a substantially long period of time. The implications from this abstraction is that there is an acknowledgement that the nature of the CAPS curriculum is beneficial to teachers who previously may have found the previous iterations of the OBE curriculum difficult to implement and therefore needed a more structured and guided process of teaching the school curriculum.

Dean, on the other hand, from his experience of the CAPS curriculum and specifically the annual teaching plan, considers it as being a very stifling and oppressive one that has restricted and limited his decision-making powers. He finds that as a result he is unable to exercise himself fully as a teacher or have the freedom to teach based on the needs of his learners. He explained that he finds the ATP far too rigid and unrealistic. He finds that there are too many topics to cover in the stipulated time frame and that the ATP does not cater for contextual factors that may arise. He also explained that these directives do not take into consideration the teacher but rather treats them as robots that can be controlled, manipulated and that lack feeling.

Similarly, Curriculum News (2012) sites work schedules and annual teaching plans as a crucial controlling tool as they prescribe time on various concepts and tasks. Work schedules and teaching plans do in fact help with coverage of the curriculum and are specific and focused. However, there is no leeway for freedom to cater for weak or struggling learners.

Furthermore, the annual teaching plan appears to be restrictive to well trained and experienced teachers, but the plan is helpful to those who are not. What is needed is a balance of teacher autonomy and freedom when implementing the curriculum and the need for teachers to make decisions based on their discretion, context and well-being of their learners.

Drawing from the above, it is apparent that the CAPS curriculum as experienced by the participating teachers is both beneficial and restrictive for teachers. It is beneficial in the sense that the CAPS curriculum is explicit and can be followed by all teachers. It is restrictive in the sense that contextual realities may compromise the curriculum process as envisaged by the CAPS curriculum, the implications of which could affect both teachers and learners. The restrictiveness of the CAPS curriculum was also expressed by some authors on CAPS (e.g. Msibi&Mchunu, 2013).

4.5.2. Superficial learning in learners as an outcome of the CAPS curriculum

Participants in this study have expressed their dissatisfaction over the fast-paced nature of the CAPS curriculum in maths in the intermediate phase. Their experience of the curriculum is that it moves at a rate that is beyond the capability of the majority of learners in their specific school context. As a result, learning that takes place is often superficial as learners lack concrete understanding or knowledge of concepts, content and topics. The demanding and impractical time constraints force teachers to swiftly move through the various sections in maths despite their reservations and concern about the quality of teaching and learning that is taking place in their classrooms.

CAPS has made it very difficult for me, frustrating for me as well. Like I said I can't function with three hours on a specific topic when you need to spend more time on those particular topics. (Dean)

It's very hard for them to grasp. Now here we have to rush through concepts in a very short space of time. The results that we produce show clearly that this kind of fast tracking of concepts has had a negative impact. (Richard)

As an educator I find myself rushing through the content not considering those learners who are weak, who didn't understand the concept. But I don't have a

choice in moving forward because it is clearly laid out for us in the document itself. As a result we experience mass failure in tests and exams. (Shirley)

Dean's experience is that the CAPS curriculum, specifically for maths, *moves at a rate that is designed for an above average child*. His learners find it difficult and challenging to keep up with the pace and state *that learning that often takes place in his classroom is superficial*. He believes that his *learners often require more time to master concepts and skills but due to the demanding time constraints of the curriculum he is forced to skip certain sections and move on even though learners lack understanding*.

Richard feels that there are a vast number of concepts that need to be covered in Grade 7 maths in an extremely short time frame. He finds that *many of these concepts are difficult for learners to grasp and that additional time is required; however, the annual teaching plan does not allow for that*. He is therefore forced to rush through concepts in a short space of time and states that he is merely satisfying the Department of Education's requirements as opposed to the needs of his learners. This *negatively impacts on learners, their understanding, comprehension and overall academic performance and progress*.

Shirley encounters similar challenges with the annual teaching plan. She believes that the *dates are far too stringent and does not allow for unforeseen circumstances*. The teaching plan also does not allow for the reinforcing of concepts that learners do not understand and does not provide enough time for concepts to be adequately mastered by learners.

Shirley suggested that the annual teaching plan and CAPS curriculum be *streamlined so that the pace is workable and manageable for both teachers and learners*. She explained that there are changes that need to be made to ensure successful implementation and so that we have the desired effect that we are looking for in education in South Africa. Teachers can ultimately provide valuable insights and feedback to the types of changes that need to be made.

These accounts from the participants suggest that their current experience of the CAPS curriculum is being measured against their past experience of teaching their subjects, more specifically the sections of school subject. For example, when Dean says that he *... can't function with three hours on a specific topic when you need to spend more time on them...*, it suggests that Dean's experience of teaching mathematics has allowed him to compare time allocation to teaching a section under the CAPS curriculum to that of teacher

autonomy under the previous curriculum frameworks. These participating teachers are thus not just resisting the CAPS curriculum, but are making informed comments on the CAPS curriculum based on their teaching experiences. Hence, from an experiential basis, the participating teachers feel that only superficial learning is possible within the tight frames of the CAPS curriculum and that for deep learning to occur, teachers need to match teaching pace with learner needs as espoused by Shirley when she commented that ...*(CAPS) does not allow for reinforcing of concepts that learners do not understand...*

“Quality education is enhanced through respecting and taking into concern the tensions teachers face such as their professional autonomy as they implement the curriculum” (Ramatlapana&Makonye, 2012). Teachers make decisions in response to the diverse characteristics and needs of the learners that they teach and the curriculum needs to present more opportunities for teachers to be provided with leeway to ensure that meaningful teaching and learning take place and that learners are not left behind as teachers race to cover the curriculum.

4.5.3. From learning to getting things done

Participants in this study expressed their concern about the prescriptive nature of the CAPS curriculum and the annual teaching plan. They feel that the maths curriculum moves at an extremely fast pace with numerous concepts to cover in an unrealistic time frame. This results in teachers having to move on regardless of whether learners have grasped content, mastered concepts or understood topics. This impacts on learner performance and progress and limits the teachers' agency as they are governed by a curriculum and are not able to freely act in the best interest of learners or provide them with additional learning opportunities that are necessary or beneficial. Correspondingly, Msibi and Mchunu (2013) view the CAPS curriculum as a teacher- proof curriculum that is prescriptive and provides limited leeway for a teacher to exercise autonomy in their classroom practices. Demanding uniformity in the form of sequencing of concepts, time allocation, textbooks, workbooks and standardised testing ultimately reduce teacher agency when implementing a stringent curriculum (Ramatlapana&Makonye, 2012).

We are finding in Maths because of the prescriptive nature of the ATPs that there are poor results in ANA, poor results in the cluster so we need to move away from being so prescriptive.

I think the curriculum has taken me backwards. I am more driven to stand in the front and talk and talk. Other than being creative in my methodologies and techniques, I have to cover so much in a short space of time; I am now more focused on getting things done rather than how I get it done. So I feel it has taken away some of that passion I have for teaching, the creativity also the children are getting a bit fed up. (Richard)

Learners come from different ability groups and different capability groups and we have to move on because the CAPS dictates to you. (Shirley)

In the CAPS you are given dates, you are given times and how many hours you must spend on a specific topic and I find that being very, very prescriptive. If you want to spend additional time you cannot do that, you just have to go on to the next aspect or topic. So the teacher is not allowed in my view to even absent themselves from school. The teacher is not allowed to even be absent or go to the toilet because you have to remain in the classroom teaching the child. (Dean)

Richard believes that the highly prescriptive nature of the CAPS curriculum stipulates a vast amount of content that needs to be covered in an unrealistic time frame. It also specifies the type of assessments that needs to be completed per term and when these assessments need to be done. He feels that as a result there is more pressure on teachers and management now to achieve the desired goals and aims for the term and for the learning area as it is clearly stipulated and a requirement of the curriculum. There is more tension in schools as teachers rush through the curriculum to ensure that all the boxes are ticked.

Dean described assessment in the CAPS curriculum as a *nightmare*. This is because he is dealing with children that are varied and have different learning abilities. He believes that the CAPS curriculum does not take into consideration contextual factors, barriers to learning and learners with different capabilities. He finds its prescriptive nature a hindrance and limitation and said that the majority of the learners are unable to cope with the assessment tasks that are prescribed and that CAPS specifically does not cater for different capability groups but rather assumes a one size fits all mentality. Both Richard and Shirley shared Dean's sentiments.

I think some of the assessments are way beyond the learner. For example, in Grade 7 Technology the things they have to do is unreal. Too much is being done in too short space of time. (Richard)

Furthermore Richard feels that *the assessments prescribed restricts and limits the teacher's performance*. He believes that by having content and assessments that are prescribed limits teacher autonomy. The prescriptive nature of the curriculum and the fast rate at which it moves has served as a hindrance to teachers in this study as they feel that they have been severely hampered by the curriculum in this regard. They require *freedom and flexibility to manoeuvre the curriculum as they see fit and need autonomy within their classroom practices*.

CAPS is a “teacher proof” curriculum and the Department of Education and the South African government should focus on ensuring that teachers’ voices are not lost and that they are provided with greater autonomy in their classroom practices. A “teacher-proof” curriculum is designed in a cookbook fashion so that every teacher who uses the curriculum will obtain the same results. It is also designed to ensure that the teachers’ control on curriculum development is reduced (Msibi&Mchunu 2013).

Drawing from the experiences of the participating teachers of teaching within the CAPS curriculum, it seems that prescribed content, time frames and assessment frames the CAPS curriculum, the assessment being the driver of the content and time for teaching. If assessment is set in advance, teachers have no option but to teach that which is to be assessed. This means that covering the content is the primary goal of the teacher within the CAPS curriculum rather than learning. While assessment would suggest that the focus is on what has been learnt, in the CAPS curriculum assessment seems to be the prescriber of content to be covered, thus relegating learning to a lesser importance. It can be deduced from this argument that accountability then seems to be the main driver of the CAPS curriculum. This means that if teachers do not cover the content as per ATPs they would then have to account for this omission through the assessment process, making coverage of content areas a primary concern of teachers and learning as a secondary consequence.

4.5.4. Concluding comments on the nature of CAPS curriculum as experienced

Teachers experience of teaching their subject has a lot to offer in terms of curriculum experience, in that teachers are able to compare and identify areas of potential challenges

in curriculum development. The nature of the CAPS curriculum as experienced by the participating teachers suggests that, depending upon who the teachers are, the CAPS curriculum could be beneficial or it could be restrictive. For the experienced teachers, the CAPS curriculum privileges content coverage and superficial learning. Its challenges being a lack of teacher autonomy within a learner-centred pedagogy, and that curriculum accountability is being privileged over learning accountability. The next theme allows one to further unpack the potential of the CAPS curriculum in the teaching and learning moments within the school curriculum.

4.6. THEME 2: OPPORTUNITIES THAT THE CAPS CURRICULUM PROVIDES FOR TEACHERS

South Africa has experienced numerous shifts in policy and practice over the Curriculum Statement (NCS) to Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) that was introduced in 2012. CAPS is notably a highly structured policy in terms of what to teach last two decades. The most recent policy revision is the transition from National and how to assess.

The CAPS curriculum, according to Harrop-Allin and Kros (2014), was introduced as a curriculum reform targeted at going “back to basics” to ensure that challenges faced by previous innovations were rectified and that simplifying the curriculum would address some of the challenges faced in our education system. CAPS is a policy document that consists of a policy statement for learning and teaching in South African schools. It is applicable for Grades R to 12 and every subject in each grade has a comprehensive and detailed policy document that stipulates what teachers need to teach and assess on a grade-by-grade and subject-by-subject basis. Each learning area has an annual teaching plan that espouses a structured programme that includes content, format, pace and structure (in the form of workbooks for teachers) that need to be followed weekly. Within this theme, the positive aspects of the CAPS curriculum were explored through the lens of the participating teachers who are very experienced, both in the teaching of their subject and in their contextual understanding of the learner population through their long service in the research site school.

4.6.1. Precise, structured and uniform guidelines

C2005, RNCS and NCS provided teachers with the freedom and flexibility to teach what they desired. There was no clear guidance in terms of content and concepts that needed to be covered and teachers were ultimately responsible for creating their own work schedules and selecting resources to facilitate their teaching. This freedom seemed counterproductive as many teachers were not equipped to deal with these demands and the quality of teaching and learning in schools was ultimately compromised. With CAPS, however, teachers are provided with clear and concise guidelines and as a result are aware of what needs to be covered within a specific time frame. Teachers are also guided with the types of assessments that need to be carried out and the mark schemes that need to be followed.

Participants in this study expressed their appreciation of the structure of the annual teaching plan as a guideline for teaching maths and of the Department of Education's interest in developing a work schedule that can be followed by all teachers. They also explained that the CAPS curriculum has differed from previous educational reforms as it offers them structure and guidance which seemed to be missing from OBE, RNCS and NCS.

The ATPs have assisted in ensuring that all schools teach from the same page. (Richard)

The content is clearly laid out as compared to previously where there was lots of confusion. CAPS is more specific. You know what to teach. (Shirley)

I would say CAPS is of a different calibre compared to the OBE and NCS. (Dean)

From these comments, it seems that equity of learning opportunities is the target of the CAPS curriculum. This means that the CAPS curriculum was designed to provide all learners across the nation to have similar learning content, similar time frames and similar assessments. Richard expressed that the *annual teaching plan ensures that teachers and learners are all working at the same pace regardless of where they are in the country or the type of school they are in*. He believes that this kind of uniformity helps to bridge the gaps in education that were created during apartheid. The need for similarity of engagement across the public school system has been demonstrated through the

benchmarking tests for comparability and ranking purposes as well as to prepare all students for the Annual National Assessments (ANA). Having noted the dismal performance of South African learners in the ANA (Spaull, 2013), reasons for such dismal performance include learners not being taught sections that were assessed (Van der Berg & Spaull, 2012; Naidoo, 2012). One way to address this concern is to introduce a curriculum framework with a structure that allows for uniformity in teaching and assessment. The CAPS curriculum, therefore, offers this possibility. However, as the participating teachers indicated, this highly structured curriculum has consequences, especially as it relates to teacher competence and learner needs, which despite the structured process of teaching, learners may never learn, either because the teachers are teaching to superficial learning or that there is insufficient time to get learners engaged with the required learning leading to meaningful learning (as demonstrated under theme 1).

A further advantage of the CAPS curriculum is that teachers do not need to be spending time interpreting the curriculum requirements and planning the teaching of their subject on a yearly basis, thus relieving them of this time that could be used for other teaching and learning activities. Richard is in favour of having an annual teaching plan that guides his teaching and provides him with specific and detailed knowledge of what to teach in maths. He believes that an *ATP acts as a syllabus and takes the burden of a teacher as they no longer have to play the guessing game and stress about what they are required to teach. Everything is clearly laid out and teachers have to follow this plan and focus on their delivery of the content.* He does however feel that the content needs to be streamlined as there are many concepts that need to be covered.

Correspondingly, Shirley acknowledged the need for uniformity and guidance in schools and suggested that the CAPS curriculum provides limited confusion amongst teachers. She believes *that teachers need to know what is required of them in terms of content and concepts and interacting with the policy document and ATP provides stability and provides the teacher an opportunity to unpack knowledge carefully before imparting it to learners.* She added that *CAPS differs greatly from other educational reforms and has limited confusion that is generally created with the introduction of a new innovation.*

Dean shared similar sentiments to Shirley and explained that the CAPS curriculum was far more workable than previous educational reforms that have plagued the post-apartheid era. In his opinion, *CAPS is off a different calibre and has seemingly been far more successful*

in terms of the way it has been formulated and the details that have gone into this type of curriculum reform.

While the CAPS curriculum has been criticised by some for being rigid, the detailed planning provides teachers with the content, concepts, topics, sequence and pace of what they are required to teach that may eliminate tension and stress from those teachers whose own personal education can be poor or limited due to being schooled during the apartheid era (Harrop-Allin & Kros, 2014). Having a concise detailed policy document and annual teaching plans for each learning area does result in a teacher-proof curriculum yet provides teachers with the direction and foundation that they require to confidently continue with their jobs.

4.6.2. Promotion of collaboration and clustering through the CAPS curriculum

Collaboration amongst teachers has been an on-going sentiment by both researcher (Shulman, 1997) and the Department of Basic Education (2011) as a way to engender professional ethics amongst teachers so that they can share and learn from each other. Putnam and Borko (2000) referred to this as discourse communities, where teachers get together for a common purpose, usually linked to the teaching of a specific subject or a topic within a subject. Through the participants' accounts of their experience of implementing the CAPS curriculum, they found that this curriculum process provided school-based opportunities to collaborate with other teachers teaching the same subjects. As previously mentioned, the CAPS curriculum has a common annual teaching plan for all schools and as a result provides opportunities for educators from the same school as well as other schools to collaborate, network and form a cluster or professional learning community.

It's important to network; we can't work in an island and think this is the only school I can grow. You must grow from outside the school and within the school as well. (Richard)

Colleagues have helped and contributed to my understanding. With interaction with each other, planning, preparation from the policy document and workshops I have gained confidence in implementation of CAPS. (Shirley)

Time was spent where you had to do a lot of reading, a lot of consultation with other colleagues in other schools who were also so called 'seasoned'. This helped me with the implementation of the curriculum and policy changes.
(Dean)

Richard believes that the CAPS curriculum has enhanced his teaching by providing him an opportunity to network with teachers from various schools and form a professional learning community because they share a common ATP. The CAPS curriculum, therefore, provides a framework for collaboration in that a common purpose becomes the binding component of a learning community. Teacher clustering or communities of learning work best when common items become the feature of engagement within these learning communities (Wenger, 2000; Maistry, 2008). By having a common ATP, colleagues would then have a focused engagement based on the teaching plan. This would mean that teachers who come together as collaborative clusters can work together on developing their teaching practices, understanding of the content, assessing learning knowledge and use of teaching and learning resources. Teacher collaboration then seems to benefit through the prescriptive framework of the CAPS curriculum. Richard indicated that he belongs to a local cluster and explained that they *have quarterly meetings in which they discuss trends in education, methods of teaching, organise assessments for the year and plan examinations*. He is in favour of clustering as a means of teacher development as he feels *that this type of consultation with his peers and collaboration provides teachers with ways to scaffold and enhance their own and each other's learning*.

Similarly, Shirley has had positive experiences with the maths cluster and networking with teachers from various surrounding schools. As the maths learning area committee in her school has been dissolved she now seeks counsel and advice from a local maths cluster. This cluster has helped her *interpret and implement the CAPS curriculum*. It has also helped her with *understanding the specific aims and skills stipulated in the policy document*. She enjoys socialising with other teachers and the supportive and safe environment of the cluster.

Dean does not belong to the local cluster but prefers to liaise with two other maths teachers on the staff to discuss learner performance and progress. He believes that working with his *colleagues that share the same teaching context and environment has played a major role in his understanding and acceptance of policy changes*. His colleagues have provided him

with the support and guidance that he required to ensure that he delivers the curriculum as stipulated by the policy. He further explained that collaboration ensures that the tradition of teachers working in isolation and in silence no longer takes place. Rather the focus shifts to teachers working together collectively to achieve common goals. Teachers receive support, encouragement and advice from one another. Discussion of challenges facing teachers and how they can be overcome is part of the discussion that takes place with his colleagues and this often takes place in the staffroom over a cup of coffee.

The idea of collaboration and establishing professional learning communities when implementing an innovation is also found in Ketelaar, et al. (2012) and Bullough (2011). They stated that professional learning communities and collaboration provides teachers with the opportunity to share knowledge and expertise, and work together towards a common goal. This is an important feature of educational transformation, and with CAPS being a transformation curriculum for the school education system, the process of collaboration through this curriculum can only enhance the outcome of such collaborative engagements.

Bullough (2011) explored the idea of hope and happiness for school improvement and reform. He stated that establishing professional learning communities can help build hope and encourage happiness for teachers. The CAPS curriculum provides opportunities for networking, collaboration and the establishment of professional learning communities. By doing so, teachers are able to share their aspirations, achievements and ultimately form a stronger foundation in which they are able to grow, develop and be content. This view is consistent with the views of some of the participants of this study.

4.6.3. Providing professional development initiatives through the CAPS curriculum

Professional development is central to any educational reform intended and can be utilised as a means of improving the quality of teaching and learning that takes place. Teacher development can be defined “as the process whereby teachers’ professionalism and/or professionalism may be considered to be enhanced” (Evans, 2002, p.131). Enhancing professional development in teachers will ultimately foster the proficiency of their instruction and practices as well as promote learner achievement. Professional development activities common in South Africa include the work-shopping of teachers which has been an ongoing endeavour of the Department of Education. Participants in this study have had varied experiences and opinions of the utility of the workshops provided to

teachers through the CAPS curriculum. Some are positive and others consider the professional development activities as not being useful.

The CAPS curriculum provides opportunities for two kinds of professional development activities. The first relates to understanding the CAPS curriculum policy and the second relates to developing teachers teaching of their subjects within the CAPS curriculum.

I think the workshops help to a large extent. (Shirley)

Shirley explained that she has participated in various workshops and attended many courses on the CAPS curriculum as well as for maths and various other learning areas that she is teaching. These workshops have prepared her to *deal with the implementation of the innovation as well as how to effectively utilise the policy document and teach various concepts in maths*. She explained that *the facilitators often provided useful handouts, and offered guidance and support. Going through the policy document step by step and providing an annual teaching plan, various resources, exemplars etc. has been a huge help and has taken away some of the anxiety that she felt*.

Others found that the professional development activities were of no benefit to them.

My experience of CAPS has been a lot of workshops, some are helpful but majority are very unhelpful mainly because of the kind of chalk and talk workshops we have. Where the facilitator stands in the front and talks about something. Possibly where they have not mastered that knowledge themselves but they are trying to provide a service to us but when we leave we have more questions than answers. (Richard)

You find that at the (training/the work shopping) the facilitators are not adequately prepared. They are coming with the same examples when I was first introduced to CAPS, so it's the same examples each time, there is nothing new and so on. That is what is very frustrating, sitting at this workshop, being retrained each time by the same or different facilitators and they use the same examples all the time, so when you come out, you want to be more prepared than what you were initially at these workshops but you come out more frustrated, angry, de-motivated. (Dean)

While Richard and Dean focus on the content and process of professional development in implementing the CAPS curriculum and view them as unhelpful, the CAPS curriculum does provide opportunities for professional development that could be beneficial to teachers. Professional development activities range from teacher induction through to a host of activities related to the teachers' personal and professional lives (Buczynski & Hansen, 2010). The CAPS curriculum provides the medium through which these professional development activities can take place. According to Shirley, the CAPS workshops which provide opportunities for understanding the policy shifts are a useful base to then develop one's teaching practice. Richard's and Dean's experience of the CAPS curriculum was considered not useful but this view needs to be understood in the context of their teaching experiences and the knowledge they have accumulated through these experiences. For a newly qualified teacher these CAPS workshops would be a useful space for them to grow as teachers, learning from facilitators, colleagues and learning materials provided for the workshop. Hence the CAPS workshops and learning communities provide a nuanced professional development aimed at developing their teaching practice, informed not only by the facilitators, but also from their colleagues and their experiences of teaching across curriculum reforms.

4.6.4. Concluding comments on the opportunities presented by the CAPS curriculum

Curriculum innovations are complex and have different values for different audiences. For teachers, the CAPS curriculum has the potential to provide opportunities for teacher growth professionally. For those teachers who are newly qualified or new in the teaching profession, the structured nature of the CAPS curriculum provides them with invaluable guidelines to develop their teaching practice. For those teachers who are more experienced and have taught across various curriculum frameworks, their experience and wisdom would inform, through collegial support, other teachers through peer support. Yet for others, the CAPS curriculum would provide opportunities for them to explore and overcome challenges. These challenges include learner and learning concerns which are discussed in more depth in the next theme.

4.7. THEME 3: CHALLENGES TEACHERS FACE WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CAPS

Since apartheid schooling there have been several challenges in school education, the details of which are well documented in the literature. Hence challenges are an inevitable aspect of change. The CAPS curriculum is no exception. The challenges, as experienced by the participant teachers, are presented within this theme and they range from personal challenges to systemic challenges.

4.7.1. Teacher paralysis from curriculum bondage within CAPS

Agency as described by Rose (2005) is the extent of a person's ability to act freely, independently and autonomously. This involves being able to make decisions and having the capability and capacity to act. Pantić (2014) advocated for teacher agency as she believes that teachers possess the expertise and capability to make decisions about their professional practices and wellbeing of their learners. Teacher agency provides teachers with the freedom and flexibility to skilfully use their expertise to make decisions and informed judgements regarding teaching and learning. Teachers do not deviate from educational policies or innovations but rather find ways to support it. The CAPS curriculum, however, as cited by various authors (Msibi & Mchunu, 2013; Ramatlapana & Makonye, 2012; Harrop-Allin & Kros, 2014), severely impedes teacher agency and hinders teachers' opportunities to act freely and independently in the best interest of their learners.

Similarly, participants in this study explained their dissatisfaction with the lack of agency that is provided to them within the CAPS curriculum. Paralysing teachers and reducing their decision-making powers have resulted in the participants being demotivated and frustrated.

I think the prescriptive nature of CAPS has taken away from teachers being the architect of their own preparations and plans. The lesson plans are prescriptive, the format of the lesson plan, the assessments are prescriptive. So the teacher's hands are tied. (Richard)

Being highly prescriptive in a sense, educators cannot exercise themselves fully in the CAPS curriculum. (Dean)

I agree with Mr Dean that the teacher's autonomy has been taken away.
(Shirley)

Richard believes that the restrictive nature of the CAPS curriculum has limited his agency as a teacher and disempowered him. He feels as though he is not the leader of his classroom and has to follow strict directives that have been laid out in the policy document and annual teaching plan even though he may not necessarily agree with it. The lack of freedom and independence has stifled his progress as a teacher and has crushed his creativity and passion for teaching. He finds it *difficult to take ownership of the curriculum* as his decision-making powers have been limited and his *professional discretion has come under scrutiny* when he does not adhere to everything that is stipulated.

In addition to Richards's feelings of frustration, Dean mentioned that the CAPS curriculum has afforded him *limited opportunities to exercise agency within his classroom* and has restricted his decision-making abilities. In his opinion, this has *negatively impacted on learner progress and performance* in his maths class. He feels that if he was able to use his professional discretion and work in the best interest of his learners he would *be able to adapt teaching, learning and the way assessments are done* to suit the needs of his learners. This would ensure that learners are able to meaningfully progress and that frivolous learning would be eliminated. Dean also feels that being told how to teach undermines him as a teacher. He considers himself a seasoned and highly experienced maths teacher *and the restrictiveness of the policy document and curriculum reduces his knowledge and expertise to that of a novice teacher that is still trying to find their bearings*. Dean feels frustrated with the state of education in our country at the moment and mentions the lack of autonomy as a major stumbling block and hindrance.

Shirley supports Dean's claim that the CAPS curriculum diminishes the autonomy and agency that teachers should be provided with. She believes that having an annual teaching plan and concise policy document does in fact provide structure and a clearer focus for teachers; however, in her opinion *teachers require more freedom and flexibility to manoeuvre the curriculum using their discretion in order to provide learners with a meaningful learning experience*. She believes that these tools (policy document, ATPs, work schedules, mark schemes) provided by the Department should be used as a guideline for teaching and learning as they *cannot be rigorously followed due to various contextual factors that arise in different schools*. Shirley firmly believes that teachers should be freely

allowed to find ways to enhance the curriculum in their diverse contexts as opposed to being controlled by rigid directives and policies.

Proportionately, Kridel (2010) highlighted the idea that teachers are both central and an integral part of the curriculum. According to Kridel (2010), the teacher as curriculum maker is a concept that was introduced to education by Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin in 1990. It is based on the assumption that a classroom is a place in which teachers are able to utilise their professional discretion to negotiate the curriculum. This is done to ensure that the diverse needs of learners are catered for and the requirements of the curriculum are being satisfied.

Teachers in this regard are active agents that possess the expertise, skills and capacity as professionals to manoeuvre the curriculum to fit their particular context and ensure that they do not stray from curricular requirements. Thus teachers are autonomous individuals that are not restricted or governed by the curriculum. Participants in this study expressed the desire and the need to have autonomy in their classroom practices and within in the curriculum itself. They ultimately feel that their teaching practices are bonded to the CAPS curriculum structure and process and that their challenge is to balance their teacher professionalism through teacher agency with that of adhering strictly to the CAPS curriculum.

4.7.2. Compliance without consultation

Robinson (2012) stated that compliance is usually an initial reaction of receiving curricular changes and this is, in fact, passive acceptance. In a South African context, Msibi and Mchunu (2013) stated that curricular change in the form of the CAPS curriculum has resulted in teacher compliance. They explained that the CAPS curriculum stipulates what teachers need to cover, giving them little leeway or the opportunity to exercise their professional discretion. Standardising testing and demanding work schedules ultimately lead to compliance.

Correspondingly, participants in the study said that they felt as though they are forced to comply with the CAPS curriculum because there are stipulated requirements that they need to adhere to. This type of educational innovation forces teachers to submit to changes and does not provide them with the flexibility to act independently or in the best interest of their learners.

Implement the changes or else, that's their attitude. There's no interaction and kind of discussion about it. Okay there's a new policy in place, what can we take from here and what can we leave behind? They feel it's coming from the Department, these principals go for meetings and they come back with an attitude of IMPLEMENT, IMPLEMENT, and IMPLEMENT! There's no consultation about things. (Richard)

I would say that myself personally I consider myself as a passive recipient of the CAPS. There is no flexibility I am functioning within the box, it limits me as an educator. (Dean)

I think that there is a lack of stability in the education system in our country. It has negatively impacted on learners that have filtered through the system. CAPS does not allow for the challenges that we experience in the class, I feel restricted at times. (Shirley)

Richard finds that being forced to comply with the CAPS curriculum without consultation and without discussion is extremely challenging. He finds that blind compliance can have disastrous effects on the state of education in his school. He believes that teachers should be given opportunities to apply the aspects of the curriculum that will benefit, enhance and work within their school contexts. Ultimately teachers at grassroots level understand the diverse dynamics of their schools and he firmly believes that it is idealistic to implement everything from the policy document. Teachers cannot merely comply but need to look at the feasibility of implementing a number of changes. Richard explained that unfortunately the management of his school believes that the policy document needs to be stringently adhered to regardless of whether it affects learners negatively (mass failure) or how teachers feel about the changes. Teachers in this regard are forced to submit even though it may go against their beliefs and professional discretion. The challenge, then, for teachers is to balance the CAPS policy implementation with that of a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning. Meeting the CAPS policy objectives through strict adherence to the implementation process, according to the participant teachers, compromises the needs and interest of the learners, putting teachers into a policy conundrum. The challenge, then, is for teachers to find ways to resolve this policy conundrum which is central to the school education system.

Dean's experience with the CAPS curriculum is that it presents limited opportunities for him to make decisions based on the wellbeing of his learners due to its highly prescriptive nature. He feels that *the CAPS curriculum forces teachers to comply as it does not allow for teachers to be innovative in their delivery of content. Furthermore it does not allow teachers the opportunity to select resources that they can use to enhance teaching and learning as CAPS compliance textbooks and workbooks are provided by the Department of Education.* Dean also feels that the CAPS curriculum is too rigid and does not adequately prepare learners for the real world. He finds that *too much emphasis is placed on learners having to swot content, concepts and information because they are tested on it in the classroom.*

Ramatlapana and Makonye (2012) explained that drilling and rote learning seem to be features of the CAPS curriculum and even though this goes against many teachers' professional beliefs, they are forced to comply. Non-compliance results in penalties and the risk of being charged with insubordination. The benchmark of professionalism is now measured by teacher compliance instead of autonomy. This leaves many teachers feeling conflicted and demotivated.

4.7.3. Concluding comments of teacher challenges experienced within the CAPS curriculum

While there are several challenges that the participant teachers alluded to, this section focused on two crucial challenges, the first being that of curriculum bondage, that is, sticking to the prescripts of the CAPS curriculum. The second is that of policy conundrum, that is, the teacher is caught between at least two strong policies that are guiding teaching and learning one requiring strict adhering to the ATPs and the other on learner centred education that is espoused to frame school education within a transforming context. The teacher is, therefore, in a conflicted state as the next theme illuminates.

4.8. THEME 4: HOW TEACHERS FEEL ABOUT THE CAPS CURRICULUM

4.8.1. Teachers as technicians

Robinson (2012) stated that often strategies of performance, accountability measures, and control mechanisms found in educational policies lead to teacher deprofessionalisation. Teacher deprofessionalisation in this regard refers to the deskilling of teachers by reducing their role to technicians, following rigid directives rather than exercising professional

discretion and judgement. Educational reform should ensure that the status of teachers is elevated and that teacher autonomy is not compromised.

A notable feature of the CAPS curriculum, as mentioned by the participants of the study, is that the curriculum has deprofessionalised them by reducing their roles to technicians and limited their decision-making powers by being highly prescriptive. Reducing teacher agency and autonomy has been an on-going challenge for the participants as they consider themselves professionals and experts in the field of education due to their experience. They are of the belief that they possess the capability to make informed decisions about teaching and learning that take place in their specific school context.

It de-professionalises me as an educator and it de-motivates me in certain respects because my hands are tied. It takes away all autonomy as an educator where I can go deliver in the classroom. So that I am not able to function as a professional and I am not able to feel free to teach and make decisions in my classroom. So the decision making in my classroom is limited or shall I say taken away because I cannot function adequately considering that there are all these impediments to my teaching.(Dean)

Being a professional means that you know what you are doing, that you have knowledge, skills, the experience therefore you are a professional, you are kind of an expert in that field to an extent. So here, they are telling you what to do all the time and therefore it takes a bit away from you, as if you don't know what you are doing. When you go to a workshop they tell you about the new curriculum and this is what you must do, it's as if what you were doing previously was all wrong and therefore this is the only right way to do it. (Richard)

I think it has restricted my functions in the classroom. I think that more opportunities need to be afforded to teachers. They have first-hand experiences; they know what works and what doesn't. They have the knowledge and expertise to handle challenges and the rewards in the classroom. (Shirley)

Dean feels that he is a passive recipient of the CAPS curriculum as the policy document is inflexible and does not allow teachers the freedom to deviate from it as everything for maths is clearly stipulated. He finds that this type of curriculum reduces the teacher's role

to that of a technician. He is therefore only able to work within the parameters that the CAPS curriculum presents as he is instructed on what to do, and how to do it. Explicit steps are provided to him and he does not have much say in his own classroom practices or in decision making. He finds that pre-packaged answers and solutions spelt out by “experts” that designed the curriculum have reduced his status as he is no longer considered or treated as a professional.

Correspondingly, Richard feels as though the CAPS curriculum has disempowered him as a teacher with little say in his classroom practices as he is governed by the curriculum. He believes that the CAPS curriculum should allow the teacher more leeway as teachers have the capability to use their professional discretion and are able to identify the needs of their learners. Richard believes there is a deep sense of emotionlessness. Those involved in policy development are de-sensitised to the various needs of learners and are unable to consider contextual realities.

Shirley has found that the CAPS curriculum has been restrictive and confusing. Her role as a teacher, as a professional and a manager within her classroom has been challenged. The prescriptive and dictatorial nature of the curriculum has prevented teachers from having enough opportunities to act freely, to be creative in terms of their teaching styles and classroom management and has regarded teachers as incapable of acting independently. She believes that treating teachers as professionals would provide them with the confidence that they need to ensure that a higher quality of teaching and learning takes place. The Department of Education should spend time investing in their teachers in terms of training/retraining teachers so that they can function as autonomous individuals in their diverse contexts. She believes that teacher professionalisation can bring about the change in education that we hope for as it equips teachers to deal with various challenges that they encounter on a daily basis.

Correspondingly, Msibi and Mchunu (2013) advocated for teacher professionalism to be prioritised. They highlighted the need for teachers to be provided with appropriate support and stated that stakeholders should focus on skilling teachers and providing them with the necessary expertise to act as professionals. They believe that this is a key feature of educational transformation.

4.8.2. Advocating for teacher involvement in policy development

Ketelaar, et al. (2012) focused on the concepts of ownership, sense making and agency in understanding how teachers position themselves towards an educational innovation. They explained that teachers should be given enough agency to find their own way of putting an innovation into action and thus taking ownership of it. They believe that teachers should be instrumental in policy development as they are ultimately required to implement any educational innovation. Being involved in policy development ensures that teachers take ownership of it and ways to enhance its delivery and ensure its success.

Consequently, participants in this study have affirmed their need to be involved in the development of policies and the improvement of the curriculum as their meaningful contributions can help transform education within the landscape of continuous change. Participants believe that their voices should be heard and that consultation and feedback are necessary for any fruitful educational endeavour.

Teachers should be able to help with policy development. I think it will make for a more practical, reasonable and workable programme for educators. It will be educators planning for educators. Not academics planning for teachers in the classroom. (Richard)

We have made some improvements, CAPS has given us some directions but it still needs to be streamlined, researched and as Richard has stated the teachers in the classroom at grassroots level they need to be consulted, to be part of this whole process. There must be more communication. (Shirley)

It will be much easier if you can have people that are actually in the classroom that is actually formulating these policies that are making up these policies drafting these policies. The planners can be of a professional background whereby teachers are selected and will have to come up with decision making and what needs to be taught in the class, the time frame and so on. (Dean)

Richard firmly believes that there needs to be more consultation with teachers when policies are developed as teachers are ultimately expected to implement these policies. He believes that teachers are able to make valuable contributions as they are in the classroom and know what works and what does not. They are also able to make the necessary

changes and adjustments to any curriculum in order for it to run smoothly and are able to adapt policies so that it is functional and workable. He believes that teachers possess the voice for change and enlightenment in education and should be provided with opportunities to be involved in curriculum development as well as to provide feedback on current policies.

Shirley is in agreement with Richard. She advocates for teacher involvement in policy development and is of the firm belief that teachers need to be part of the process of curriculum design. She explained that teachers are required to deliver in the classroom and therefore they should be included in policy making as they are the ones who are aware of the concrete challenges that exist within the classroom and are able to find solutions to combat these complications. She affirmed that teachers are not merely passive participants of the education process but rather play crucial roles as they are in control and are required to interpret policies and deliver in the classroom. As a result, they have useful contributions to make in the formulation of the curriculum and policies as they have the knowledge, insights and a vested interest in the successful development and implementation of any educational innovation.

Dean's view is that often policies are developed by educationists that have been out of the classroom environment for a very long time and therefore are not aware of the various challenges that now exist or of the abilities of learners. This is very problematic as often the type of policy that is created is idealistic and not practical or workable for teachers. He believes that teachers at grassroots level know their actual strengths and weaknesses, what is feasible and can be accomplished, and therefore in collaboration with policy makers will be able to design a curriculum that will take South Africa even further in the new age. Ultimately, teachers need to be decision makers when it comes to developing a policy and their professional capacity should not be discounted or discredited.

In South Africa over the last two decades, we have seen many policies and curricular changes implemented to bring about educational reform and transformation. As explained by Jansen (2001), a serious problem facing educational change is the disconnect between policy visions and practical realities in schools and classrooms in South Africa. Teachers can be used to bridge this gap and to fill this void if given the opportunity to be part of policy development and revision. As Jansen suggested, the creation of dialogues of

meaning between policy, politics, practice and stakeholders, can be used as a means for transforming education.

4.9. A REFLECTION OF KEY ISSUES PRESENTED IN THIS CHAPTER

It is evident from the data generated above that Samuels Force Field Model provides a way to explain Shirley, Richard and Deans professional lives and teaching experiences in meaningful ways. All three participants have a love of teaching and are passionate about the work they do. They draw meanings from their backgrounds, past experiences and their school to construct themselves as professional teachers within the education system. With the change of curriculum to CAPS, Shirley, Richard and Dean are confronted with contextual, institutional, programmatic, biographical and professional forces and are now trying to negotiate this change. Due to the nature and complexity of the change, the various forces encroach on their autonomy within their respective classrooms.

With regard to the CAPS curriculum, these three teachers who participated in the study are trying to mediate the forces that are within the school system whilst still trying to maintain a degree of autonomy within their classroom practices. Their professional work as maths teachers has been greatly affected by programmatic, institutional and contextual forces that have played a significant role in limiting their opportunities to exercise agency and to use their professional discretion. Throughout this study, teachers described how they struggle to mediate, negotiate and manage these forces and how these forces play a role in shaping their lives, experiences and daily work.

The participants also provided detailed accounts and experiences of the CAPS curriculum and its nature. By doing so, they highlighted its positive aspects and possible drawbacks and shortcomings.

Teachers in this study felt that the annual teaching plan for maths provided them with a clear outline of what to teach and steered teachers within South Africa in the same direction. This was a relief as under previous educational reforms teachers were expected to devise their own work schedules and teaching plans which was very problematic and lacked a shared vision and structure. Participants added that the structured programme that the CAPS curriculum provides is especially beneficial to teachers who found the previous iterations of the OBE curriculum challenging to implement.

Whilst teachers stated that they are in favour of the annual teaching plan, they felt it to be too fast paced and complained that it did not take into consideration the various learning abilities of learners. Furthermore, they criticised the prescriptive nature of the curriculum and explained that it did not provide leeway for teachers to exercise autonomy and stated that demanding uniformity to this extent was in fact counterproductive. They also felt that learning is secondary in the CAPS curriculum because the primary focus is the covering of stipulated content, as teachers are required to teach that which is prescribed to be tested.

Participants stated that the curriculum provides them with opportunities to collaborate and network with other teachers and it encourages the formation of clusters or professional learning communities. They believe that this has enhanced their teaching and provided them with the necessary support required to implement and deliver the curriculum efficiently. They also found that workshops that they attended were sometimes useful and the guidance was necessary for their professional development.

Participants however expressed their concern about the lack of agency that the curriculum provides teachers and stated that they require more freedom, flexibility and autonomy within their classroom practices. They also believe that being forced to comply with the CAPS curriculum requirements can hinder creativity and progress of both the teacher and learners. Teachers added that limited agency paired with forced compliance can lead to teacher deprofessionalisation. They advocated for the need of teachers to be able to utilise their professional discretion and to be the architect of their own classroom domain. Participants also highlighted their need to be involved in policy development and explained that collaboration and communication between various educationists, teachers and stakeholders can transform education in our country.

4.10. CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on the presentation and discussion of the data collected. A thematic-based approach illustrated the findings of the study and the critique of these findings paired with the literature consulted for this study permeated much of the discussion presented in this second last chapter of the research project. Recommendations in light of these findings, limitations of the study itself and suggestions for areas of extension are presented in the final chapter of the dissertation.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout this study I discussed my investigation of maths teachers' experiences of implementing the CAPS curriculum whilst at the same time explaining how I had explored and tried to understand the agency that teachers possess within the CAPS framework for education. In this final chapter, I conclude this dissertation with a reflective review of this study after carefully considering the insights that I obtained throughout this study. I offer major conclusions that I have drawn from the study and present recommendations in light of these conclusions. In trying to gain an understanding of maths teachers, my study addressed three key research questions, the first being: *What are teachers' experiences of implementing the CAPS curriculum within school education?*

The second research question addressed in the study was: *What agency do teachers have within the CAPS framework for school education?*

Finally, I addressed: *How do teachers use their agency, if at all, in mediating the restrictions experienced in implementing the CAPS curriculum?*

In this study the CAPS curriculum was used as a backdrop against which to explore and understand various degrees of agency that teachers experience within a prescribed school curriculum. The CAPS curriculum has led to much dissatisfaction among maths teachers as well as their concern over the nature of the curriculum. Understanding the three teachers' daily lived experiences of working within and implementing the CAPS curriculum has offered valuable insights into opportunities that the curriculum provides for teachers and how teachers feel about its implementation.

5.2. A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR CONCLUSIONS THAT CAN BE DRAWN FROM THIS STUDY

5.2.1. What are teachers' experiences of implementing the CAPS curriculum within school education?

Teachers who participated in this study described and provided their personal accounts and experiences of working within the CAPS curriculum. Each participant discussed the nature

of the curriculum and how they experienced it in their respective classrooms. Clearly what then emerged from the data was teachers' concern about the prescriptive and fast-paced nature of the curriculum. These teachers feel that the curriculum is not easily accessible to learners with differing capabilities and specifically does not cater for weak learners. Teachers account for the annual teaching and workbooks as controlling and monitoring devices that work against the freedom and flexibility of the teacher which prevents them from working within the best interest of the diverse needs of learners.

The notion of a balance between teacher autonomy when directing the curriculum whilst still following the guidelines stipulated was highlighted. Teachers said that they feel the need to be provided with a greater sense of agency in their classrooms. They further added that the curriculum is both advantageous yet restrictive. It is advantageous in a sense that the guidelines, content and pace are clearly stipulated and the guidelines are clear and concise. Yet it is restrictive in its design because contextual factors that arise in school could impede teaching and learning as *a one size fits all* curriculum is not realistic or practical.

These teachers' expertise and experience in the field of education have provided clear insights into the nature of the CAPS curriculum and they were thus able to express and discuss positive aspects and challenges that they experience. What also emerged during the study was the idea that the CAPS curriculum could be beneficial or prohibitory depending on the teacher. It could be beneficial to a teacher who is new in the profession, a novice teacher or a teacher who lacks confidence/content knowledge or whose own education is poor. It could however be restrictive if the teacher is experienced and seasoned or is knowledgeable in that particular learning area or subject. In the case of the teachers who featured in this study, their experience of the CAPS curriculum has been a restrictive one as they consider themselves experts in the area of maths given their number of years of service in teaching.

5.2.2. What agency do teachers have within the CAPS framework for school education?

Participants in this study understand teacher agency as the *ability to make decisions based on the needs and requirements of learners*. They also indicated that it requires the *teacher being in control of content and being able to freely adapt the content, environment and teaching experience* based on the abilities and capabilities of their diverse learners.

From the data generated throughout this study it appears that participants are discouraged by the lack of agency that the CAPS curriculum affords them. They described the curriculum as a force that has severely hampered their decision-making powers and expressed how this has demotivated them as maths teachers and how frustrated they are in their individual classes as they feel as though *their hands are tied*. They further added that this has very negatively affected the progress and performance of learners in their school as the Annual National Assessment results (ANA) for maths have been erratic and have steadily decreased over the past five years. They described this as a downward spiral in education as they have been unable to act within the best interest of learners due to rigid directives that have been imposed by the CAPS curriculum.

Participants also indicated that because their autonomy has been reduced they feel deprofessionalised and that their status as a teacher has been reduced to that of a mere technician. Teachers also expressed their uncertainty about the role they now play. Dean indicated that he is a passive recipient of the curriculum due to his agency being limited whilst Shirley and Richard feel unsure of their position as teachers which they describe as being de-stabilizing and unsettling.

Limited opportunities for teachers to exercise agency and restricted teacher autonomy have been major challenges for these participants as they believe that they are experts in the field of maths due to their experience and being afforded the opportunity to teach across various curriculums and educational innovations that have occurred in South Africa. Collectively these teachers have advocated for a greater sense of agency within their classroom practices and greater autonomy when directing the maths curriculum as they believe that decision making should ultimately rest upon the teacher.

5.2.3. How do teachers use their agency, if at all, in mediating the restrictions experienced in implementing the CAPS curriculum?

Teachers in this study are in agreement about the CAPS curriculum providing limited opportunities for them to exercise their agency. They have however used their agency and autonomy in various ways to mediate and manage the restrictions that the annual teaching plan and the curriculum have imposed on them.

Richard and Shirley described themselves as extended professionals. They both stated that they have been very flexible with the implementation of the CAPS curriculum and the

annual teaching plan. They are able to skilfully manipulate and adapt it to the needs of their learners without compromising the stipulated guidelines. They both believe that following the curriculum too stringently would not be practical or possible for their school context. Instead, they use tried and tested methods when teaching and they use additional time when necessary. They believe that using their professional discretion, expertise and wisdom that they have gained has assisted them in manoeuvring the curriculum and mediating the challenges and restrictions that they face. They essentially meet the stipulated demands and requirements within the curriculum but use alternative methods to get it achieved. Their experience and competence allow them to strategise and work within the best interest of their learners.

Dean however follows the stipulated guidelines more stringently and thoroughly and as a result has experienced higher levels of restriction, limitations and frustration. He complies with aspects of the curriculum despite it sometimes going against his professional discretion and better judgement. He has noted that his agency and autonomy have been severely hampered by his compliance and instead of manoeuvring the curriculum he opts to follow its guidelines. He is therefore a passive recipient of the CAPS curriculum.

Participants in this study have therefore experienced various degrees of agency and have either found ways to mediate these restrictions or simply complied with the policy and curriculum wholeheartedly even if it went against their judgement. What has been apparent, however, is how participants have struggled with maintaining their professional discretion and agency whilst fulfilling the demands of the curriculum. Balancing their autonomy and juggling the CAPS curriculum has been challenging as they try to manoeuvre the curriculum instead of being governed by it.

5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS IN LIGHT OF THE CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THIS STUDY

Based on the research objectives set for this study and the findings, recommendations are proposed.

The CAPS curriculum as noted by participants in this study is prescriptive and fast paced. It is prescriptive in a sense that the annual teaching plan specifies content, sequencing of concepts, pace and time. This does not take into consideration the varying capabilities and competencies of learners. Stipulating a time frame to be followed by all teachers is

counterproductive and impractical. The annual teaching plan, however, is a useful tool and should rather be used as a guideline for teachers. Stipulating the content and concepts that need to be covered ensures uniformity, but the pace and time frame in which these concepts need to be taught should be omitted. Greater freedom and flexibility are needed for teachers as they work in the best interest of learners in their specific contexts.

The curriculum should afford teachers greater opportunities to exercise their agency. Providing teachers with the required agency and autonomy would ensure a greater sense of ownership to the curriculum. Teachers require decision-making powers and to be able to adapt the curriculum to suit their own specific context. Agency is an important component of a teacher's professional life and teachers should be provided with greater autonomy when negotiating the curriculum and making informed decisions and judgements regarding teaching and learning. Teachers should be treated as professionals who possess the capability and expertise to act in the best interest of learners.

Teachers have valuable insights regarding the curriculum and implementation. At grassroots level they are aware of positive aspects and pitfalls of any educational innovation. Therefore, to be able to streamline the curriculum teachers should be included when drawing up policies and teachers who are currently in the education system should provide feedback on the curriculum and policies. Teachers should be consulted and be a part of the whole process. More communication is needed.

5.4. POSSIBLE AREAS OF EXTENSION OF RESEARCH

This research was based on a case study that took place in Aster Primary School and included three maths teachers from the intermediate and senior phase. Further research could include case studies of maths teachers in various other schools in KwaZulu-Natal. This may include teachers from the foundation phase as well as the intermediate and senior phases in the primary school. This study could further extend to high schools and include maths teachers, or a further study could not limit the case study to solely maths but focus on other learning areas as well. It would be interesting to note teachers' experiences of implementing the curriculum in other learning areas as a means of drawing differences and similarities.

This study specifically focused on teachers' experiences of implementing the CAPS curriculum and did not include various other role players in the field of education. This

study could therefore expand by offering the experiences and perceptions of the school management team, subject advisors, department officials and various other educationists in order to gain a multifaceted view of the research topic as well as further valuable insights.

Participants in this study are very experienced and seasoned teachers who have taught under various curriculums and have a wealth of knowledge and expertise in the field of education. When extending the research and building on it, teachers that are new in the profession as well as novice teachers can be included to offer their experiences and views.

Whilst ideas have been mentioned with regard to an extension of this research study it is important to note that these are just possible suggestions. They are intended to serve merely as guidelines for possible future research on the CAPS curriculum and teachers' experiences. The critical question, research site, sampling, modes of inquiry and other details are left to the discretion of the researcher and will be dependent upon the nature of the research envisioned.

5.5. CONCLUSION

By conducting this research study I have realised that being a teacher in the twenty first century is by no means an easy task. Curriculum changes have been a recurring feature of educational reform in South Africa and teachers are faced with the daunting task of taking ownership and understanding new innovations whilst ensuring the successful implementation thereof in their schools. Every innovation comes with its own set of challenges and teachers are required to manoeuvre through the mist that the curriculum presents whilst dealing with numerous contextual factors specific to their school.

Teachers therefore need to be understood and provided with ongoing support, assistance and guidance to successfully manage implementation and the challenges that they face. More opportunities need to be afforded to teachers to exercise their agency as they require greater freedom to make decisions and the capacity to act in the best interest of their learners. Teachers are essentially at the heart of the curriculum and by ensuring that they are placed in a position of power will ensure a brighter education and transformation for a new South Africa.

REFERENCES

- Bantwini, B.D. (2010). How teachers perceive the new curriculum reform: Lessons from a school district in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 30(1), 83-90.
- Bassey, M. (1995). *Creating education through research: A global perspective of educational research for the 21st Century*. Edinburgh, Scotland: British Education Research Association (BERA).
- Bell, B., & Gilbert, J. (1994). Teacher development as professional, personal, and social development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 10(5), 483-497.
- Boeije, H. (2009). *Analysis in qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Botha, R.J. (2002). Outcomes-based education and educational reform in South Africa. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 5(4), 361-371.
- Brodie, K. (2013). The power of professional learning communities. *Education as change*, 17(1), 5-18.
- Buczynski, S., & Hansen, C.B. (2010). Impact of professional development on teacher practice: Uncovering connections. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(3), 599-607.
- Bullough, R.V. (2011). Hope, happiness, teaching, and learning. In C. Day, & J.C.K. Lee (Eds.), *New understandings of teacher's work* (pp. 15-30). New York: Springer.
- Campbell, E. (2012). Teacher agency in curriculum contexts. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 42(2), 183-190.
- Chisholm, L. (2005a). The politics of curriculum review and revision in South Africa in regional context. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 35(1), 79-100.
- Cohen, K., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6th ed.). London, England: Routledge.

- Cohen, L.M.L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education*. London, England: Routledge.
- Connelly, F.M., & Clandinin, D.J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14.
- Craig, C.J. (2010). Teachers as curriculum makers. In C. Kridel (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of curriculum studies* (pp. 867-869). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J.W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J.W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Boston: Pearson.
- Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Cross, M., Mungadi, R., & Rouhani, S. (2002). From policy to practice: Curriculum reform in South African education. *Comparative Education*, 38(2), 171-187.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research*. London, England: SAGE Publications.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Chung Wei, R., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Ophanos, S. (2009) Effective teacher development: What does research show? In L. Darling-Hammond, R. Chung Wei, A. Andree, N. Richardson, & S. Orphanos (Eds.), *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad* (pp. 9-13). s.l.: National Staff Development Council.
- Day, C., & Sachs, J. (2004). Professionalism, performativity and empowerment: Discourses in the politics, policies, and purposes of continuing professional development. In C. Day, & J. Sachs, (Eds.), *International handbook on the continuing professional development teachers* (pp. 3-32). Maidenhead, England: Open University Press.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (Vol. 3). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Department of Education. (2002). *The Revised National Curriculum Statement*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

Department of Basic Education. (2011). *Curriculum assessment policy statements (CAPS)*. Retrieved August 11, 2014, from <http://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/CurriculumAssessmentPolicyStatements/ta/bid/149/Default.aspx>.

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, *103*(4), 962-1023.

Evans, L. (2002). What is teacher development? *Oxford Review of Education*, *28*(1), 123-137.

Fakier, M., & Waghid, Y. (2004). On outcomes-based education and creativity in South Africa. *International Journal of Special Education*, *19*(2), 53-63.

Fleming, D. (1998). Autonomy and agency in curriculum decision-making: A study of instructors in a Canadian adult settlement ESL program. *TESL Canada Journal*, *16*(1), 19-35.

Fullan, M.G. (1993). Why teachers must become change agents. *Educational Leadership*, *50*(6), 12-17.

Harley, K., Barasa, F., Bertram, C., Mattson, E., & Pillay, S. (2000). The real and the ideal: Teacher roles and competences in South African policy and practice. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *20*(4), 287-304.

Harrop-Allin, S., & Kros, C. (2014) The C Major scale as index of back to basics in South African education: A critique of the curriculum assessment policy statement. *Southern African Review of Education with Education with Production*, *20*(1), 70-89.

Henning, E. (2004). *Finding your way in qualitative research*. Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik Publishers.

Hilferty, F. (2008). Theorising teacher professionalism as an enacted discourse of power. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *29*(2), 161-173.

- Jansen, J.D. (2001). Image-ining teachers: Policy images and teacher identity in South African classrooms. *South African Journal of Education*, 21(4), 242-246.
- Jansen, J.D. (1998). Curriculum reform in South Africa: A critical analysis of outcomes-based education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 28(3), 321-331.
- Jita, L., & Vandeyar, S. (2006). The relationship between the mathematics identities of primary school teachers and new curriculum reforms in South Africa. *Perspectives in education*, 24(1), p-39.
- Josselson, R. (2007). The ethical attitude in narrative research: Principles and practicalities. In D.J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 537-566). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Ketelaar, E., Beijaard, D., Boshuizen, H., & Den Brok, P.J. (2012). Teachers' positioning towards an educational innovation in the light of ownership, sense-making and agency. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28(2), 273-282.
- Knight, P. (2002). A systematic approach to professional development: learning as practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(3), 229-241.
- Kridel, C. (Ed.). (2010). *Encyclopedia of curriculum studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Kumar, R. (2011). *Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lawler, S. (2008). *Identity sociological perspectives*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.
- Lawson, T. (2004). Teacher autonomy: Power or control? *Education 3-13*, 32(3), 3-18.
- Leedy, P., & Ormrod, J.E. (2010). *Practical research and design*. Harlow, England: Pearson.
- Lipponen, L., & Kumpulainen, K. (2011). Acting as accountable authors: Creating interactional spaces for agency work in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(5), 812-819.
- Loh, J. (2013). Inquiry into issues of trustworthiness and quality in narrative studies: A perspective. *The Qualitative Report*, 18(65), 1-15.

- Long, C., & Lampen, E. (2014, July 7-11). *Teacher agency and professional practice: Developing and nurturing creativity in mathematics teacher education*. Paper presented at the The Association for Mathematics Education of South Africa 20th Annual National Congress, Kimberley, South Africa.
- Maistry, S.M. (2008). Towards collaboration rather than cooperation for effective professional development of teachers in South Africa: Insights from social practice theory. *Southern African Review of Education with Education with Production: A Review of Comparative Education and History of Education from SACHES*, 14(1/2), 119-141.
- Maree, K., & Pietersen, J. (2010). Sampling. In K. Maree (Ed.), *First steps in research* (pp. 172-180). Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Maxcy, S.J. (1991). *Educational leadership: A critical pragmatic perspective*. New York: Bergin and Garvey.
- McCarthy, T. (1998). *Descriptive writing*. New York: Scholastic Inc.
- McMillan, C., & Schumacher, S. (2001). *Research in education: A conceptual introduction* (3rd ed.). New York: Harper Collins.
- Merriam, S.B. (2002). *Introduction to qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.
- Msibi, T., & Mchunu, S. (2013). The knot of curriculum and teacher professionalism in post-apartheid South Africa. *Education as Change*, 17(1), 19-35.
- Msila, V. (2007). From apartheid education to the Revised National Curriculum Statement: Pedagogy for identity formation and nation building in South Africa. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16(2), 146-160.
- Naidoo, V. (2012, December 9). Errors blamed for maths test 'disaster'. *Times Live*. Retrieved August 14, 2014 (Available from Times Live website: <http://www.timeslive.co.za/sundaytimes/2012/12/09/errors-blamed-for-maths-test-disaster>).

- Neuman, W.L. (2006). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.
- Nieuwenhuis, J. (2010). Introducing qualitative research. In K. Maree (Ed.), *First steps in research* (pp. 46-68). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Pantić, N. (2014). Myth, theory and research of teachers as agents of change: The importance of noticing relationships. In J. van Tartwijk, M. Brekelmans, P. den Brok, & T. Mainhard (Eds.), *Theorie en praktijk van leren en de leraar, Liber Amicorum Theo Wubbels*. Amsterdam: BV Uitgeverij.
- Pearson, L.C., & Moomaw, W. (2005). The relationship between teacher autonomy and stress, work satisfaction, empowerment, and professionalism. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 29(1), 38-54.
- Priestley, M., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2012). *Teachers as agents of change: An exploration of the concept of teacher agency*. Stirling, England: University of Stirling.
- Putnam, R.T., & Borko, H. (2000). What do new views of knowledge and thinking have to say about research on teacher learning? *Educational Researcher*, 29(1), 4-15.
- Ramatlapana, K., & Makonye, J. (2012). From too much freedom to too much restriction: The case of teacher autonomy from National Curriculum Statement (NCS) to Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). *Africa Education Review*, 9(1), S7-S25.
- Robinson, S. (2012). Constructing teacher agency in response to the constraints of education policy: adoption and adaptation. *Curriculum Journal*, 23(2), 231-245.
- Rose, S.P. (2005). Human agency in the neuro-centric age. *EMBO Reports*, 6(11), 1001-1005.
- Samuel, M. (2008). Accountability to whom? For what? Teacher identity and the Force Field Model of teacher development. *Perspectives in Education*, 26(2), 3-16.

- Scotland, J. (2012). Exploring the philosophical underpinnings of research: relating ontology and epistemology to the methodology and methods of the scientific, interpretive, and critical research paradigms. *English Language Teaching*, 5(9), 9.
- Shulman, L.S. (1997). Professional development, learning from experience. In B.S. Kogan, (Ed.), *Common schools, uncommon futures: A working consensus for school renewal* (pp. 89-106). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Sloan, K. (2006). Teacher identity and agency in school worlds: Beyond the all-good/all-bad discourse on accountability-explicit curriculum policies. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 36(2), 119-152.
- Spaull, N. (2013). Accountability in South African Education. *Transformation Audit*, 47-66.
- Tufford, L., & Newman, P. (2012). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work*, 11(1), 80-96.
- Van der Berg, S., & Spaull, N. (2012, December 7-13). Interview with the Mail & Guardian regarding ANA 2012. *Mail & Guardian*, p. 14.
- Webb, P.T. (2002). Teacher power: The exercise of professional autonomy in an era of strict accountability. *Teacher Development*, 6(1), 47-62.
- Wenger, E. (2000). Communities of practice and social learning systems. *Organization*, 7(2), 225-246.

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



26 March 2015

Ms Alisha Singh 206505301
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Singh

Protocol reference number: HSS/0077/015M

Project title: Teacher agency within a prescribed curriculum: The case of teachers' experience of implementing the CAPS curriculum

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received on 6 February 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted FULL APPROVAL.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

Cc Supervisor: Professor Labby Ramrathan
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Murojele
Cc School Administrator: Ms T Khumalo/ Ms B Bhengu

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

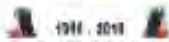
Dr Shanika Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 280 3587/31204657 Fax: +27 (0) 31 280 4400 Email: singha@ukzn.ac.za / shamila@ukzn.ac.za / pm@hss.ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



1911 - 2011
100 YEARS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Faculty Offices: Edgewood Howick College Makhosonke School Pietermaritzburg Westville

APPENDIX B:
REQUEST TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY

Date: 27 November 2014

From: Miss A Singh

46 Aurora Road

Bluff

Durban

4052

To: The Principal
Durban South Primary School
10 Blamey Road
Clairwood

Dear Sir

RE: Request to Conduct a Research Study

My name is Alisha Singh and I am currently registered for my Masters degree in Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. As part of my Masters study I am expected to do a research project and this research project is supervised by Professor Labby Ramrathan who is employed at UKZN. I would like to request permission to conduct my research at your school. The details of the research and your school's participation are presented below.

The title of my research is: **Teacher agency within a prescribed curriculum: The case of teachers' experience of implementing the CAPS curriculum.** The purpose of my study is to explore teacher's experience of teaching within the CAPS curriculum policy with a view to understanding how teachers use (or not) their agency within the context of this school curriculum.

I am interested in interviewing Mathematics teachers from your institution as a delimit to this study. The participants will be selected through a purposive sampling process and their inclusion will be on their informed consent. During the research process all ethical processes will be followed and adhered to, including that of anonymity of the participants and of the school. The data collection process will be done at times and places convenient to the participants and will not impact on the functioning of the school. The rights of the participants and that of the school will be respected at all times, including the withdrawal from the research process if the participants so wish. Audio recording of the interviews will be done only with the express consent of the participants. The data will be stored at the university for a period of five years and will thereafter be destroyed as per university rules. The security of the data will be the responsibility of my supervisor as these will be stored in locked cupboards in his office. The outcome of the research will be presented to you as head of the school, and the participants during a post research meeting. Other persons for whom this research has significance will also be invited to this presentation.

I would like to assure you that the data generated will be treated with utmost confidentiality. I am bound by ethical standards of conducting research and the dignity, privacy and interest of the participants will be respected.

For more information you can contact my supervisor Professor Labby Ramrathan on 031 – 260 8065 or at RAMRATHANP@ukzn.ac.za

Yours faithfully

Miss Alisha Singh.....

Contact no. 082 2980 700

Email: aaind@telkomsa.net

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

DECLARATION

I..... (Full names of principal) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I grant permission for the research study to be conducted by Miss Alisha Singh at my school during non-teaching time.

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL

DATE

.....

.....

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

DATE

.....

.....

APPENDIX C:
INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Social Sciences, College of Humanities
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood Campus

Dear Participant

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Alisha Singh. I am doing Masters Degree in Education (Teacher Development Studies) at University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus, South Africa. The aim of this study is to explore teacher agency within the context of a prescribed school curriculum. I am interested in investigating teachers' experiences of implementing the CAPS curriculum and understanding the agency that teachers have within the CAPS framework for education.

I have selected three data generation methods for this study. These instruments include a descriptive essay, semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview. The descriptive essay will be based on your illuminations (accounts) of experiencing and implementing the CAPS curriculum in your classroom. The interviews would take between 45 minutes to an hour and will be done after school. These interviews will be hand written as well as audio recorded. Your privacy is guaranteed as pseudonyms will be used.

Kindly note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your personal information will not be disclosed.
- The interview may last for about 1 hour.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the data generated will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes, and there are no financial benefits involved.

- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		

I can be contacted at:

Email: aaind@telkomsa.net

Cell: 082 2980 700

My supervisor is Professor Labby Ramrathan who is located at the School of Education, Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details: email:RAMRATHANP@ukzn.ac.za Phone number: 031 – 260 8065

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

DECLARATION

I..... (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from this study at any time, should I so desire. Please indicate if you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

.....

APPENDIX D:
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS

TITLE OF THE STUDY: Teacher agency within a prescribed curriculum: The case of teachers' experience of implementing the CAPS curriculum.

The purpose of the interview is to gain some insight into how teachers perceive the CAPS curriculum, their experiences of teaching within this prescribed curriculum and how they exercise agency in their teaching practices.

SECTION A
BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

1. **Age group:**

0 -19	20- 29	30-39	40 -49	50-59	60-69	70+
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. **Gender:**

MALE	FEMALE
1	2

3. **Marital status:**

SINGLE	MARRIED	DIVORCED	WIDOWED
1	2	3	4

4. **Education:**

4.1	Matriculation	
4.2	Diploma (Specify)	

4.3	Undergraduate (Specify)	
4.4	Postgraduate (Specify)	
4.5	Other (Specify)	

5. Number of years teaching:

0-9	10-19	20-29	30 -39	54+
1	2	3	4	5

SECTION B

1. Why did you choose to become a Maths teacher?
2. How long have you been teaching at this school?
3. How do you feel about curriculum changes that have occurred over the last decade in South Africa?
4. What are your views on the CAPS curriculum?
5. Do you think that the CAPS curriculum addresses educational challenges faced in your classroom?
6. Do you think that the prescriptive nature of the CAPS curriculum deprofessionalises teachers?

SECTION C

1. What are your experiences of teaching within this prescribed curriculum?
2. Does this type of curriculum differ from previous educational reforms that you have experienced?
3. How have you managed with the implementation of the CAPS curriculum?
4. To what extent has curriculum changes impacted on your classroom practices?
5. Are there curriculum changes that you have not implemented?
6. What is your overall opinion of the CAPS curriculum?

SECTION D

1. What is your understanding of the concept of agency?
2. Do you think that the CAPS curriculum provides opportunities for teachers to exercise their agency?
3. Do you exercise agency within your classroom practices?
4. Do you think that agency is an important component of a teacher’s professional life?

SECTION E

DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY

TITLE OF THE STUDY: Teacher agency within a prescribed curriculum: The case of teachers’ experience of implementing the CAPS curriculum.

The purpose of the essay is to explore teachers’ experiences of implementing the CAPS curriculum in their classrooms.

Write a descriptive essay based on your illuminations (accounts) of your experiences in implementing the CAPS curriculum in your classroom. This essay will tell the story of your struggles/triumphs and experiences in dealing with CAPS in your teaching practices.

Name: _____

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Focus Group Interview

1. What do you understand by teacher agency?
2. Can you provide some examples of things that you have done as a teacher that you consider as having exercised your agency?
3. Working within the CAPS curriculum framework- how have you seen your work of a teacher being altered, affected or enhanced?
4. What element of CAPS do you consider as taking away teacher autonomy?
5. Has the CAPS curriculum restricted you as a teacher – in what ways, why do you consider it restricting you, how have you worked around these restrictions?
6. Do you consider yourself as an extended or restricted professional within the CAPS curriculum?

7. Do you have any concluding remarks or anything you would like to add about CAPS or even about teacher agency?

Jeanne Enslin
Freelance language practitioner

17 York Close
PARKLANDS
7441

13 November 2015

Proof of language editing

I, Jeanne Enslin, acknowledge that I did the language editing of Alisha Singh's dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Education.

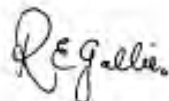
The title of the dissertation is:

**Teacher agency within a prescribed curriculum:
The case of maths teachers' experience of implementing
the CAPS curriculum**

If any text changes are made to the electronic document which I sent to Alisha Singh on 13 November 2015, the document needs to be returned to me to check the language of the changes. Technical editing, formatting, checking of references and cross referencing were done by Ronèl Gallie, the technical editor.



Jeanne Enslin
Language editor
082 696 1224



Ronèl Gallie
Technical editor
084 7780 292

J H Enslin BA (US); STD (US); Hons Translation Studies (UNISA)