EVALUATION OF THE NORTHERN CAPE FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT PROJECT IN THE NORTHERN CAPE.

Margie Paton-Ash

INTRODUCTION

The goals of the evaluation

The broad focus of the research was to investigate change in the Foundation Phase Teachers’ practice and the possible influence of the Rhodes University Teacher Professional Development project on this change. This would be achieved by:

1. Investigating the efficacy of the teacher professional development programme, the BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree run by Rhodes University for teachers in the Northern Cape and possibly making recommendations as to whether the degree could be replicated elsewhere.

2. Evaluating how the BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree was, or was not, enabling change in classroom practice by observing teachers in their classrooms.

3. Receiving feedback from the teachers involved in the BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree as well as their principals as to what changes have or have not taken place.

4. Determining if and how the change in classroom practice was impacting on the school as a whole, including other teachers and parents.

5. Receiving feedback from the provincial education department of the Northern Cape as to how the BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree was working in the schools where teachers had been selected to be part of the programme.

For the purposes of this evaluation the term ‘teacher’ or ‘student’ is used to describe the teachers who were students on the BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree programme. They are to be separated from the Rhodes staff who are referred to as academics, lecturers or Rhodes’ staff. The BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree is referred to as the ‘programme’ or ‘course.’

Method of evaluation

The research is a multi-site case study centred on two areas in the Northern Cape, namely Kimberley and Kuruman. It is a qualitative study, using grounded theory methodology, which seeks to identify and understand the dynamics of the change process as influenced by the teachers’ professional development programme in the Northern Cape, the BEd (In-service) degree.
Developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, grounded theory is a three-step process in which the researcher begins the research without a hypothesis, describes what is being investigated and unveiled, and then tries to explain why it is so (Bailey, 1987: 54; Cohen et al., 2007: 491). The research design is of an evolving nature as it requires the simultaneous collection and analysis of data. As data is collected and analysed according to a coding system, flexibility is required in the research design as new avenues could be unveiled that need to be investigated. This proved to be true in this research project as I collected and analysed data in phases. Analysis of the data collected in the first phase informed the design of the research in the second phase.

This study is an interpretive study and as such is ‘guided by the researcher’s set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005 cited by Birks and Mills, 2011: 8). It is therefore important to state my underlying assumptions about the project under investigation. Formulating beforehand what I expected to find in my research would help me guard against bringing preconceptions to my gathering of data and data analysis. I expected to find:

- Classes which could not be described as print-rich in terms of books or suitable posters on the wall. If there were books they would not be easily available to the children.
- Children who were struggling to read and do basic Mathematics.
- Teachers who did not read mainly as a result of coming from backgrounds where people did not have access to books as children.
- The lack of understanding of principals and teachers of the link between books, literacy and academic achievement.
- Poor schools in rural and urban communities with not a lot of resources.
- Poor facilities or the lack of facilities such as halls, libraries and sports fields.
- Big classes of 40 to 60 children.
- Children who came from poor homes where parents struggled to put food on the table.
- Feeding schemes to be present in some of the schools.
- Pit toilets and pre-fabricated classrooms which were hot and uncomfortable in the extreme heat of summer (temperatures of 35 - 37° C) and cold in winter.
- Schools without areas of shade for the children to play – no lawns or trees.
- Lack of parental involvement in their children’s education.
- Absent teachers or teachers who were demotivated as a result of the difficult teaching environments they were working in.

These assumptions were based on my experience as a Geography teacher and teacher–librarian with over thirty years of experience in high schools, mostly independent schools. I have no or little experience, with the Foundation Phase except as a mother of two girls. A few years ago I researched school libraries in Gauteng for my MEd degree which I completed through Rhodes University in 2012.

There were three phases to the evaluation:

**Phase 1:** Involved a visit to Grahamstown for an overview of the programme and to gather data which would then inform the design of data collection for the Phase 2.
**Phase 2:** Fieldwork at schools in the Northern Cape.

**Phase 3:** Data gathered from Phases 1 and 2 were synthesised in order to write the final evaluation report.

**Phase 1**

This phase was carried out in early January 2014. I began by interviewing two of the lecturers responsible for the course, Ms Jenny Hodgskiss and Ms Sarah Murray; observing one of the contact sessions with the teachers/students; interviewing the field officer, as well as gathering data from 37 teachers/students involved in the BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree programme (Rhodes’ teachers) through a questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of four open ended questions (see Appendix A), the answers of which guided me in designing the questions for the semi-structured interviews in Phase 2 in line with grounded theory. The questionnaire for the teacher/students was designed to elicit perceptions and comments about the degree without too much prompting or guidance from the questions themselves as they were deliberately vague. I wanted the respondents to guide me as to what should be investigated when I visited the schools and conducted interviews with the teachers. The questionnaire was completed individually under controlled conditions where no discussion took place to ensure that each individual had the opportunity to express what they felt about the degree and its impact on them personally.

Documents pertaining to the degree were also gathered and analysed during this phase.

**Phase 2**

This phase was carried out in late January 2014 when I spent five working days in schools in and around Kimberley and Kuruman. Data was gathered through a total of 22 semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B) with the teachers, their principals, a few colleagues and parents. A well placed official at the Northern Cape Education Department was also interviewed. Twelve of the teachers were observed in their classrooms and the Kuruman group of teachers were observed at a workshop held by the Field Officer.

**Phase 3**

This phase was completed from May to June 2014. The report was drafted and submitted to the Education Department of Rhodes University.

**Ethical considerations**

All participants were informed about the nature of research in writing and their informed consent was sought. Care was taken to ensure that all participants were given the chance to remain anonymous and no school, principal or teacher was named. All photographs had the faces of children and teachers blurred out so that they could not be identified.
Permission was sought from the principals to enter the school to interview teachers, themselves and observe lessons throughout the school day. No lessons were interrupted as all interviews with the teachers took place either during break or after school.

PHASE 1

CONTEXT

The Northern Cape

Kimberley and Kuruman are part of the Frances Baard and John Taolo Gaetsewe districts (See Figure 1) respectively in the Northern Cape.

Figure 1: Map of the Northern Cape Districts

Although it only has a 2.2 % share of the total population of the country, the Northern Cape is the largest province in South Africa. (South Africa. Department: Government Communication and Information Systems, 2012/2013). The province is situated in the drier north-western side of South Africa and contributes only 2.3% to South Africa’s GDP (South Africa Info, 2014) despite its size, with economic activities focused mainly on agriculture and mining (diamonds, iron-ore, zinc, lead and manganese).

The National Development Agency (no date) identified several challenges faced by the people living in this province directly as a result of poverty. In 2010 unemployment was high at 27.8%, and this situation was exacerbated by the diminishing resources of the alluvial diamond
minefields which had resulted in many people becoming dependent on state grants. Health challenges were identified:

- Malnutrition and foetal-alcohol syndrome
- TB
- Chronic diseases such as hypertension
- HIV/AIDS

Education represented a further challenge for people living in the Northern Cape. In 2013 the third Annual National Assessment (ANA) showed an upward trend country-wide, with the exception for Grade 1 Mathematics, in the Mathematics and Language results in the Foundation Phase (South Africa. Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2013:1). Figure 2 however shows the Northern Cape ANA results and the trend was discouraging as in all instances the achievement rates of the children in the Foundation Phase in the Northern Cape province lagged behind the national average. The downward trend in Grade 3 Language and Grade 1 Mathematics were a further concern.

**Figure 2: A summary of the ANA results for the Northern Cape for 2012 and 2013 as measured against the national average.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Average mark (%) in the Northern Cape (South Africa. DBE, 2013)</th>
<th>Average mark (%) for the country (South Africa. DBE, 2013)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 Mathematics</td>
<td>63.5               55.1</td>
<td>68.1                  59.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 Language</td>
<td>52.4               56.8</td>
<td>57.5                  60.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2 Mathematics</td>
<td>54.4               55.2</td>
<td>57.4                  58.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2 Language</td>
<td>48.7               52.8</td>
<td>55.3                  56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 Mathematics</td>
<td>37.9               50.5</td>
<td>41.2                  53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 Language</td>
<td>49.4               46.2</td>
<td>52                    50.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ANA results for the Frances Baard and John Taolo Gaetsewe districts in 2012 and 2013 for Grade 3s were even more concerning as can be seen from Figure 3.

**Figure 3: ANA results for Grade 3 in the Frances Baard and John Taolo Gaetsewe districts (South Africa. DBE, 2013: 74)**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Mathematics (%)</th>
<th>Home Language (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances Baard (Kimberley)</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>53.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Taolo Gaetsewe (Kuruman)</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Cape Average (all five districts)</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from Figure 3 the attainment in Grade 3 in Home Language in both districts has shown a downward trend with Mathematics faring better than the overall Northern Cape results in the Frances Baard district. Both Mathematics and Home Language however are well below the average for the Northern Cape in the John Taolo Gaetsewe district.

The challenges in education resulted in an intervention by the Education Department at Rhodes University. The University was successful in a tender bid put out by the Northern Cape Education Department for a teacher development programme in the Foundation Phase. This programme (BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree) is based on a set core curriculum with the programme that is specifically designed for teachers who are teaching in this phase at schools in the Northern Cape.

**BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree (Rhodes University)**

**BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase**

The BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree is a three year part-time degree. According to the *Submission of new teacher education qualifications for approval by the Department of Higher Education and Training* (date?: 1)document submitted by Rhodes University this qualification is “oriented to teachers currently practicing in schools who would like to achieve graduate status and so become acknowledged as fully qualified teachers, by attaining the qualification of BEd (FP Teaching).”

Academics at the university referred to this course as a ‘blended course’ as it combined a distance element as well as contact sessions where theory was introduced by the lecturer and dialogue could take place between lecturers and students. A sufficient number of contact sessions qualified this programme as a contact course. Contact sessions took place every holiday when the Rhodes’s teachers were bussed from the Northern Cape to Grahamstown. This added at least an extra 20 days to the teachers’ working year. It also meant that the staff at Rhodes had an early start to the academic year as the first contact session always took place in early January.
At Rhodes they were exposed to a full programme (see Appendix D) and they left with at least ten assignments from each contact session which they were required to complete before they came to the next contact session. In addition they were required to do a lot of reading for each assignment to make up the notational hours they would have missed if it had been a full-time course.

Because the contact sessions are limited to 20 days, the scheduling of time was limited to 4 or 5 hours per subject. This had an impact on the course design which is discussed later in this chapter.

Funding for the degree

The BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree was funded by the Sishen Iron Ore Company (SIOC), one of the mining companies operating in the area. Each student had a bursary of R70,000.00 per year. This included transport to and from Rhodes as well as food and accommodation at Rhodes. A vehicle for the field officer was also funded by the company.

The schools involved in the programme

There were thirteen schools with teachers on the course; six in the Frances Baard district (Kimberley) and seven in the John Taolo Gaetsewe (Kuruman).

Figure 4: Map of the schools involved in the BEd (In-service) programme

Nine schools were visited for this evaluation in Phase 2; two schools in small towns a distance away from Kimberley in the Frances Baard district, three schools in Kimberley itself, and four...
schools serving mostly the rural areas of Kuruman in the John Taolo Gaetsewe district. All of these schools were quintile 1 or 2 schools, or no fee or low fee paying schools, serving children from mostly impoverished backgrounds. They were mostly no fee paying schools. Those that did charge fees asked the parents for nominal amounts. Needless to say, many of the parents struggled to pay, or could pay, those nominal fees.

The teachers involved in the programme

The number of teachers varied according to each school, with a maximum of eight teacher/students in one school, to schools with only one teacher. The repercussions of having so many teachers in one school on the programme will be discussed later in this paper in Phase 2 and 3.

The teachers were selected in 2011 and the funder, Sishen Iron Ore appeared to have stipulated that funding was for teachers from two districts only, Frances Baard and John Taolo Gaetsewe. Teachers had to meet certain criteria to be selected for the programme; they had to be in-service, they had to have a Matric and they had to have a Level 5 NQF qualification or another teacher diploma such as an ACE diploma. Those who met the criteria wrote a benchmark test which assessed their comprehension skills and their ability to write an essay on some aspect of their teaching practice. On the basis of their results on this benchmark test, the current cohort of teachers was selected.

These teachers had taught for many years and they understood the school system and as a result they brought a wealth of experience to the programme. As in any group of students, the teachers were of mixed abilities and some found the course easier than others who needed more support, particularly from the field officer shown as the School Support Facilitator (see Figure 5).

The programme started with 33 teachers from the Northern Cape but one teacher had dropped out. In addition there were five private students from different parts of the country on this course. The private students were not part of the evaluation although they did complete the questionnaire.

Staffing

The course itself fell under the auspices of the Education Department of Rhodes University and the coordinator was Ms Jenny Hodgskiss who worked for the Centre of Social Development (CSD). Ms Hodgskiss, who regarded herself as the Junior Academic (see Figure 5), had been in charge of this cohort of Rhodes’ teachers since March 2012, but was not part of the initial planning phase which took place in 2011. During 2011 all negotiations and the development of relationships with the Northern Cape Education Department (NCED) took place under the previous incumbent.

Ms Sarah Murray had been with the course since its inception and was regarded as the Senior Academic (see Figure 5). Both academics were interviewed in order to establish a good understanding of the programme before going into the field to observe and interview the teacher/students in their schools, as well as their principals.
A unique aspect to the approach by Rhodes to the teacher professional development programme was the permanent field officer known as the School Support Officer (see Figure 5) who worked closely with the teachers (in this model referred to as students). She was an experienced Foundation Phase teacher and teacher educator herself and her role was to have regular contact with the teachers as a mentor and mediator. She also visited the schools once a term to assess the teachers/students according to the Teacher Practicum criteria (see Appendix C for an example) and consolidated the implementation of the previous term’s Teacher Practicum criteria. She also ran workshops for each district at least once a term assisting the teachers with regard to their queries about their assignments. In addition her role was to liaise with principals and NCED officials with regard to the programme. The field officer was also interviewed in order to gain an understanding of her role in the programme. The importance of the role of the field officer will be discussed in Phase 3.

The rest of the team, referred to as experienced teachers in the model, were lecturers associated with the university, mostly in a part-time capacity initially. The model shows an integrated approach to the teaching structure where everyone interacts with one another to develop the programme. A further advantage was that the experience of the senior academic, Ms Sarah Murray, also filtered down all the way to the Rhodes’ teachers.

**Figure 5: Model of teacher educator structure in the Rhodes BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree**
Two challenges with regard to staffing came to the fore in the interviews, namely the initial problems with regard to the change of coordinator of the programme and the difficulty of having part-time lecturing staff.

The original coordinator of the course, who developed the programme for the teachers from the Grahamstown area in 2011, left the university to take up a lecturing post at another university and the current coordinator had to step in just before the Northern Cape cohort arrived for the first time in 2012. The current coordinator, Ms Jenny Hodgskiss had the experience and qualifications and one had the sense that she had developed and refined many of the systems to make them more efficient since taking over the course coordination.

Examples of systems which appear to have been successfully implemented included streamlining the handing in of assignments, adhering to university timelines, and the introduction of a Duly Performed (DP) Certificate, as well as external moderators for all the examinations and the students’ portfolios of evidence. In addition all teachers/students had to sign an agreement at the beginning of the course to say that they would attend the contact sessions at the university and if anyone missed a session at Rhodes a leave of absence form was required, supported by a doctor’s certificate. Furthermore, at the beginning of each contact session the students were given a programme and all notes were colour coded for easy use and reference; all assignments were printed on pink paper, rubrics on yellow and the over-view of the course on blue paper.

Some of the lecturers on the course were part-time and this was identified by the course coordinator as a problem when it came to finding time for meetings to plan and manage the programme. She managed this methodically through constant phone calls and following up on each individual to make sure that everything was in place.

The fact that part-time lecturers are not paid in line with the demands of this type of course was problematic according to Ms Murray. I would recommend that this is an area which should come under scrutiny by the management of the Education Department and that Ms Murray’s recommendation, for the use of post-graduate assistants to lighten the marking load of the part-time staff, should be considered. Interns could also be of assistance to the course coordinator in the physical setting up of the venues each time there is a contact session and the general administration associated with those sessions.

**Course objectives**

There appeared to be no formal objectives of the course although both Ms Murray and Ms Hodgskiss identified broad, global objectives associated with the degree. These were to improve the quality of teaching and the children’s achievements in the Foundation Phase in the Northern Cape by improving the teachers content knowledge, improving their teaching methods and introducing them to the new curriculum (CAPS) and how it was taught.

As Ms Murray pointed out a further aim was to develop the teachers “personally and professionally…to make them more knowledgeable and more confident, more self-aware, just
to allow them to grow and flourish…to realise their potential as individuals.” Ms Hodgskiss went further to say that they hoped these teachers would become leader teachers in their schools, who would apply for Head of Department (HOD) positions and share their new skills and knowledge with other teachers.

These **broad aims to improve the quality of teaching** in the foundation phase **could be achieved by creating**:

- a stimulating learning environment
- clean, attractive classrooms
- a print-rich environment, with alphabets on the walls, a book corner and access to books including graded readers
- focusing on discipline
- creating an environment where children felt respected and valued
- working on literacy skills through shared reading and group guided reading – every child must leave a class being able to read and write
- improving the teachers’ content knowledge
- improving the teachers’ knowledge of theory
- focusing on the CAPS curriculum

The extent to which these aims were fulfilled is examined and reported on Phase 3 of the report.

**Course design**

The degree was broken up into modules which met the requirements of the Department of Higher Education and Training. Every year each of these modules built on the teaching and learning of the previous module as follows (Submission of new teacher education qualifications for approval by the Department of Higher Education and Training, date):

- **Education Studies** reviewed learning theories (Piaget, Vygotsky) in depth with particular application to school learning and effective learning in the first year with key concepts for learning being motivation and engagement; attention and memory as well as self-regulation. In Year 2 the focus was on the ways in which socio-historical factors (poverty, social class, race, gender, and language drawing on Bernstein) influence learning and development. In addition, inequality in South Africa and teacher agency and identity were covered. Year 3 enabled students to use knowledge of assessment to identify children with barriers to learning and to differentiate teaching and learning as well as think critically about quality education, pedagogy and curriculum.

- **Professional Studies** consolidated knowledge of professional issues in teaching and grounded this knowledge in educational practice in the first year by looking at professional issues with regard to the teacher and child; the teacher and the law; classroom organisation and management; lesson planning; sequencing, pacing, progression and differentiation. Year 2 focused on developing a critical, reflective and reflexive understanding of practice in the teaching profession in order to develop teaching approaches and strategies including discipline issues and solutions as well as
dealing with diversity and inclusivity. The final year covered the teacher and the wider community; detailed and integrated planning and preparation; ethical issues in teaching as well as dealing with diversity.

- **In Home Languages** the aim was to develop content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge for teaching in relation to the development of literacy in bi/multilingual contexts. In the first year the focus was on understanding how children learn to read and write; understanding the curriculum (CAPS); teaching strategies; planning, selecting and developing resources; managing the classroom; identifying and supporting struggling readers and writers as well as children’s literature. In the second year and third year the focus shifted to Grade 2 and Grade 3 respectively and understanding how to extend children’s literacy to these grades.

- **In First Additional Languages** (FAL) the aim was to develop content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. The first years focused on theories relating to second language acquisition (SLA); bilingualism and biliteracy – the concept of transfer; consolidation of communicative and text-based approaches, using the balanced approach to teach literacy in the FAL through shared reading and writing, phonics, selecting and developing resources, feedback and assessment; the CAPS curriculum as well as understanding and sharing and learning about the culture of the FAL. In the third year consolidation of the children’s FAL communicative competencies became the focus of the module. If the FAL was English, the focus shifted to teaching children to use English as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) in Grade 4.

- **In the Mathematics modules** the aim was to synthesise knowledge of curriculum and knowledge packages in order to develop learning trajectories for the teaching of the content. In year 1 the focus was on number, shape, space, time and measurement and in year 2 on measurement and data handling. The third year required the students to critically engage with the nature of mathematics by examining beliefs about mathematics and discovering what foundational mathematics was. In addition the focus was on the development of learners’ mathematical proficiency and the promotion of access to quality mathematics experiences and knowledge for all children. This would be achieved by developing, using and critiquing resources, learning recovery (assessing barriers to learning and planning learning trajectories) and developing Mathematics Clubs in schools.

- **Life Skills** developed knowledge and practice as well as an understanding of Life Skills as an integrated, holistic, age-appropriate discipline. Year 1 focused on Creative Arts and Visual Arts as well as Health and Safety and year 2 on the Performance Arts with specific content knowledge for Music and Drama. The third year consolidated knowledge and practice to develop knowledgeable, confident and creative teachers who could promote all areas of Life Skills that were relevant and accessible to learners. In this year the focus was on Natural Science, Social Science, technology and Physical Education.

- Finally, the students are exposed to **Tools and Technologies** in order to strengthen and deepen their academic, computer and information literacy, their capacity for critical
reflection as well as computer and information literacy for research and teaching purposes.

Course design principles

After a difficult start as a result of the change of coordinator in 2012, as discussed earlier in the chapter, several principles informed the design of the course.

There was a deliberate attempt to by the lecturers to ensure that this BEd degree was not of a general nature but was specifically related to the Foundation Phase. All the content and theory was applied to Grades R-3. For example, Ms Murray, the senior academic on the programme planned Education Studies according to what teachers needed to think about in the classroom and what they needed to understand about children in those particular grades. As she explained, ‘…some of those things are to do with psychology and child development and some with sociology – to do with society, poverty and social class… and some are about philosophy and I think most of the teachers have never thought about why am I doing this. And you can see it in their teaching.’

Scaffolding was another design principle as the subjects were structured in such a way that each lecture built up on knowledge and content learnt in previous lectures. The principle of scaffolding extended to Grade R and covered the years from 0 – 4. As Ms Hodgskiss explained, “the idea is when they [the teachers] finish the course they are specialised in teaching all of the grades. The degree equips them to teach from Grade R to Grade 3.” The course had been designed so that teachers did more challenging work with the children in Grades 2 and 3 as Ms Murray felt that the degree needed to shift the focus a little to these grades as often children were not challenged enough by their teachers.

All the lecturers of the content subjects such as Language, Mathematics and Life Skills were focused on teaching according to the CAPS documents. According to Ms Hodgskiss there had been challenges associated with this as some of the teachers/students had remarked that “the principal says we mustn’t use the CAPS.” To facilitate teaching according to the CAPS documents all the information had been cut and pasted from the main document to make everything available to the teacher/students on one page. An example of this would be Language for Grade R where speaking, phonics, reading, viewing, handwriting are all on one page for easy reference.

Reflective and reflexive practice was another design principle. For the Rhodes’ staff this was an important design principle as teachers should always be improving their teaching practice and needed to review their lessons and think about whether they worked or not and what they could do to change the lesson to make it more effective. This was illustrated by two examples given by Ms Hodgskiss which applied to the degree course itself. In the first example she became aware that the teachers had not done well in Reading Instruction and Development as well as Phonics in the last examination. This became the focus of the third year course. Likewise, the lecturers discovered that the teachers did not know how to write academic essays and that plagiarism was a problem. This was being addressed in the Academic Literacy class (in the module, Tools and Technologies) of 2014.
The lecturers on the programme were committed to an **experiential teaching model**. A concrete example of what was being taught was always presented in the lectures. Ms Hodgskiss explained this cycle, ‘so if I was doing group guided reading I will look for a nice video clip on group guided reading and I show it to the students. I tell them to look at what the teacher is doing? What kind of questions is she asking? What kind of resources is she using? What are the children doing?’

Another example from Ms Hodgskiss: ‘then we give abstract conceptualisation, where I give the actual theory and talk about it and also the methodology – the steps … and then we get the students to practise it themselves. We give them the resources and then we say ok, now you are going to work in groups and I want you to try this out and give examples and a little reading lesson…’ These practices also gave the teachers/students a chance to try out new things and the opportunity to reflect on theory and their own practice.

Because the teachers did not have a lot of contact time with the lecturers **coherence** and **relevance** had become design principles. According to Ms Murray these principles also ensured that there was no overload of the same concepts which could happen when one teacher did one aspect and another teacher also covered the same thing. As Ms Murray pointed out ‘You cannot waste a second. So, you can’t afford luxuries, you have to be disciplined about how you design the curriculum. And, you have to make sure you know why everything is in there. And, you have got to be able to justify it…it has got to be coherent so that each bit speaks to another bit. Students complain if they come and they are doing an arbitrary thing here and an arbitrary thing there and say “why am I doing this?”’ The extent to which this has been achieved will be discussed in Phase 3 of the report.

**Academic rigour** was another design principle. Ms Murray felt that the course had to be academically strong ‘but that does not mean a lot of theory.’ Care was taken to find appropriate theory (Piaget and Vygotsky), which was accessible to the teacher/students who were mainly Setswana speaking, that enhanced teaching practice in the classrooms. As Ms Murray pointed out quite a bit of time was spent on Vygotsky with this group in their second year and ‘…through Vygotsky I can talk about play and the role of play and all those things that are important in Grade R. I can use it to talk about self-regulation; about exploratory talk…I can use it to talk about things that are crucial in Foundation Phase, in their Foundation Phase practice. I think that if they really understand those concepts then they will go away with something worthwhile.’

**Issues and challenges associated with the degree**

Several issues and challenges have been identified by the Rhodes’ staff as well as the teachers/students. The challenges identified by the teacher/students were taken from the questionnaire and fell into several categories as shown by Figure 6. It was interesting to note the difference in the issues and challenges identified by the two groups, with the staff identifying a far greater number compared to the teachers/students on the course.

**Figure 6: Challenges identified by the teachers/students**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Number of teachers who found this a problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal challenges</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelling to Rhodes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggling work, study and personal life</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assignments</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of assignments</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing of the assignments</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact sessions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of the periods</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of contact sessions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fifteen (42%) of the teachers mentioned the **difficulty of juggling their personal, work and study lives** (see Figure 6). As one teacher commented, ‘we are overloaded with work as teachers as we are teachers, parents, nurses, social workers etc. to the learners we teach, and as mothers we need to do what is expected of us at home, e.g. cooking, helping our kids with homework. From this course [we are] given lots of assignments…it is too much for us.’ It must be acknowledged that some of the teachers themselves had health and/or financial issues, as well as family, cultural and social obligations in their personal lives which made studying part-time very challenging.

The course coordinator, Ms Hodgskiss pointed out that many of these women were the main bread winners and head of their homes with commitments and large families to look after and this could have an impact on their studies. According to the coordinator this could result in a ‘tension between not being sympathetic and being perhaps too sympathetic’ as her job was to represent the university when problems arise.

Age was not a criterion for selection and this raised concerns as some of the teachers/students were in their mid-50s and were struggling with ill-health. The course was physically demanding with long bus trips to Grahamstown from the Northern Cape, and once they were at Rhodes the teachers were required to do a lot of walking; for example, the computer laboratory was a good ten minutes’ walk from their lecture hall. Feedback from the questionnaire confirmed that six of the teachers found the bus trip very demanding physically (see Figure 6). However, one teacher felt that ‘one was never too old to learn,’ while another teacher realistically pointed out that ‘for most of us in this course we are retiring in a few years…to sit at home with the knowledge.’ She felt that it would be ‘wise’ to fund and train younger ‘children’ who had a matric as they would have a long time educating learners.
Some teachers worked in very remote areas - one of the schools was in a deep rural area 70 kilometres away from Kuruman. Some of the schools did not have electricity. The course coordinator, Ms Hodgskiss, felt that circumstances such as these made the completion of assignments extremely difficult for these teachers. The only difficulties encountered by a very small number (3) of teachers related to the number of assignments and the timing of the assignments (see Figure 6) particularly at the beginning of the year. As one teacher pointed out ‘this is a crucial time for my work especially with Grade 1 learners.’ It is admirable however that these teachers had met the academic requirements of their first two years and were now in their final year of study.

It was to the credit of the teachers that they were always on time, if not early, for each of the lectures in the contact sessions. This ensured that no time was wasted during contact sessions. However, the time allocated to lectures was a problem as each subject had limited time with the teachers/students at the four contact sessions in the year. It was a very full time-table but the design principles outlined above (relevance, coherence, academic rigour) had ensured that every moment during the session was used constructively. Theory that was introduced in Education Studies was reinforced by the other lecturers in their subjects. An example was children’s play; the theoretical aspect was introduced in Education Studies, but a different aspect was covered by Professional Studies with the teachers required to do a research assignment of children’s play.

Reflective and reflexive practice did not come easily to some of the teachers. The field officer stated that many of the teachers had many years of teaching experience and were ‘stuck in their ways’ and that it ‘requires a lot of patience to get them to see that there is another picture.’ Ms Hodgskiss explained that these teachers found it very difficult to reflect on their own practice. As she commented, ‘we want teachers to teach and then to think ok what worked well, what didn’t work well. And if it didn’t work well what changes can be made next time that can improve the process – to improve the learning…it is not just a matter of reflecting it is doing it in quite a systematic way.’ Measures had been put in place to assist them and the teachers/students were required to reflect in writing as part of their assignments. It was encouraging to read that one teacher/student had embraced this concept. She wrote, ‘I shouldn’t be hard on myself when I fail. The course taught me that when I fail it means I have set…challenging goals.’

Academic rigour was identified as a challenge. Ms Murray stated that these teachers had quite a lot of practical knowledge but not about the pedagogy of what they were actually teaching. When the teachers started the degree they were not able to articulate what was driving their practice according to Ms Murray. She acknowledged however that universities did not ‘have any realisation what it takes to work in those kind of contexts, with under-privileged teachers who are under-prepared for… the academic side.’

Ms Murray argued that many of these students were writing in a language, English, that was not their home language and it was difficult for them as a result to be able to write essays and read academic articles.
There was a discrepancy between the year mark and the examination mark with some of the teachers. Ms Hodgskiss felt this was due to the fact that some of the teachers struggled with the actual understanding of the topic. She explained that some of the topics were new and ‘difficult for them…and it takes longer for them to implement it…the difficulty is taking theory and putting it into practice.’ This could be attributed to the fact that some of the teachers were stuck in their ways due to many years of experience and they had to be encouraged to take risks and try out new methods of teaching.

It was reported, despite the attempts by the lecturers to achieve coherence that the teachers did not always understand how the different components of their course fitted in with each other. As Ms Hodgskiss explained, ‘I notice now that even with Language …the different components of language and trying to get them to understand the reading process. They [the teachers/students] don’t really understand that all these different things are happening and that we need to learn about them separately, but in actual fact when a child is reading a lot of these things are taking place simultaneously.’

The teachers struggled with some of the academic aspects of the degree and with their reading assignments in particular. This may due to the fact that all of these teachers grew up in areas without libraries as a result of apartheid (Paton-Ash, 2012) and were not readers themselves. The field officer described how she had to motivate these teachers every time there was a reading assignment because ‘it seems as though it is something they can’t overcome.’ Plagiarism was also regarded as a problem.

Ms Murray stated that she would search thoroughly for appropriate texts that were worthwhile reading and academically sound. This was not an easy task as academics ‘don’t like to write in simple ways.’ To counteract this problem, academic literacy assignments were introduced where the teachers were given the readings, and according to Ms Hodgskiss, as a first assignment they were ‘given questions that relate to the article, that takes them through the article so that they start dealing with the content and the new concepts and the implications for teaching…and then we give them something that they have to write about.’ This intervention however had increased the number of assignments but had improved the quality of the course.

The field officer felt that the teachers would benefit from study guides or books and did not understand why these were not available as a resource to these teachers/students.

Ms Murray identified literacy as an enormous challenge. International tests measuring literacy showed that our children performed very poorly when it came to literacy as well as mathematics (Paton-Ash, 2012). Ms Murray contested that research from the United States showed that poverty had an impact on literacy levels. As she stated, ‘children from poor homes are two years behind in literacy than children from wealthy homes…teachers in poor schools have just got a much, much tougher job.’

A lot of work had been invested by the field officer in helping the teachers set up book corners. The aim was to make these attractive, comfortable and cosy spaces for children to go and relax and read books. However, sourcing graded readers and books for book corners to create a print-rich environment was problematic as these schools were disadvantaged with regard to
library materials during the apartheid era. The teachers were encouraged to make use of the local library, share books with other teachers in the school and to approach Biblionef for book donations. The latter was done as a literary exercise where the teachers/students themselves had to draft a proposal for books in a letter to Biblionef. A further possibility for a source of books had recently come to light in 2014 when visiting education officials from the Northern Cape (NCED) informed the Rhodes staff that they were about to introduce a ‘box library’ project in their schools.

The implementation of group guided reading was a challenge to the teachers as all of them had large numbers of children in their classes. Ms Hodgskiss reported that they became demotivated because of the size of the classes and did not seem to understand how you could take a group for 15 minutes as they were concerned about what they did with the rest of the class during that time. She was adamant however, that by the end of the year they would be able to do group guided reading.

The focus of the course in the first two years had been on the literacy or Language component. However, the focus had shifted to Mathematics with a new lecturer in charge of the subject from the beginning of 2014. Life Skills however was perceived as a weak area in the course. Ms Hodgskiss stated that teachers did not appear to do much Life Skills in their classes because they did not ‘really understand how it works and they don’t really understand the terminology.’ This was compounded by the fact that the Life Skills course up till now had focused on practice and the teachers needed to consolidate what they had done in class with more reading material and the assignments according to Ms Murray. In 2014 the teachers were exposed to Physical Education and terms such as ‘laterality’ and ‘dominance’ so that they could understand how vital movement was to the child’s development, and how it connected to their academic achievements.

Computer literacy was also identified as a weakness of the degree course as many of the teachers did not have good computer skills. The effective use of technology was being covered on the course but Ms Hodgskiss believed that it could be done a lot better. Other problems were identified as the long walk needed to get to the Rhodes computer laboratory during the contact sessions, and the fact that the teachers had two lessons and did not practise when they get home. Many of these students could not type up their assignments because they did not have the skills and/or did not own computers. Attempts to obtain funding for laptops for those teachers without computers had failed so far. A further challenge for some of the teachers was that they did not have access to the internet and this meant that research was difficult. Furthermore, they could not refer to the video clip URLs given to them by their lecturers to reinforce what they were learning in the lectures during the contact sessions.

A clean, hygienic learning environment was a further challenge in the schools in the Northern Cape as the drinking water and the food, given to the children under the umbrella of feeding schemes, were delivered in unhygienic conditions. Rhodes’ staff identified these issues as an opportunity to focus on Life Skills, on health in particular. According to Ms Hodgskiss teachers were taught by the field officer to teach children the things such as ‘how to cough and how to blow your nose and how to wash your hands…the basic things that children don’t know.’ Both
Ms Murray and Ms Hodgskiss reported that the teachers had responded positively to this intervention, even in some cases by enlisting the help of parents. The net result was that in all schools clean water and food delivered in hygienic conditions was characteristic of the classrooms of the teachers on the course. A further example in Life Skills characterised these classrooms: the children ate in their classrooms on desks that had been cleaned and covered with table cloths or table mats. Each child received their food on their own plates and they sat at the table, said a prayer and then ate and chatted.

A further health problem related to the toilet facilities as four of the Kuruman schools did not have access to flush toilets and relied on pit-toilets instead. Taking care of these facilities so that they remain clean and hygienic had been a challenge identified by the Rhodes staff as well as the field officer.

It was discouraging to discover that there were problems working with the subject advisors in the NCED. One of the teachers reported in the questionnaire that she had never received any support from her district officers. Two teachers felt that workshops held by the district area subject advisors were not helpful as all they were given were papers to read with no assistance in understanding the content of those papers.

According to Ms Hodgskiss, Rhodes was supposed to be working closely with the NCED but in reality this had not happened. The subject advisors were supposed to come in and sit in on the teachers to see how they were doing. But if the subject advisors came at all, they would look at the teacher’s planning book and not visit the classroom. There appeared to be internal politics which had impacted on the relationships between teachers and the subject advisors.

A few logistical issues were mentioned as proving problematic. There had been difficulties with transporting the teachers to and from the Northern Cape. The Rhodes’ staff were not responsible for transport but felt frustrated because it was out of their hands as transport was the responsibility of the funder.

A second logistical issue related to accommodation. The teachers were accommodated in student residences which usually worked well as the students were still on holiday when accommodation was required. September was the exception. At this time the teachers had to share rooms or stay in dormitories and it was not very pleasant for them.

A further logistical issue related to the timing of the examinations. In previous years examinations were held in Kimberley and Kuruman over five days and Ms Hodgskiss felt that this impacted negatively on achievement especially in the examinations that were written towards the end of the session. Feedback was sought from the teachers and examinations were scheduled over two weekends with a break in between.

The receiving and marking of assignments was a logistical challenge as in the past the assignments were handed out at the contact session in early January and were completed and returned to the lecturers in April at the next contact session. The assignments would then be marked and returned to the teachers in the June contact session. This cycle would be repeated each term. This meant that there was a long time before students received any feedback on their
work. The new system introduced in 2014 gave early deadlines for some assignments which had to be handed into the field officer who would then courier them down to Rhodes.

No assignments were given in September as there would not be enough time to hand them in, mark them and get them back to the teachers before the examinations begin. Ms Hodgskiss also identified a problem with some part-time lecturers who left marking assignments to the last minute. As mentioned earlier (under the heading ‘Staffing’) she had worked to put systems in place to counteract these problems by refining and streamlining the receiving and marking of assignments. One of the systems was the introduction of a closing date for all assignments, including re-dos, at the beginning of September. This would allow enough time for the lecturers to mark the assignments before the teachers arrived for their final contact session of the year.

Finally two *logistical problems relating to Rhodes University* were identified. The first was that the university was not geared towards part-time students and there were problems registering the students because the courses were held in the university’s vacation times when administration staff were not as readily available. This was due to the fact that the teachers were not taken out of their classes to attend the contact sessions.

The second issue related to access to the Resource Centre as well as the actual resources in the centre. Ms Murray felt that staff and teachers needed access to the centre and ‘one shouldn’t have to endlessly [be] negotiating these things.’ Resources had been ordered for this degree course but were not available as they were taking a long time to be processed through the system. It was also important, according to Ms Murray that the resources were multi-lingual, isiXhosa and Setswana in particular, and that the resource centre did not have a ‘fraction of what was available’ in these languages.

**The impact of the BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree course**

There were encouraging reports from the Rhodes’ staff relating to the *positive impact the degree has had on the teachers as well as their schools*. This was backed up by every teacher answering the questionnaire (see Figure 7). In contrast to Figure 6, where only a few challenges were identified by a relatively small number of teachers, Figure 7 illustrates that there were many aspects of being involved in the course that the teachers viewed in a positive light.

**Figure 7: The positive impact of the BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree course in the view of the teachers on the course.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible dimension</th>
<th>Number of teachers who felt this way</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>View of the degree programme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering, challenging or inspiring</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well organised</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20
As can be seen from Figure 7 many of the teachers viewed the degree course and the lecturers in a positive light. As one teacher wrote, the lecturers ‘are so kind to help us, even if we struggle they make us feel at home.’ Another commented on the programme and the lecturers by writing, ‘the programme is very good; a lot of knowledge and information has been given to us, and all the lecturers whom we interact with are experts in that specific subject or field. All the subjects are relevant.’ One teacher noted that the programme was interesting and the every subject had ‘demonstrations for us to understand better.’

All of these teachers reported positive changes in some form to either their own personal development, their teaching, their professionalism or their learners. Their comments attested
to the positive way in which their teaching practice had changed as a result of the course. Some examples of their views follow:

- **Their personal development:** 12 teachers felt it was an honour to be chosen and used the word ‘proud’ to describe how they felt about the course. A respondent described the teachers involved in the course as ‘shining stars’ because of the changes they had made in their classes and at their schools. One teacher wrote that ‘this course has affected my personality tremendously as I am now (sic) a caring, loving and kind mother of the learners, community, colleagues and my family.’ Nine teachers commented on the fact that their attitude towards teaching had changed and they were enjoying their jobs. A teacher wrote, ‘this course encourages me to love my work and my learners,’ while another stated ‘I’m not negative about teaching anymore.’ 12 teachers also commented on how their self-confidence had grown as a result of being on the course. One teacher felt that being on the course ‘makes me proud because I am now more confident about what I am doing in class.’

- **Their teaching practice:** As one teacher explained, ‘I learned many things which I applied in my class and saw improvements in children’s work.’ Another teacher felt that the practical way the University dealt with CAPS ‘makes it easy for us to implement in our classrooms.’ One teacher described how much easier her workload had become by involving parents. She also described how her teaching skills had improved; ‘I know different reading strategies that helped my learners to read. I am not afraid to teach mathematics anymore because I know where to start.’ Finally a teacher wrote about how the course had changed her teaching and her understanding of what was expected from her. According to her the change was drastic and ‘I now know how young minds learn and what I must do to discipline my children so that teaching and learning can be effective. I didn’t have classroom rules, group rules, etc. I didn’t follow what I must do in class on a daily basis as expected. The course has opened my eyes.’

- **Their professionalism:** Comments such as ‘I am now a teacher who is always on time’ indicate that punctuality is now part of this teacher’s approach to her job. Two teachers reported that they had learnt how to manage their time and three had begun to plan better. The way teachers dressed was commented on by two respondents who both described a change to wearing clothes that were more suitable to the work they did. As one teacher explained, ‘I wear clothes now that I can sit down with, which makes me comfortable and also learners can see that I am at their level.’ Significantly a large number of teachers (54%) described how they shared their knowledge and new skills with colleagues. As one teacher stated, ‘I always try to share with my colleagues the knowledge I gain from here [Rhodes] because I know it’s for all our benefit.’ Another described how her colleagues viewed her as an ‘expert’ as she was now in a position where she could ‘assist, guide and re-train’ and she was ‘more willing to help out and I’m confident when someone enters my class while I’m teaching.’

- **Impact on their learners:** One teacher described how she had become a ‘loving parent to the children I am teaching’ and how she had become more confident to ensure that learners ‘enjoy being in my class…I have learned to hug every child in my class and I
realised that it contributes positively to the lives of individual children.’ Another wrote that she had seen a ‘positive improvement in the academic performance in the learners in my class.’ A teacher noted that the course had an impact on literacy as her learners were ‘starting to love the books/reading.’ Finally, one of the teachers described how despite ‘studying pedagogics at college’ she had only understood the concepts in her first year at Rhodes. She commented, ‘I try to get the background of the child and I now understand why these poor kids behave, perceive or have difficulties in their academics and in their extra-murals. I know how to assist their shortcomings by going to the source [of the problem] and [it] is possible to rectify that.’

Interestingly, six teachers described a wish for the teachers in the Northern Cape and/or the rest of the country to be part of this degree programme. As one teacher wrote’ I wish all educators in our province could be developed through using skills used at this University.’ Another teacher realised that ‘this programme is all our country needs to bring a drastic positive change in the Education Department.’

The teachers were motivated by the fact that they are going to become graduates. Ms Murray commented that this had become apparent with their passing of the examinations each year. As she stated, ‘in a short course you can’t say to the students that it is really important that you keep the bar high and that you achieve. But I can say to them all the time “you are going to be graduates of Rhodes University and you have to achieve this”…you can really get the students to aspire when they are doing a BEd.’ The field officer supported this view by making reference to the low number of ‘drop-outs’ on the course - only one from the original group of 38 teachers (33 in the Northern Cape and 5 private students) had left.

The design principles of the degree were identified by the field officer as fundamental to the success of the degree. She felt that the lecturers from Rhodes had designed and adapted the course with the context of the state of education as well as the social conditions of the Northern Cape in mind. One of the teachers commented that the course had been an ‘eye-opener for me in many ways. I didn’t understand CAPS the way I do now.’

Ms Murray felt that there was an emerging number of the teachers who were able to use theory to drive their own teaching practice. She gave an example of the recent examinations (2013) where they had to explain the processes of restructuring knowledge, using examples from their own every day experience in their classes. According to Ms Murray, they ‘did a fantastic job.’ These teachers, some more than others, were able to answer examination questions by drawing in concepts from elsewhere that had been dealt with in the lectures. She had also noticed that the teachers did ‘use more of the language, some of the terminology and some of the concepts …we have been dealing with.’ Ms Hodgskiss concurred and stated that she felt that the Rhodes’ teachers were able ‘to start thinking about things in more depth…and give reasons for their opinions and their views.

There was a perception that teaching had improved especially with regard to literacy. According to Ms Hodgskiss, the teachers were ‘starting to understand the value of reading, not as much as I would like, but it is definitely improving from what is was.’ Proof of this was
book corners which were a new addition to the classrooms, the fact that children were able to read books in their classrooms and the teachers themselves were starting to implement reading strategies in their Language lessons.

The way the teachers interacted and talked to the children had changed. Encouraging talk such as ‘well done’, ‘that is great’ and ‘I can see you have worked hard at this’ were all phrases that had been introduced in their classes. The teachers also started treating the children with more respect, yet at the same time introducing systems of discipline as well as reward systems to encourage children to do better. On the whole there was a general feeling of ‘well-being and respect and kindness and motivation that perhaps weren’t there before’ according to Ms Hodgskiss.

There was a perception that the learning environments had improved in the classes of these teachers. In the beginning the field officer had focused quite extensively on the quality of the teaching environment in order to ensure that the classrooms were clean and attractive places. Ms Murray felt this was ‘powerful…to an outsider, it might look like, well why are we doing things like scrubbing the classrooms and putting up curtains and having flowers on the tables …particularly the teachers who lack confidence – then suddenly they have these beautiful classrooms, all neat and tidy, and everything is looking lovely and everybody is coming to look at your classroom, and they were saying things like “my goodness this is like a Model C school”; and all the other kids want to come to this classroom.’

The teachers themselves were starting to have an impact on the teaching practices of colleagues who were not on the course. The field officer described how colleagues of some of these teachers were asking for help. This had not always been the case. At the start of the programme the teachers were reluctant to share their knowledge with their colleagues as they feared that their fellow teachers would be jealous of them and make life difficult for them as a result. When this did not happen and colleagues started asking for help the confidence of the teachers grew and they became willing to share their knowledge.

Ms Hodgskiss also commented that other teachers at the school who were not on the course were very impressed. The field officer had a vehicle with the Rhodes logo on it and apparently people ‘come to her and say where is Rhodes, and I have seen what my colleague is doing and I would like to study there as well because I can see that what that teacher is doing in her classroom is making a difference.’

Ms Hodgskiss reported that the focus on improving health and hygiene in the classes had ‘made major spin-offs in the actual schools…their colleagues are coming and saying “can you show me how to do this? I want to learn how to do this.” At one school the impact of this focus resulted in a change in the water system for the whole school.

The field officer described one of the major problems in Northern Cape schools was non-attendance of children and teachers. It was common to have 60 children in a class because of teacher absenteeism. The teachers had reported that attendance at school by the children had improved since they had implemented changes in their classrooms as a result of the degree course. The field officer stated that this had resulted in parents ‘fighting to get their children
into their [teachers] classes.’ This was attributed to the fact that children felt respected and valued in their classrooms.

Ms Hodgskiss thought that the **attitude of the teachers towards teaching had changed** and improved. They were starting to realise the impact and importance of what they did in Foundation Phase and the effect it had when their pupils got to Matric. As a result their feeling of self-worth had improved. This was confirmed by 12 teachers who reported that their self-esteem and confidence had improved (see Figure 7) since being on this course.

It was reported that **principals were starting to become quite proud** of their teachers who were on the course and as a result were giving them the recognition that they needed according to Ms Hodgskiss. One teacher described how she was ‘…the light at my school. My class is always sparkling,’ and the principal ‘always refers other teachers to my class so that they [can] make improvements.’

It would appear that these teachers’ positions amongst the parent community had improved as a result of them being on the course. Parents were keen to have their children in the classes of these teachers. The field officer explained that teachers were initially reluctant to involve parents ‘because they can’t set a foot wrong and then the parents are onto them.’ The **involvement of parents** by the teachers had been a fundamental change in three schools in particular. Ms Murray gave the example of a teacher who got the parents together to view a programme called *Feeling at home with literacy* about the day in a life of a Xhosa speaking girl in Cape Town and all the environmental literacies she sees when her mother takes her to school. The field officer was working very hard to change the mind sets of the teachers with regard to parental involvement; by having personal contact with parents and to ‘put them on a podium’ by praising them and using their strengths. Teachers had to acknowledge that sending notices home might be pointless as many of the parents were illiterate. They therefore had to communicate face to face with these parents.

The **supportive role of the field officer** was identified as one of the reasons why the course was working so well. As Ms Murray stated, ‘she is the kind of key to it all cause you can’t make it happen unless you have got a good person on the ground.’ The field officer agreed and felt that the Rhodes’ degree was ‘ground breaking’ and succeeded because teachers were implementing what they were being taught. She felt that on other teacher development programmes they were ‘learning… [but] in class they don’t implement’ what they had learnt. According to her, ‘everyone is moaning and complaining that it (implementation) is not happening but there is no one to monitor and I think this monitoring part is very important.’

The field officer monitored the implementation in lessons and in the classrooms by the teachers of the theory and practice that was being taught on the degree. She also ran workshops to assist all these teachers and went out of her way to help students who were struggling. She attended the contact sessions and made notes and asked questions in order to clarify points to be able to assist in the design of the assessment rubric (see Appendix C) for the teaching practicums. This particular individual was perceived as being passionate about her job and words of praise such as ‘she is amazing, really committed’ (Ms Murray) and ‘she is really hands-on and she is
passionate about pastoral work...always available to help’ (Ms Hodgskiss) were used to describe her approach to her job. The field officer disclosed that she was known as the ‘Queen of Hygiene or Ecoli’ by the teachers because of her insistence on a clean and healthy learning environment.

The field officer confirmed that she was passionate about her position to ‘make a change in our children’s lives; to be able to read…numeracy skills and the life skills they need…people don’t have life skills anymore. There are no values; people kill for a cellphone…it is all about change in our communities and I see the teachers in Foundation Phase as people who can bring the change, because what you have been taught there you are going to carry with you.’ To her the perception, amongst people was that government would bring about change to improve education, was incorrect and they did not realise that they can bring about change themselves. It was her goal to make these teachers realise that they could make their own resources and they ‘could still make it [change] happen.’ This was confirmed in the questionnaire by one teacher who wrote how she had started looking at waste as a resource to be used for lessons.

Ms Murray explained how the lecturers would liaise with the field officer, ‘she sees them[the teachers] once a month, I think it is, in the schools and goes and does the classroom observations and works with them on different things. And we [the lecturers] liaise with her … and she will say to me “is there anything specific that you would like done”, and then I will say to her “I would really like you to look at this in the classroom”.’

The field officer stated that she had developed good relationships with the teachers. This was due, in part, to her counselling role when she spent time listening to all their personal and professional problems. She felt that nationwide students were dropping out of their courses at universities because of these problems. However, if there was someone who was prepared to listen and help by putting in structures to assist these teachers they did not have to feel overwhelmed by their problems and could help themselves. Examples of this came from two of the replies to the questionnaire where both teachers gave credit to the field officer for them still being on the course despite having wanted to drop out earlier. Her encouragement and assistance gave them the support they needed to stay on the course despite the difficulties they were encountering.

The field officer also admitted that it was difficult to be objective when it came to these teachers and this did cause tensions between herself and the staff at Rhodes. The latter had to ensure that academic rigour applied to all aspects of the course even though the teachers were experiencing problems in their lives.

The field officer had influence beyond the teachers themselves. She had developed relationships with the principals and had been asked by some of these principals to give motivational talks on health and hygiene and best teaching practice.

The workbooks from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) were seen as good resources for the teachers to use in their schools. An advantage of the workbooks was that these were available in all 11 official languages and as a result made it very easy for the lecturers to use the English version in their lectures as Setswana speaking teachers would have the identical
resource available to them in the own language. It also meant that teachers had a print-rich tool to use in the class even if there were no other books available to the children.

**Teamwork amongst the Rhodes staff** was also identified as a positive factor of the degree programme. Ms Murray felt that a community of people was being built of those lecturers who were involved in the course and Ms Hodgskiss had a lot to do with this as she was very committed to the programme and was a very organised and efficient manager. These lecturers were talking and interacting amongst themselves about the degree as well as in the meetings that Ms Hodgskiss chaired. Generally an atmosphere of collegiality prevailed amongst the staff involved in the degree.

**Conclusion**

In this section I have reported on Phase 1 of the research. This involved analysis and interpretation of a questionnaire for all teachers involved in the programme, interviews with key staff on the BEd programme, documents pertaining to the course as well as understanding the context of the teaching environment in the Northern Cape. Several issues and challenges were identified. Some related to the course itself, the teachers themselves and several logistical challenges were noted. The impact of the BEd degree on the teachers, their teaching practice, the learning environment and the children themselves has been described.

The information gathered during Phase 1 influenced the design of the questionnaire for teachers and their principals in Phase 2. The aim was to investigate the issues and challenges as well as the perceived impact of this degree course in the schools where these teachers were practicing.

**PHASE 2**

**Introduction**

Phase 2 reports on the findings of the fieldwork which was completed over a five day period in the schools in the Northern Cape.

**Aims of the fieldwork**

In order to achieve the goals of the evaluation as outlined in Phase 1, several questions needed to be clarified and answered. These arose as a result of the data analysis of the interviews, documents and the questionnaire.

In the questionnaire teachers identified several areas where change had occurred, namely their personal and professional development as well as their teaching practice (see Figure 7) as well as some issues and challenges associated with doing the degree (see Figure 6). In addition the staff at Rhodes had outlined further issues and challenges as well as their perceptions of how the course had impacted on the teachers.

The aim of this phase was to go into the schools and determine if change had or had not occurred as reported by the staff and the teachers as well as determining if the staff were correct
in their descriptions of the issues and challenges relating to the degree. More particularly the aim was to be able to illuminate if reality matched what the stakeholders were saying about the BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree. This would be achieved by interviewing the teachers, their principals some parents and colleagues where possible and observing what was happening in their classrooms as well as attending a workshop run by the field officer for the teachers.

Methodology

- **Semi-structured interviews of teachers, parents, principals and a NCED official.**

Nine schools were visited. All the principals (nine) and eleven teachers who were students on the course were interviewed. In addition three teachers, who were not on the programme but were colleagues of the teachers involved, were interviewed. A parent was interviewed from two different schools. All principals were interviewed during the school day and the teachers during the breaks or after school.

Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B) of the stakeholders included questions which could possibly illuminate the actual context of teaching in those schools in the Northern Cape, changes if any to teaching practice including sharing with colleagues and personal development, as well as issues and challenges associated with the degree.

The semi-structured interview as a result would include questions relating to the context in which the teaching took place, the impact of the degree on teaching practice, the learners, colleagues, the principals and the school itself. Finally the views of the teachers on the course itself were to be examined. Questions were asked of the principals in each of the schools visited as well as parents to see if they had noticed a change in their teachers, what this change was and how it had affected their learners, their colleagues as well as their schools.

A well placed official in the NCED was also interviewed in order to gain an insight into perceptions within the department about the course.

The interview guide included:

**Questions that related to context:**

- Where the schools were (location) and what facilities and resources did these schools have?
- What were the socio-cultural contexts of the communities the schools served?
- What were the teachers’ background and qualifications?

**Questions that would assist in establishing the ways in which the BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree had impacted on the teaching practice of the individuals:**

- Had the course influenced their aims and goals as teachers?
- How had the course influenced their practice?
- a. What systems had they introduced since being on the course?
b. What tools and resources were the teachers using since being on the course?
c. How had the course changed the way they prepared for lessons?

- How had the course impacted on their professionalism
  a. Did they share their knowledge and skills with their colleagues and principals?
  b. Did they involve the parents?
- How had the teachers understood and embraced the theoretical aspects of their course?
  a. Did they use theory learnt at Rhodes to drive their practice?
  b. Were they able to articulate the theory behind their practice?
  c. Did what they saw or experienced in the classroom relate to the theory that they had been exposed to?
- Did the course have an impact on their learners? If so what was the impact?
  a. Had their attitude towards the children and the management of the children been affected? If so, how had it changed?

Questions that would examine their experience of the BEd (In-service) degree:

- What was the most difficult aspect of the degree?
- What did the degree mean to them personally?
- What role did the field officer play?
- What was the role of the NCED?

**The interviews**

The interviews with the principals, parents and colleagues were relatively short and the length of the interviews with the teachers varied according to the time available. Some people were very easy to interview and there was only two people whose interviews I was not happy with. One was a principal who did not answer the questions and the other was a teacher who appeared not to understand what I was asking.

- **Observations of lessons in each of the nine schools visited**

Time was spent in the classes of nine of the teachers observing their teaching, their class layouts, and their interaction with the learners as well as the systems that they had put in place.

- **Observations of workshop attended by the Kuruman group of teachers.**

One afternoon was spent with the field officer who held a workshop in Kuruman for the teachers in the area.

**The number of teachers on the programme at the schools visited**

The number of teachers at each school differed from individual teachers at four of the schools, to a maximum of eight teachers at one school. Two of the schools had two teachers and two had three teachers on the programme.

The number of teachers per school was a contentious issue as far as the NCED official was concerned. Her view was that the degree course should be ‘spread …to more schools’ and she
gave an example that ‘we would not like to see five English teachers at one school.’ I would support this view as the greatest impact of teachers on the school seemed to come from schools with only one teacher involved in the programme or the school with three teachers in different grades – Grade 1, 2 and 3 (see section on Professionalism).

Data Analysis and interpretation

The physical locations, facilities and resources of the schools

The location of the nine schools visited where the teachers worked differed quite considerably. Four schools were located in isolated rural areas or in small villages surrounding Kuruman whereas two of the schools were located in small towns, a distance away from Kimberley. There were also teachers on the programme from three urban schools in Kimberley.

All of these schools lacked facilities (see photos below) such as sports fields, school halls and libraries with only two of the schools being in the fortunate position of having mobile library boxes sponsored by a mining company. One Kimberley school had a library but it was no longer in use.

A physical education lesson in the yard of the school. Note the stony ground.

One school had been the beneficiary of several mobile library boxes. Two were in the principal’s office and this one was in the classroom of a teacher who was on the course.

At one school there were teachers working in pre-fabricated classrooms. This made teaching very challenging. As the teacher commented, ‘You see teaching in a mobile class is not good at all. Weather conditions here are extreme. In winter it is extremely cold; summer it is extremely hot. So teaching in a mobile class it really does frustrate the children especially because I sometimes can go outside [to cool down] but [not] these poor kids.’

Two of the rural schools had problems with water and had to rely on pit-toilets. It was concerning that that one of these schools had a brand new toilet block with flush toilets but had to rely on their old pit-toilets as the water supply to the school was so un-reliable.
At one of the schools the **Grade R teacher was teaching her class in the school yard** in the sun as the classroom allocated to her was too small for the children. It was a small room but it was crowded with furniture as well as old boxes (see photos below). This could be remedied by clearing out the furniture and placing it elsewhere and one wondered why this had not been done. It must be said that the Grade R teacher was not on the Rhodes programme. However her Head of Department was a student on the programme and it is disappointing that she had not used her position as HOD to ensure that the room was cleared up so that it could be used as a classroom.

![Grade R class on their knees, colouring in on whilst working on stony ground.](image1)

![Grade R classroom filled with old boxes and rubbish.](image2)

Two of the schools had a large covered area where assemblies could take place. There was **evidence however of money being spent on infrastructure** (see photos below) as two of the schools had undergone recent renovations and additions to the school. One school had built a new block of classrooms for the Foundation Phase classes as well as a new Grade R facility (the latter donated by one of the mining houses). This school also had new covered car ports for the teachers and a newly paved driveway and entrance to the school. Another school had recently acquired a new administration block as well as covered car ports and a new paved entrance to the school.

It seemed that improvements to the entrance gates, the newly paved driveways and covered car parks had been a priority at these schools and one wonders if money would have been better spent creating facilities such as halls, sports fields or libraries/library boxes with sufficient books in them. These facilities certainly would have benefited the children more.
A new Grade R facility donated by a local mining company for a school in a small village near Kuruman

In three of the schools the principal had made attempts to improve the environment by adding plants and grass to the school yards. On the whole, however these schools lacked inviting outdoor environments where children could gather to play during breaks and after school. It was interesting to see a community development project at work at one of the schools where workers were clearing weeds and tidying up the school yard to make it look more attractive.

The socio-cultural contexts of the schools

These schools all served the poorer communities in the province. Most of them were no fee schools and even where fees were charged, the amount was minimal and the parents struggled to pay. Most of the children in the classes that were observed received a meal at school. One teacher explained, ‘most of the children are eating here at our school. Because most of our learners are not from [here]… they are from …the deep rural village. They come and build shacks here; there are lots of them.’ Her principal confirmed that the majority of children came from the nearby ‘tin shanties; they are new settlements, not having electricity or water.’

There were a handful of children in each of the schools who brought their own lunch to school. Only one teacher felt that there was not as much poverty amongst the school community when compared to the community at her previous school.
Teachers in the Kuruman area mentioned **the high level of unemployment** amongst the parents. According to one teacher many of the parents depended on government grants as a result. She said, ‘most of them are not employed. They were striking last week because they think that the mine is not working for them. There are mines in the Northern Cape but there are people from Joburg, from all over that come and work here. Whereas if they are here they are not [employed] and even if they apply they are not called for… so they toi, toi.’ The deputy principal at one school indicated that 80% of the parents at the school were unemployed, all of them depending on the social grants of the pensioners in their families.

Poverty also had an impact on the pupil’s abilities to bring their own **resources** to school. They did not have enough money to buy stationary or plastic to cover their books. One teacher solved this by collecting crayons from children in her classes at the end of the year before they left for the next grade. She would keep these and dish them out to those children who were without crayons. Likewise she would take the previous year’s old books that the children no longer used and she would remove the covers so that she could cover the books for children whose families could not afford to buy plastic.

It was clear that **parental involvement in their children’s education was problematic** for several reasons:

- Some of the teachers outlined how difficult it was to work with the **parents who did not have an education** themselves. As one teacher explained, ‘parents of this community are not educated. Most of them can’t read and write…and most of the parents are very young.’ This had implications when notices were sent home as well as when parents were required to support homework. This was confirmed by a teacher who described how difficult it was to involve the parents in their children’s homework. She said, ‘When you give them homework they come to school not having done the work. When you ask why did your mother not assist you? They say, my mother cannot read and write.’ It would appear that the brothers and fathers were not around to assist the children either.

- One of the Kimberley principals also found the **lack of paternal involvement** in their children’s education as proving problematic. He described what happened when he called the parents in to discuss difficulties their child was having at school. He said, ‘it is just the mommies that pitch up. I have got to basically insist when I write a letter or make a phone call that I want to see the daddy. If I don’t do that the daddy doesn’t come. It seems that education has become the responsibility of mommies, mothers and women.’

- Some of the parents of these children were said to **abuse alcohol**. When asked if alcohol affected their babies, one of the teachers reported that it did. She said: ‘We are sitting with most of the children here who are struggling to read and write. Some of them are in Grade 3 but they are struggling to write their own names. They are only in Grade 3 because of the policy which says they must go forward.’ One teacher described how some mothers came to school drunk and embarrassed their children. Even more concerning was her description of alcohol abuse by a pupil at the school. In her words, ‘There was one of the learners in Grade 3 last year who brought a bottle [of alcohol]
and was drinking in the toilet…because at home, he also is drinking. He couldn’t wait till school was out so he brought it to school. It is a problem of parents who abuse alcohol and if you call them they don’t respond, they don’t care; they don’t know the meaning of good care of their children.’

One of the principals at a Kimberley school felt that getting the parents involved was a big challenge. He said that the parents were reluctant to support their children. On the first day of school the yard was full of parents but that they did not come to meetings at the school. He explained that they worked with the small number of supportive parents as a result. It must also be noted that some of the parents were supportive of the teachers and did attend class and grade meetings. One teacher at a Kuruman school estimated that 10 out of 30 were supportive in this regard.

One teacher at another urban school in Kimberley felt that the lack of parental involvement was a major problem at the school. She gave two examples to illustrate her point:

- She said she was not as fortunate as the other teachers on the course who had parents cleaning her classroom and reasoned that it could be that the school was in the city or ‘it is the type of parent that we have at our school who feel that it is not their (because parents have sent me messages) job to clean the classroom.’ She cleans the classroom every day with the help of some of the girls in her class.
- The school asked for R30 a month or R360 a year in school fees. Parents who could not pay were exempt if they brought proof that they were on a social grant. At the end of the previous year the parents owed R 300,000.00 to the school in fees.

A teacher at one of the Kuruman schools told of her struggle to get the parents to buy placemats for the meals the children had at school. She had sent them messages but no one responded. It may have been the case that the parents did not respond because they could not afford to buy the placemats.

There were very encouraging changes to the way parents were becoming involved at the schools their children attended. This could be ascribed to the influence of the teachers at the school who were on the degree course, all of whom were making a special effort to involve the parents.

Parental involvement at most of the schools tended to be limited to washing chairs, cleaning, maintaining or painting the classrooms of the teachers or supplying paint. It would seem that those who received assistance from the parents tended to receive help of a more practical nature. For example, the teacher in the remotest location described how supportive her parents were: they had helped clean and sand the children’s tables, ironed Grade R graduation gowns, as well as cleaned her classroom regularly.

Another teacher had a roster of parents, five at a time, who came and cleaned her classroom every Friday or Saturdays and Sundays if they could not come on the Friday. She had a rather different approach to enticing them to volunteer by telling them that there was a lot of work in Grade 3 and if they couldn’t come and clean the classroom, ‘I will, the children will clean
them… they are going to clean and the children will say ‘oh, teacher I am so tired.” She stated that other teachers at the school had noticed and were asking her why the parents were listening to her. She did not know but felt it had something to do with the way she spoke to the parents. This was confirmed by the parent who said that this particular teacher respected the children and the parents.

In one instance at one of the urban schools in Kimberley the parents were willing to donate money so that the teacher could buy paint for the classroom. She asked them to help paint the classroom but no one arrived to assist so the teacher had to paint the classroom herself.

One teacher in one of the remote schools in the Kuruman district had received unprecedented support from one parent who volunteered to assist in the class. She had also made herself available to be interviewed for this report.

Two teachers in particular had tried to change the way the parents supported their children’s learning:

- One teacher had been extremely proactive in involving the parents at the school by illustrating to the parents what was being taught in class and what the children needed to know. This teacher in a school in a small village outside Kimberley described how she presented lessons to the parents and told them that was what Grade 3s were expected to do. It was revealing of the difficulties she faced when she outlined how she tried to involve them in the Mathematics curriculum by focusing on fractions. She stated that ‘when you fold the paper the parent can’t tell you which one is three quarters …I present lessons to them…we want to engage them, we want them to come in to see what they can help us with because some children come in Grade 3 not having enough vocabulary and enough number sense and number concepts.’
- Another teacher in the Kuruman area described how she phoned the parents to come to school and watch a YouTube video on emerging literacy and emerging mathematics in the environment in order to reinforce these concepts at home.

At two of the schools a parent had made the effort to come to the school to be interviewed in support of the teacher on the programme. One of them was a policewoman who took time off work to be interviewed.
There was parental acknowledgement and support of the teachers on the degree course. It was clear that they were noticing a difference in the way their children were being taught and they liked the changes that they were seeing. A parent described the change; ‘I see the difference because when they [the children] come into the classroom you see them very serious with everything they do, they are very serious.’ The other parent felt that the teacher’s class was very different from the other classes and that the teacher was a very hard worker: ‘her class is always clean and nice. Her children are always in good order, respecting people.’

One of the principals felt that the impact of the teachers who were on the course was being noticed by the parents in the community and this had an impact on enrolments at the school. According to him, ‘I have noticed from the increase in the learner enrolment; because we know that parents will draw their learners to a school where they see, you know, something is happening at that school…This has increased tremendously, so this is a change in the way we get our kids.’

A principal at the school with one teacher on the course stated that parents were taking a ‘keen interest in what she is doing and they are responding positively... She has got a profound influence on the parents. The parents respond differently to her. I don’t know how, maybe there is the weight of the programme on her which … is making a difference.’

One teacher told me that she had received a message of support via a sms from a parent telling her that she had ‘taught my child very much. I am proud of you. Keep it up.’

Parents were making requests for their children to be placed in the classes of the teachers who were on the course. However this created pressure on the principals who had to appease those parents whose children did not get allocated to one of these teachers.

One principal of a school in the Kuruman area described how parents had asked him to ‘change their learners from other teachers’ classes’ because they wanted their children to be taught by the teacher on the degree course. He said it had created a problem because the other teachers in the same grade with her ‘felt belittled and uncomfortable. It means the parents have also noticed that this teacher is doing something better than the other ones.’

Another principal with two teachers on the programme implied that the changes the two teachers had brought to the school would over time affect all the teachers in the Foundation Phase. He dealt with the problem differently by telling the parents, ‘unfortunately you can’t have one teacher responsible for 120 learners’ and that he had to explain to the parents that whatever was happening in these teachers’ classes was being cascaded down to the other classes. ‘So it is in-service training and their meeting on a regular basis and just to see to it that we synchronise and that we do the same thing across the grade…but still parents have their preferences and they say they want my child in [X’s] class; I want my child in [Y’s] class. I said we only have one [X] and one [Y], give us time and we will have a whole grade full of them.’

Positive comments to one of the teachers included ‘I want my child in your class next year,’ despite the teacher not teaching that grade.
The backgrounds and qualifications of the teachers on the degree course

Most of the teachers on the course came from the Northern Cape Province; they grew up there, many of them in remote areas which they referred to as the ‘deep rural areas.’ There were two exceptions. One teacher had come from Krugersdorp and another teacher had grown up in Port Elizabeth and fled to the Northern Cape in the 1970s due to unrest that was being experienced there at the time. She, along with the other teachers, trained to become a teacher at nearby teacher’s training colleges in Kimberley with quite a few of them having been trained at Taung College of Education in the North West Province.

Some of these teachers qualified in the era (up to the 1980s) when you could get a teaching diploma, a Primary Teacher’s Certificate, without having a Matric certificate. The requirement to enter the teacher training college to study as a primary school teacher was a Standard 8 (JC) certificate.

Interestingly three of them said they did not want to teach but their options had been limited to a diploma in teaching. As one teacher explained her parents were so poor and she chose teaching although it was not her first choice ‘because at that time teaching was the best a parent could afford.’ One teacher used her mother, who was a teacher, as a role model for her choice of teaching as a career.

The teachers all had a qualification in Primary School education and often had taught in the Intermediate Phase or Senior Primary before moving to Foundation Phase almost by default. As one of the Kimberley teachers explained; ‘So when I was at college I did the Senior Primary Teacher’s Diploma but when I started teaching there were no jobs [in Senior Primary] so they just put me in the Grade 1 class. And I didn’t even know what to do in the Grade 1 class but I learnt.’ One teacher described how delighted she was to be able to study for the Foundation Phase specifically as offered by Rhodes University. She said that up till now she had never found a university that offered a degree in this phase.

Many of the teachers had continued to study after qualifying whilst they were teaching in order to improve their qualifications. This meant that they either completed their Matric certificate if they did not have one and/or did some other qualification such as an Advanced Certificate of Education (ACE). One teacher had completed an ACE course in school management. Confusingly one teacher told me that she had just completed her BEd Honours a few months before joining the course.

As most of these teachers had qualified in the 1990s and 1980s they had years of teaching experience.

Many of them had only taught in schools in the Northern Cape, often in the ‘deep rural areas’ that they were familiar with. Two teachers at different schools outlined how they had been moved to their current schools when they had been declared ‘in addition’ at their old schools. According to one teacher, ‘in addition’ meant that there were too many teachers at the school. She said in those days ‘they [the NCED] used to say you are too many here and that one of you move to here.’
The impact of the BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree on the teaching practice of the teachers on the course:

- Had the course changed or influenced their aims and goals as teachers?

This section was not satisfactory in terms of the quality of answers. It was clear that some individuals did not understand what I was asking. I realised this early on in the interviews and decided to leave this question out when I interviewed the teachers during break as time was limited.

Furthermore, some teachers felt that their aims and goals were more or less the same after two years on the course compared to when they started teaching. One individual said she wanted to make ‘a positive contribution towards life, so building a person is something good for me so I just wanted to see myself contributing positively towards life ...that is why I chose teaching.’ She stated that her aims were still the same and added, ‘I wanted to sharpen my skills and make sure that I am going with the times and I acquire new skills and also develop as a person. So they are still standing. I like it when I work with young ones because I start them from scratch and make sure that I lay the foundation.’

Another teacher said that she initially wanted to have children ‘come in and be educated and be what they wanted to be in their careers.’ When asked if this had changed, she rather surprisingly replied ‘yes since I went on the course, actually now I am loving teaching a lot.’

Two teachers indicated that they wanted to teach children to read and write. One teacher described how she had been affected at the start of her teaching career when she taught Grade 4 and the children couldn’t read or write. She wanted to move to Grade 1 so that she could teach them to read and write. When asked if her aims had changed she replied that they had not but she felt more confident in teaching all the grades in the Foundation Phase since being on the course. One aim that had changed for her since being on the course was to invite parental involvement in their children’s schooling. This was something that she had started quite successfully in her second year on the degree programme.

Another teacher said when she started teaching her aim was to give the children what their inquisitive minds needed because it ‘was very amazing when you look at their faces when they start recognising words. It is amazing to be able to help them to read and write.’

Understanding the policy documents which pertained to their teaching seemed to have become an aim for some teachers. One teacher could not describe what her aims and goals were but she did state that she had been very demoralised when she started teaching because she did not understand the [school] policies and that she now understood the policies as a result of being on the course. This was view was supported by another teacher who said that this had become a change to her aims and goals.

As had been stated earlier three teachers had become teachers because of limited training and career choices available to them; teaching was not their first choice and so in all likelihood they did not have clear goals and aims when they started teaching. As one teacher explained, ‘when I started teaching I think I just came to teaching because firstly
teaching was not something that I want to do, but my mother not having enough money said, “ok you can go that that college I will try and pay so that you can go”…but when I started working with the children I enjoyed working with the children. Then I had the passion of learning…the other thing I wanted was that one day I would have a doctorate.’

This question has not really been answered satisfactorily as the answers on the whole indicated that the teachers were not able to articulate what their aims and goals were and how they had changed.

- **Had the course influenced their practice since being on the course?**

**What systems had the teachers put in place?**

**New systems had been introduced to manage the physical environment.** These were present in most classrooms and included changes to the water systems, meals served at school, the introduction of plants, attractive classroom layouts and in two instances systems were put in place to regulate the use of toilets by the children.

In the Kuruman schools and the school in the small villages outside of Kimberley, where there was no running water, access to safe drinking and water for washing hands was a challenge. In the past children would rinse their hands in one bucket which they shared with others in the class and would then dip a cup into another basin or bucket for drinking water (See photo below). This cup was shared by everyone in the classroom.

It was apparent that the teachers had not understood how this practice could result in the spread of disease amongst the children. As one teacher commented, ‘there are a lot of recommendations, advises and lessons where they [Rhodes staff] talk about the health hazards that water can bring when we drink with one mug. I just realised…I need to change.’

Some of the teachers on the course had made their principals aware of the need for safe, clean water. A principal confirmed that the teacher on the course had made his school realise ‘that when the learners are drinking communally from one container it poses a danger to the hygiene of the other learners; communicable diseases like TB, so the lecturer has encouraged her so that each learner has a bottle. That has helped us a lot.’ Another principal stated that the course had ‘raised a quiet level of awareness in terms of things that we are lacking hygienically speaking.’
It was clear that there was a **new awareness of health and hygiene** amongst the teachers on the course. This resulted in an **emphasis on introducing water systems** which would ensure that the children had clean drinking water and clean water for washing their hands. As one teacher explained since she had attended the course she had ‘realised that it is not hygienic to wash in one basin so we asked the principal to buy us those bottles. So they wash under running water with soap and they rinse (sic) their hands with a towel.’

Not all the teachers had tackled this challenge in the same way. Some teachers had introduced individual bottles for drinking water, others had introduced individual cups and others sterilised the few cups they had before passing it on to the next child (see photos below). A closed container with a tap was the most common way of accessing clean water in all the schools.

Every teacher made sure that the children had access to a closed water system and the result was that all the children had access to safe and clean drinking water as well as water for washing their hands. There was one exception. At one of the Kimberley schools one teacher had access to a tap in her classroom and she provided drinking water with a cursory rinse of a cup which was shared by the children.
Looking at the outside of the classrooms to see if the children had the use of a closed water system was one of the quickest ways to determine if the teachers had influenced their colleagues with regard to the new water system they had introduced. Usually, if they had
successfully influenced their colleagues, the water system would be a copy of the system used by the teacher on the course. It was so interesting to see that in most schools it was often the colleague next door to the teacher who was the one who had been influenced in this regard.

Many children were the recipients of a free meal from various feeding schemes at the schools. This resulted in a daily meal being served to the majority of children and this was another system that had undergone fundamental changes. These changes were evident in all but one of the classes that were observed. The meal which was usually served between 10:00 and 10:30 consisted of rice and tinned fish or bread with juice and a fruit or cabbage and pap or samp. Changes to this daily meal included changes to the way the food was served, the way the class was set up for the meal and the way the meal was consumed.

The first thing the teachers addressed was the how food was served. It used to come in buckets that were not clean and the children would eat outside using their hands for the most part. All teachers on the course changed this aspect and food was now served hygienically on clean plates from buckets that were also clean. Meals were eaten in the classroom on individual plates on top of mats or cloths which covered their desks. In addition, all children were required to wash their hands before eating (see photos below). One teacher explained how much the system had been changed by describing what happened on Fridays when the children had bread, fruit and a juice. She said,

‘We used to just give them bread because there are three slices and they just normally take it out of the plate and eat. So the school realised that it is not necessary for us to use the plates. So, after joining this programme I realised that this is more than a health hazard so I decided to challenge the management and ask them to reverse the decision that we made. ... And, at least they listened to me so my children, on a Friday, they are served with plates. And I also make them aware that these things are very dirty and there are a lot of germs on the tables so it is not good to take those slices and put them on the tables.’

Making the meal a time to socialise as well as using this time as an opportunity to teach basic Life Skills with regard to eating had become a part of the teachers’ approach to this aspect of the school day. As one teacher told me, ‘we never had flowers, we never had table cloths, and then [the field officer] said …you cannot treat them [the children] like that because you are having a table cloth on the table, they also need that. We are not just dishing out food… we explain why they are eating this kind of food.’ A colleague of one of the teachers had copied her system with regard to meals and she said because ‘we use this system … they [the children] feel so special.’ Another teacher told me that at meal times she would walk around the class and check if the children had good table manners; ‘I teach them that it is rude to speak while they eat with their mouths open and things like that.’ The deputy principal at one school reported that the eight teachers on the course had been teaching the children ‘how to behave when you are around the table.’

In two of the classes that were observed the teacher told the children what food they were about to be served and discussed healthy eating with the children. One of the teachers had brought a
lot of different types of fruit to school and used the opportunity, whilst making a fruit salad for the class during a Life Skills lesson, to teach the children about the food pyramid.

Setting the tables in preparation for the meal whilst the rest of the children washed their hands.

Sitting quietly and eating. Some children in this class had brought their own food.

It was disappointing to see that one teacher had not been systematic about how lunch was served in her class. She began the meal with a prayer in English and isiXhosa but only one table had been covered with a cloth, placed over some workbooks that had been left on the table. Some children sat on the floor and ate their meal.

The use of plants to make the learning environment attractive and teaching the children to use waste water to make the plants grow was another change to the teaching practice adopted by these teachers. At five of the schools the teachers had plants, in pots or planted in the ground in front of their classrooms and the waste water (from hand washing) was used to water these. A teacher described how she had been encouraged by the field officer to plant flowers in front of her classroom and how every child washed their hands under a closed system with a tap ‘under clean water so the water falls into the basin [below] and then we fill (sic) the water into the flowers.’
Plants at the end of the corridor outside the classroom watered by waste water.

The sight of plants outside a classroom and a closed water system with a tap became an almost instant way of knowing that the classroom belonged to a teacher on the course.

**It was noticeable how different and inviting the classrooms of these teachers on the course looked.** The classes of other teachers at the schools looked drab, in need of a coat of paint and with little of interest on the walls for the children. In contrast the classrooms of teachers on the course were clean and attractive with brightly coloured walls, colourful containers to hold workbooks and other resources used for teaching (See photos below).

One of the principals remarked on their classes, ‘their classrooms are attractive. They have got curtains, they have got water, they have got equipment and all the motivation they need. Their
classrooms are more attractive than all the other classrooms of our teachers.’ He ended by saying somewhat cynically, ‘I don’t know if they are just trying to impress the facilitator or what.’

There were two exceptions to this and it was disappointing to see old broken chairs (see photos below) in otherwise quite attractive classrooms.

The arrangement of the desks differed according to the types of desk and the space that was available. One teacher described how different her class layout was since being on the course. Her room had consisted of straight rows of desks in the more traditional style. She referred to an exercise at Rhodes where they were required to draw a classroom layout. This made her change her classroom completely; her desks were arranged in such a way that children were together in groups, it was freshly painted in bright colours, bright curtains shielded the children from the hot sun and all her resources were put in colourful containers and were neatly labelled.

The focus on cleanliness by the field officer had influenced all the teachers on the course to ensure that children worked off desks or tables that were clean. As one teacher explained;

‘Our tables were so dirty and, you know what, we are not even aware of our tables at the time, we just took it as there was nothing that you can do, they are like that. But since the [field officer] has come into our classrooms she has showed us. We also found out that these tables are dirty so we decided to put on table cloths. The chairs needed to be washed.’

She solved the problem of the dirty chairs by making the children clean their own chairs with soap and scrubbing brushes every Friday.

A deputy head of school confirmed that the eight teachers at her school who were on the course had made a difference in their classes with regard to cleanliness. She commented on this aspect by remarking ‘they keep their classes clean and they come to us although we’re running short of cleaning materials, but they improvise and say I will bring along washing powder and come and clean up my classroom and that sort of thing.’
Another teacher showed me her flowers [pot plants] that she had put in her classroom to make it more attractive. She said that ‘I never realised that I can keep flowers in my class…every time when we close the school I just take them back home.’

The emphasis on health and hygiene had been extended to the use of toilets in two of the schools. The three teachers at a Kimberley school had worked as a team and put into place a system regulating the use the toilets by the children. The principal explained that the school had a problem with the way the ‘learners use the toilet. Then they [the teachers on the course] had an idea and I told them no, no I don’t want to present it to the teachers, I want you to present it to the teachers… And they did. So, in a way what they are learning in this programme is also rubbing off onto the other teachers of the other grades.’

One teacher at the remote rural school outside of Kuruman had used her status as HOD to change the way the pit toilets were used. She had negotiated with the management of the school to allocate two toilets in each of the blocks for boys and girls. The use of these two toilets would be restricted to the children in the Foundation Phase. She taught the children how to use them and was very proud to show how clean these toilets were and that they were not smelly.

New systems to manage the children had also been adopted by all the teachers:

This included the introduction of class rules, as part of disciplinary systems, which were prominently displayed in all classrooms. In many of the lessons that were observed these rules were constantly being referred to and reinforced. Some of the principals were aware of this and one of them described how there had been a ‘quiet improvement in the discipline of the learners’ in the class of the teacher on the course. Another principal commented that the discipline of the children by the teachers on the course was ‘excellent.’

It was clear that making and using class rules was a new departure for all of the teachers. One teacher said, ‘another system I changed is classroom rules, I never had [them] and I learnt in Grahamstown from Rhodes in this programme. I made them on separate pages’ (see photo below).

![Example of class rules above the chalkboard in Setswana and English.](image)

It must be noted that the rules differed quite a lot between the teachers who had decided on the rules which would suit their situation best (see photos below). One of the teachers described how she had searched for a discipline system on the internet and had found something that was appropriate for small children. In all instances the classes were quiet, calm and disciplined.
Further examples of class rules in two different schools.

A teacher at one of the urban schools in Kimberley stated that they were used to shouting at the learners to discipline them but this had changed since they had been at Rhodes. She commented that this had affected her relationship with the children and attributed this to the change in the manner she used when talking to the children. She said that she was calm and referred the children to the rules when they were doing something wrong. The children would then correct themselves.

One teacher used a very different way of controlling her class. She was observed asking the children to ‘give me a one’, ‘give me a five.’ She explained that it was part of her disciplinary system:

‘I don’t like shouting and I learnt that when I was at Rhodes. I normally had a picture; it is a hand on my board…so when I got onto the programme I realised that is something one can use. I give them 1 [finger] it means you look at me, 2 means you stop talking, 3 means you stop everything that you do, 4 means you be ready for the lesson [and] five means that if you have done all these four just raise your hand to show that you are ready. So these ones are very noisy, when I count 1, 2,3,4,5 some of them will not be listening so I decided to change this to ’give me 5.’…when I say ‘give me 5’ they just raise up their hand and now I am saying to them thank you so much for giving me 5 because you are listening to me.’
Another teacher had adopted a promise system with regard to the class rules, ‘every day when they come in, we have a promise. I have taught them a promise so they say it every time they come into class, like “we promise to be good listeners,” “we promise to use our soft voices” so they know this by heart.’

One teacher used a bell which she rang when the children were getting too noisy. It was a signal to them to keep quiet and seemed to work well. She was the only teacher who did shout at her children on the one occasion when she forgot to ring the bell.

One of the principals indicated that when he visited the classes of the two teachers on the course he had noticed that the ‘learner now take them as mothers…this is one thing that has changed. I don’t know how they changed it but I am saying that it is one of the things that I realised.’

Many of the teachers however stressed that they were ‘mothers’ to their children in the class and this was another major change to their approach to teaching. As one teacher explained, ‘I must show that love to them, the children…They must not be afraid of me. I don’t want children who are afraid of me…They are small, they know nothing.’ She also referred to the need to teach children right from wrong at school because they were staying with mothers or parents who were ‘irresponsible.’

One of the colleagues, who made herself available for an interview, had adopted this view of her role as a teacher. She said that she had been influenced by the teacher on the course; ‘Our children, when we are teaching, they know this is our mother. Our mother wants this, our mother don’t want this.’

In every class that was observed the teacher had a firm, yet a quiet and gentle control of their classes. It was possibly the reason why the children regarded them as mothers in the classrooms. The teachers acknowledged that this was a change in the way they managed their classrooms since they had been on the course; they all spoke to the children with quiet voices. One teacher explained why they had started speaking quietly to the children:

‘If you raise your voice to the children, they will also raise their voice. If you scream they will also…I learnt from Rhodes that you must not raise your voice when you talk to them. If you raise your voice they will also raise their voice.’

Another teacher confirmed this and linked noisy classes to poorly behaved classes by saying:

‘I don’t shout. Rhodes, you know…built my character. I don’t shout because I found out that when I shout they also shout. So I talk to them in a polite manner… it affects their behaviour. Because when you scream they get sort of violent. But when you talk, speak softly to them…There is no more so much noise in my class…they know they must just sit down and do the work I gave to them.’
One teacher said that ‘even if the child had done something wrong we must not be so angry. We must try and talk to [them]…and sometimes their peers they must try to correct [the child]. I must give them the opportunity so the peers can correct each other.’

Other teachers appear to have noticed the change. A teacher described how her colleague in a staff meeting had told the staff that, ‘I have realised now that maybe the children are so violent because they [the staff] keep on shouting, shouting, but when Mrs…she is referring to me, comes into the class they become quiet.’

A colleague of a teacher on the course commented on this as well and said that she had adopted the same manner of dealing with the children by smiling at them as well as praising them.

Another teacher explained that she had ‘really changed. I love my children.’ She said that when they were at Rhodes for the contact sessions the lecturers had trained them as to how they should ‘treat our learners.’

This change was adopted by every teacher on the course and it was a pleasure to see such happy, disciplined classes where the children went about their day at school in a calm manner.

**Duty rosters** (see photo below) were found in all classrooms and this also represented a new system introduced by the teachers to manage their classes. As one teacher said this was necessary because ‘they know who does this and who does that, because they all want to work at once and it is not possible.’ Duties would include looking after the weather chart, collecting and handing out books, watering the plants, cleaning tables, laying out the cloths for the meal etc.

A teacher at one of the schools in a small village outside of Kimberley explained how much had changed when she explained; ‘In the past we didn’t have rules. We have (sic) rules but we didn’t implement them. We just write the daily routine but sometimes they can go for a week not using them. But I have learnt that those are the things that hurt the child.’ She had even tried to persuade the parents to ‘make the routines at home, tell the child this is what you have to do.’

The time spent in classrooms observing the teachers and the children revealed a pattern which was to be found in all classrooms; a calm atmosphere and disciplined children. The switch from one subject to the next took place effortlessly with certain children being allocated duties regarding the handing out and gathering of workbooks and other resources needed for the lesson.
Most teachers were observed praising the children when appropriate but only a few teachers had adopted the introduction of reward systems as a mechanism to manage the class. The concept of reward systems had apparently been introduced to the teachers at a recent contact session at Rhodes, and at the workshop the field officer indicated that this was something she was going to assess in the practicum. It was clear that some teachers had not implemented a reward system at the time of the workshop and still needed to put this system in place.

One of the teachers however had started using buttons for her reward system and indicated that she had seen a video at Rhodes where this was used and she had liked the system. She was opposed to dishing out sweets as a reward when the children did well. When she got back to Kimberley she had visited the local haberdashery and asked for spare buttons that were no longer being used. She was given two vials of buttons. Some of the children also brought spare buttons from home. Each day she would hand out the buttons to a child who had done good work or good deeds. At the end of the day the buttons were counted and the child with the most buttons was ‘given a hand.’ She said ‘that she would rather write a note to the mommy and say, you know, Tato really worked well this week and received four buttons or ten buttons for her good work’ leaving it to the child to explain to her mother why she had received the buttons.

- What tools and resources were the teachers using since being on the course?

Many of the teachers indicated that they did not have access to quality resources and often resorted to making their own resources or asked for donations of equipment or resources. A few teachers had bought some of the resources using their own money. One teacher described
how she had bought baskets for her resources from her own pocket as she wanted to be able to access the resources quickly because she felt it was ‘not nice to scrap and scratch for resources.’ One teacher downloaded pictures off the internet for her classroom and paid for them to be printed and laminated. Another teacher had found empty boxes in the photocopy room and covered the boxes with brightly coloured Christmas wrapping paper for resources. She also explained that if the school bought any resources for her classroom she would make sure that they were properly looked after as they would not be replaced if they became damaged.

Physical Education was no longer taught at the schools before the teachers went on the degree programme and as a result most of the classes had no equipment for these lessons. At the contact sessions at Rhodes the teachers had been made aware of the importance of movement to the development of children. One teacher who had no equipment in her class for Physical Education described how she had asked her principal to write a letter to the parents to

‘ask for donations to make some kind of classroom for physical training like that one I saw in Grahamstown... they brought us balls, they bought us tennis balls, they bought us skipping ropes...the children came in with balls and all the like we didn’t have and all the things that we can use for physical training. We used skipping ropes, we used some tins – we can put in the stones, we used a bucket there where the children could go run and get a stone and put it in the bucket.’

She had, through her own initiative, built up quite a collection of equipment that could be used for Physical Education (see photos below).

Workbooks for Home Language, Mathematics and Life Skills from the national Department of Basic Education were present in all classes. They were being used by all the teachers. One teacher commented that ‘they were helping even though there is a lot in the books and the children get easily tired.’

Every teacher had created a reading corner as a tool for teaching. Often this would consist of a mat or carpet, shelves for books, some comfortable cushions and/or some chairs. One of
the teachers said the reading corner was new to her class since being on the course and that previously books had been stacked on shelves. Two of the teachers allowed the children to read books if they had finished their work. One teacher described how her children were starting to use the reading corner, ‘when they are done with their work they know they can take a book and read, instead of just sitting and disturbing others.’ She did admit that the Grade 3 children were not used to it and they would often ‘ask me if they can take a book and I say yes but you must not sit at the desk you must sit over there in the corner.’

It was lovely to see children lounging on the cushions reading books after school had ended in one teacher’s class.

A distressing aspect of visiting the schools was the lack of books in most of the classes. This confirmed what the staff at Rhodes had said about situation with regard to reading material in the schools. One teacher had even resorted to making books for the children in her class (see photos below). Another teacher said she had books but they were not appropriate for the age of her children.
There were two schools with mobile library boxes with new books as has already been mentioned earlier. At one of the schools it was due to the initiative of a teacher on the course who had been responsible for the donation of these mobile library boxes containing books. She had asked an official from the NCED for books and they had been delivered to her. She and a colleague, who was not on the course, had the luxury of allowing the children to take books home. At one of the schools the teacher had found a library box that had been donated many years ago. The books were fairly old but had not been used or claimed by any teacher so she decided to use them for her class.

A few of the teachers chose to limit the number of books to only those books which dealt with the theme they were teaching. This however seemed counterproductive as children need easy access to a wide variety of reading resources if they are to become readers who enjoy reading. It also meant that there would never be enough books for every child to be able to read a book at the same time. Perhaps a solution would have been to display the books which related to the theme on the theme table itself and fill the shelves with books that were readily available to the children.

One teacher made a rather telling comment when explaining that although she had books but as it was the beginning of the school year she had not put them out yet because the children would become unsettled by the books. Her reasoning; ‘when you put something there they have never dealt with, they become so disturbing (sic). Every time they come and look at the books.’ These children were in Grade 1 and it is tragic that they had not been exposed to books before and were now being denied the opportunity to become acquainted at this early stage of their education.

Some teachers had resorted to bringing newspapers and magazines from home to class so that the children could have something to read (see photo below). A teacher at an urban school in Kimberley told me that the school’s library was no longer operating and as a result she would bring newspapers and magazines to school for her reading corner. She was very aware that not having books in the class was a problem and had encouraged her children to make use of the local library. She said, ‘I do request that the learners bring me their library card and I make a copy of it which I keep in a file because I like to, I want to see that they are members of a library. And then I encourage them, I say did mummy take you to the library, or did you go?’
This teacher collected newspapers and magazines to supplement the books in her reading corner

One of the exercises done by the teachers on the course was to write to Biblionef and ask for donations of books for their classrooms. Many of the teachers were waiting for the books that Biblionef had donated. These books had been delivered to Rhodes and were ready to be delivered to the neediest schools, those without books, by the field officer. Although there were not many books once they were shared out, it was a start to building the collections in the classes.

The teachers were aware of the need for big books to teach reading and these were present in most classrooms albeit not in large numbers. For a reading lesson one teacher used a big book with all the children sitting on a mat in front of her. She made sure that everyone could see the book. She discussed the front cover with the children and asked questions about the cover as well as showing them the different elements of the book such as the spine. She then read the book to the class. After that the class read with her. She said that she and a colleague had gone shopping to buy books and she had to tell the teacher who was with her why big books were good to teach reading, ‘I said some words repeat themselves so that the children can read. Some words like “I went to”.’

The teachers had been taught to use graded readers for group guided reading. One teacher regarded this as a big problem and described her frustration as a result of not having these readers:

‘The one that I really struggle with is the group guided readers, that series. If I can get that I can really move forward. I really struggle. If I could just have enough books! Sometimes I photocopy…If you don’t have enough books you struggle and
you just use books inside the classroom. There is a need for children to take books home so that they can go and read. And now I should photocopy one page and one page. But when are the children going to read at home? It is a problem; it is a big problem for us.’

Very few classes had graded readers (see photos). A teacher told me that she had learnt how to grade books at Rhodes, ‘this is for stage 1; this is for stage 2.’ However, there did not seem to be any urgency on the part of some of the teachers to grade the books they did have. A teacher said she had still to grade her readers before she could put them out for the children. Another teacher said she had some books but they were not graded and the books that she did have were inappropriate for her young children. Yet another teacher reported that since she had been allocated a different grade this year she was not yet able to grade the books she did have. All the books for her previous grade had been graded however.

Waiting for graded readers

Graded readers in a Kimberley school

The teachers had tried to create print-rich classrooms and it was clear when walking around a school which teacher was on the Rhodes course, or was a colleague who had been influenced by one of the teachers. There were posters on the wall (see photos below) and almost everything in the class was labelled. All the teachers were very aware of the need for a print-rich classroom and one teacher was very proud to say that she could now type her own labels, a skill she had learnt since being on the course. One of the principals with one teacher on the course at his school described how this teacher had encouraged everyone at the school to put stickers on each and every door to indicate that this door ‘is for the principal, this is the male toilet, the female toilet, this is Grade so and so.’

As a teacher explained, ‘I have made my hand prints and [I will] write under it, left and right. I make sure that everything that we do with them is [also] in writing. I make sure that I write them down, the labels.’ She said she also tried as far as was possible to make the labels in phrases such as ‘let’s learn to read and write,’ and ‘we like to read and write.’ She tried to
promote ‘incidental’ reading by putting labels all around her classroom and would read them out loud to her Grade 1s.

Most of the posters for Grades 1 and 2 were predominately in the home language of the children, Setswana or isiXhosa with some labels repeated in English. In the Grade 3 classrooms English was always on the posters as well as the home language. It was clear that many of the teachers were preparing their children for Grade 4 when the language of teaching and learning was English.
This teacher was fortunate enough to teach at a low fee-paying school which could afford to buy posters for her class.

One of the teachers had understood the importance of building vocabulary and had made a word wall with all the words that the children were learning (see photo below). This changed all the time depending on the theme that was being taught or the books that were being read.
Many of the posters were handmade and it must be said that some were better than others as the quality of the posters was not the same across all the classrooms that were observed. At one school in particular there were errors on the posters (see below). At the same time the class of the teacher, who was not on the course, next door had beautiful posters on the walls.

In one classroom there were a few errors on the posters:

Above: 1 and 10 were not part of the display
Right: Note the spelling mistake.

Some classes had better resources (see photos below) for Mathematics than others; some were bought and some were handmade. Most of the classes did have resources for counting. One resourceful teacher had used pasta of different sizes and shapes and colours. Another teacher had been very resourceful and covered tins with numbers and she had also made dominos. Yet another teacher had picked up acorns in Grahamstown and used these for counting exercises. She had also collected bottle tops for counting. A few of the teachers had managed to buy posters displaying numbers.

Handmade times table

Mathematics table
It was revealing that all these new homemade counters and resources for Mathematics had been introduced since the teachers were on the course. As one teacher explained,

‘I never realised that I could use egg boxes to teach fractions and I learnt that from this course. So I never used egg boxes before, I am honest. Last year I made myself a theme table for fractions for the Grade 3s where, because it was easy to do it with egg boxes, you take 18 and work in 3s: 9 is half… I made it with egg boxes. It was so interesting. I loved it so. I never used the egg boxes before.’

One of the teacher said that she was now aware that she needed to have the 100 chart (numbers up to 100) on the wall.

The teachers all were using themes and theme tables as teaching tools (see photos below) in their classrooms to teach Life Skills. As it was the start of the year the teachers were in the process of getting to know their children and most of the themes related to this.
Only a few teachers had access to cassette players. One the Grade 3 teachers who did have a player used it so that the children could listen to music or stories. She said that the stories were in English and that the emphasis on English would help the children as they would be taught in English in Grade 4.

**Weather charts and birthday calendars** (see photo below) were common features in the classrooms of the teachers on the course. One teacher had not completed her birthday chart and she said it was because the school was still admitting new children into her class as well as the classes of other teachers in the school.

![Birthday chart](image)

**Birthday chart**

Every morning the group of children who were responsible for the weather chart would change the information on the board in the classes. It was one of the most common duties assigned to children on the duty rosters.

Some of the teachers had calendars which also needed daily adjustments by children who had been allocated to that task. One teacher said that the daily calendar was the first thing she did with the class every morning, changing the labels which were all in Setswana thereby teaching the children the days of the week, the date, the month and the season.

**The use of washing lines as a teaching tool** (see photos below) was a common feature in all the classes and the teachers reported that the children loved it. One teacher described how the children started teasing her when she started using the line for a Mathematics exercise by saying, ‘oh Ma why are you hanging the clothes?’
Another teacher explained that this was ‘also one of the things that we were taught at Rhodes…You can do a lot of things with this.’ This proved to be true as it was seen to be used for displaying the alphabet, numbers as well as displaying the children’s artwork.

- Had the course changed the way they presented lessons and prepared for lessons?

It was clear that many teachers on the course spent a lot of time preparing their classrooms and their resources for their lessons. Some of the teachers stayed at school in the afternoons and even came to the school over the weekends to prepare their classrooms (see section on professionalism later in this chapter). Several principals had commented on this aspect and mentioned that this was a change in the way the teachers approached their work.

One of the teachers remarked that she had started to observe what the children knew before she started teaching and that she had ‘learnt that she must go at the pace of the learners.’ This proved to be true in most of the lessons that were observed. The teachers worked at a pace that all the children could cope with. There was one exception and it proved quite distressing to watch as the teacher left some children so far behind that they did not even get to begin the next task before she had started moving onto a new one. They were working on a Mathematics exercise and she completed a Language lesson with the children who had finished the work whilst some children were still busy on the Mathematics exercise. It was clear that they were struggling with the first task yet she made no attempt to see where they were at and if they needed assistance. What was even more disturbing, this happened in a class of fewer than 20 children. The same teacher allowed some children who had finished the second task early to get a book in the reading corner but called them to the next exercise before they could even open the book to read the first page.

Some teachers spoke of the need to plan their lessons according to a theme which needed to be integrated through all the subjects. It was not clear that this was happening in all the classes that were observed. Most of them did have theme tables but because the lessons were in Setswana it was difficult to ascertain if integration was actually happening in all the subjects.
The use of workbooks for lessons would have made this difficult as well as these probably would not have conformed to the theme chosen by the teacher.

A few of the teachers indicated that they had **learnt to plan and manage their time** better as a result of the course. One teacher said that now ‘I just sit down and plan.’ Two teachers indicated that they had learnt to manage their time better. One of these indicated that she now knew what she had to do each day,

‘I know I must do this and this and this. This I should do on a daily basis…I had a time problem, a problem of time management, so the course also helped me to manage my time in class. I am very slow, yes, I am always behind, but now at least I know that the 15 minutes is over for this, now I can do this, now I can do this. At the end of the day I must have done this, and this and this.’

It was noticeable in the **Grade 3 classes that the teachers were trying to introduce English whenever they could in their lessons.** As one teacher explained, ‘these are Grade 3s and next year they will be in Grade 4 and the language of teaching here is Setswana but I always mix with English and I am preparing them for Grade 4 because the language of learning here is English.’ Another teacher agreed and said that she felt that she should put more emphasis on English because it was not their mother tongue.

Another teacher had been made aware of the fact that children had **different learning styles** and she tried to accommodate everybody when she planned her lessons. She expanded on this by saying, ‘I have learnt to use the play-dough because I never used that before, to accommodate those who are not auditory, who are kinaesthetic. So I honestly am thinking about them when I prepare the lesson. She added that she also took into account the context of what she was about to teach and would think **Is this context going to be familiar to them?** Am I going to be talking about something that they are familiar with? So, I can’t talk about the sea because they never saw the sea. So even if you talk about the sea, it should be something which is related to what they know.’ She explained that it could be some running water somewhere she would take the children to look at and then tell the children that a sea had much more water than they had just seen.

**Teaching according to the CAPS documents** was a major change for these teachers. It became apparent that the teachers had only started teaching according to these documents since they had been on the course, despite attending departmental workshops on the policies. A teacher said that she planned according to these documents since being on the course.

One teacher commented that ‘the implementation of CAPS, it is a total new thing. My study at Rhodes, it really puts me at an advantage because we are doing it practically and from there I am implementing in the class.’ Another teacher said that she had ‘really changed because I didn’t understand these policies so well. But I understand now, I know what to do in class.’

Yet another teacher confirmed that ‘being a student at Rhodes helped me to recognise that there are lots of things that are in the policy that I didn’t do…I don’t know where to put the
blame…whether they didn’t tell us or I wasn’t that eager to read more because the government keep (sic) on changing the curriculum and there is a lot of paper work. You concentrate more on learners than on checking what is expected from you as a teacher.’

A teacher who was HOD said that she had told her teachers that they had to follow the CAPS documents. She said that they hadn’t done them because ‘we were not told about them’ so she told the teachers what ‘Rhodes has told us…We have to do the policy.’ Another HOD stated that they were now following the CAPS documents and felt that those aspects that were hard and confusing to understand had been clarified by the lecturers at Rhodes.

- How had the teachers understood, embraced and implemented the theoretical aspects of their course?

The teachers described how they used the theory they had learnt at Rhodes to change their methods of teaching. This included changes to the way they taught the three subjects. On the course they had been made aware of many different strategies to teach the different subjects and the successful implementation of some or all of these had changed their practice in a fundamental way. One teacher said that she ‘didn’t know the strategies, a lot of things that I can use to make teaching and learning easier and more interesting… It helped me a lot.’

Some teachers were worried about the reading abilities of their children. As one teacher explained, ‘we are worried in the system about the reading of young children. Reading is giving us problems. Children cannot read and we struggle a lot if they cannot read in Grade 3.’ One teacher said she tried to put reading in every activity they did and gave an example of the place mats used at meal times. She had written prayers on the mats so that every child would have a turn to read out a prayer for the whole class.

A big change in all the classes was the introduction of group guided reading for Language. One teacher commented on the ‘excellent way…Jenny taught us’ to do group guided reading and that one group would sit on the mat doing silent reading or paired reading while she dealt with the other group. Another teacher said that since being exposed to group guided reading at Rhodes she had implemented it in her class and her ‘learners have benefitted a lot.’ Yet another teacher stated that her children had been struggling with their reading and that since she had introduced reading techniques such as group guided reading to her children they were starting to read.

It was interesting to hear one teacher explain that they had been given group guided readers by the Learning Area Manager (LAM) but they didn’t understand what to do with them until they got to Rhodes because ‘they teach you until you understand it.’ Another teacher said that her LAM had told the teachers to ‘read the book, Teaching Reading in chapter 5’ and that she did not understand what this ‘woman wanted.’ She only understood how to teaching reading when she got to Rhodes after they had explained the reading strategies to them.

Many of the teachers were observed teaching Mental Mathematics and this was also new to their teaching. One teacher reported that after the first session of the year she had come
back to school ‘well equipped with Mental Maths’. She added that she ‘never did Mental Maths properly because every time the children had to do maths, they write, write, write. But…Mental Maths is something they have to do orally.’

For this teacher it was very interesting when children did calculations on the board and she would ask them to show how they got to the answer. Doing it this way helped other children who were observing to understand how the answer was arrived at.

One teacher had been influenced by the Mathematics lecturer at Rhodes the previous year who had introduced the concept of ‘mathematical language’ to the teachers. She said that they had been told to use the correct mathematical language when teaching the children. The teacher explained this meant a change in the language they used when they taught Mathematics; ‘don’t say “give the answer of” say “give the product of”, “what is the sum of?”’ So they have to keep a dictionary where they will write the term and the explanation of the mathematical [term] in everyday English.’ After this lecture the teacher concerned had called a staff meeting and given them a report and she asked the school to buy index books which some teachers were using in their classes to teach mathematical language.

The new lecturer in Mathematics in 2014 made an impression on one of the teachers who commented that she had learnt from her that ‘you can involve the children a little bit more. How you can make them think for themselves…When you go to workshops, they will tell you, you must let the children think critically, you must let the children do this, but they never give you how.’ Asking the children to explain their answers was something that this teacher had never done before and she stated that the children now knew that they would have to do this and they would have to think about their answers. Another teacher was observed doing just this in her Mathematics lesson as she tried to extract from the children how they had reached their answers to some addition problems she had given them.

Most of the teachers used English when referring to numbers and it appeared that teachers seemed to have differing views about the use of Setswana vs English when it came to numbers. One teacher said that it was important to teach the children the numbers in Setswana as the ANAs required them to be able to read them in their home language. She explained,

‘When we are in meetings I just give some ideas. I said, you should teach the number names in Setswana, don’t teach them in English. They said no, we don’t know them; how to say them in Setswana. They are difficult in Setswana rather than English…So the children struggle with reading those number names from Grade 2, so that we are struggling in Grade 3 because when we get the ANA papers, the common papers, they come in Setswana so they must learn it in Setswana.’

Another teacher disagreed by pointing out that she always took the background of the children into consideration when planning her lessons. According to this teacher the parents did not use Setswana words for numbers. As she explained;
‘When the parents send them to the shop they don’t speak Setswana. They don’t use Setswana words; they say they give them Twenty Rand… They say Twenty Rand. They say one, two, and three. They don’t use Setswana, they don’t use those numbers. That is why when I plan my lessons I plan always to consider their environment.’

Perhaps this is an aspect that needs to be clarified for the teachers when they next have a contact session at Rhodes.

**The introduction of physical movement was another new departure for the teachers on the course.** Most of the teachers were able to articulate why physical movement was important. A teacher explained that she now understood that physical education was related to healthy minds and that she could help some learners ‘by engaging them like balancing so that they will be able to focus. Laterality so that they can be able to know left and right, this would help them when they write; they start from the left… without movement they are unable.’ One of the teachers who was observed giving a Physical Education class explained that these children were new to school in Grade 1 and her lesson, they had to stand in a line at an arm’s length away from the child in front of them, was aimed at teaching them about personal space. Another hopping exercise she did with the class would help her determine which side was dominant in each child as this was important for teaching them writing.

Another teacher said that when a child was struggling to write she would take the child outside because she knew that ‘running, skipping will help them.’ She would watch how they moved and then would work out which was the child’s dominant side. She added that skipping, running and play-wheelbarrows helped strengthen their muscles.

The one teacher who could not say why movement was important described how much the children enjoyed the lessons, ‘we play games, we play ball, we use bean bags, we run, we jump; all those sorts of things and they enjoy.’

All the teachers had started teaching values to the children as part of their Life Skills lessons. Value Trees and posters (see photos below) were prominently displayed and the teachers said that they referred to it constantly in their lessons. One teacher was observed referring to the value of the week, respect, in a Grade 3 class. She said that after a week she would focus on another value. Another teacher had chosen love as the value of the week and explained that her children were small and they didn’t know what a value was but they did understand when she put the word ‘love’ on the board and she told them they must be a family and love each other and not bully and beat one another.
Values displayed at the back of the class

Values displayed on the door of the class

Value Tree

Some teachers explained that they **had learnt to teach the learners in smaller groups according to their abilities**. It was clear in some of the classes that were observed that this tactic was working well for the teachers. They had learnt for instance how to split the class into groups with one group being occupied with an exercise at their desks while the teacher did a reading or a Mathematics exercise or lesson with a smaller group on the mat.
There was a new emphasis on play since the teachers had been on the course. The teachers often were observed using songs and movement to introduce a new exercise (see photo below). One teacher explained that play is important in learning; ‘they have to play. When they come and I teach them every time I start my lesson with something to encourage their minds. I have to start my lesson with music or with movement like clapping so that they will be able to focus.’ She also said that the children are able to learn things when they sang.

One of the teachers said that she had learnt about play at Rhodes and she had not known that playing could be constructive, that it could be planned for and that if children did not play they ‘came down, if I may use that expression.’ She never realised that when children played they learnt things easily and had come to this conclusion when she taught the children to say a rhyme whilst skipping. She also mentioned that she would often sing when she gave instructions to the children and they tended to listen to the song and then they would realise that the song had a message.

One of the teachers explained that using movement in combination with singing was good for the children when they had been sitting in the classroom for a long time and were bored and tired. Her children were observed doing two different songs; in one of them they had to point to different parts of their body and then they had to point to different directions in the classroom such as front, back, up and down.
Another teacher said she had started bringing her laptop to school so that she could play music to soothe the children when they were eating or had just come back from PE.

**One of the fundamental changes that could be applied to the teachers was the change within themselves.** Many of them reported that they loved their job and implied that this had not been the case before, with two of the teachers saying that they had thought of ‘quitting teaching.’ The degree programme had instilled confidence in these teachers mainly because they knew what they were doing in the classroom since being on the course.

- **Had the course changed their professionalism?**

The principals were complimentary about the change that they had noticed in the teachers on the course. A common theme was the increased commitment shown by the teachers on the course, perhaps something that had not been there before. One principal, with two teachers on the course, felt that these teachers were ‘going the extra mile in all the things that they are doing.’ Since they had been on the programme they had come to school on Saturdays to prepare for the week and often asked him not to lock the school in the afternoons as they wanted to stay and prepare their classes for the next day.

Another principal commented that the two teachers on the course ‘are working hard now days,’ and that since being on the course they left the school at 5 or 6 o’clock. Yet another principal said of the three teachers on the course, ‘their professionalism is outstanding…the way they approach their work now is different to what it was before. They are on time and they are prepared for lessons.’

A decrease in absenteeism by the teachers on the course was also noticed by two of the principals. As one principal commented, ‘she is progressing well. She does not want to be absent.’ The other principal noted that her teacher’s attendance as well as her performance in the classroom had improved. This teacher ‘was always a person who likes to be absent, to be out of school. Now she is always at school. When she is out of school there is a problem, not like before.’ She said that this particular teacher had been a ‘little bit negative with everything. She has spent her whole teaching career here and she was a bit negative but now… she is positive about everything. It has changed her.’

It was encouraging to hear one principal describe the change in his two teachers on the course. He felt that the teachers had gone beyond the call of duty and that these teachers had grabbed the opportunity to study with both hands;

‘They have grown a lot. They have become more positive about their teaching environment and you can actually see the improvement in their classes. In fact, they lift the standard for what a classroom should look like…also their attitude towards teaching; it is absolutely amazing how positive they are about the programme. It is not just another course; they are benefitting from it, and they are eager to implement what they have learnt… their standard of service delivery has improved, [and] their attitude and commitment towards teaching.’
He felt that these teachers could be appointed at mentors for teachers coming into the school and novice teachers.

On a more negative note; perhaps the principal was not aware that one of these teachers had been observed leaving her class frequently and appeared to be walking around the school for most of the morning trying to get cheques signed and sorted out. Even when I visited her class she was still busy with the cheques although her class was orderly and the children were occupied. It must be acknowledged however that she was the only teacher whose professionalism could be called into question.

These teachers, where ever possible, tried to share their knowledge and their new practices with their colleagues. There were tell-tale signs which were easy to pick up if they had succeeded; notably the water systems, the layout of desks in the classes, reading corners as well as the print-rich environment they had all succeeded in creating.

At one school the two colleagues of a teacher on the course had been inspired by her example to also paint their classrooms to make them more attractive. Another teacher described how her colleagues would come to her class in order to see what ‘you have done this time from Rhodes and then they will copy this and they will copy that like the birthday chart; then they will try the rules in the classroom.’ She had even influenced a teacher at another school who would visit her and ask ‘what else did you learn there? What did you do? Please give me some things that I can do over there at my school.’

One teacher said that she made photocopies of her notes for her colleagues and told them to ‘go and read and tomorrow come and tell me what did you get from that. And they said…you give us an idea.’

At one of the schools the teacher had given a presentation to the staff on values the day before (see photo below). The principal said that she had explained to the whole staff how values would bring quality to the school. She said, ‘It was great. The whole staff was very impressed with her.’ It remains to be seen if they adopt her system but at least she had made the effort to share what she had learnt.
Teachers on the course reported that some of their colleagues had adopted the changes they had introduced. In a lot of instances it seemed that these colleagues were influenced by the change in appearance and the management of the classrooms of the teachers on the course. A teacher described how one of her colleagues had taken everything off her walls and when she queried the reason for this, her colleague replied that ‘after seeing your classroom, I don’t like my classroom.’

Another teacher explained that when she made teaching aids, and her colleagues liked the aids, they would ask her if they could do the same. She said she did not mind sharing and she normally encouraged the teachers by telling them to ask ‘if there is anything that you want to learn from me.’ She gave an example of the toilet routine that she had made for her children. She stated that her colleagues would come and tell her that they didn’t have a toilet routine in their classes and could they make copies of her toilet routine.

In some instances the teachers influenced the teaching practices of their colleagues. A Grade 3 teacher had influenced the way Mathematics was taught at her school. She said, ‘we are having a problem with Mathematics in our schools so they [the colleagues] are asking if they can come and observe what, how do I teach Maths.’

A colleague of one of the teachers on the course stated that this particular teacher had shared information that made her teaching easier and more enjoyable; ‘it is not so difficult any more, like Mathematics; since she gave [the information] I know what to do.’ She also commented that the teachers in the phase had learnt a lot from the teacher at Rhodes by saying, ‘this
programme is good for us because from our side we enjoy what [names the teacher] tell us to do, we discuss it. It brings some freshness to us.’

Another colleague described how the teacher’s studies had influenced her when it came to class preparation, reading activities and working with groups. She said that her teaching practice had changed a lot because of this individual because ‘I learn a lot from her.’ She reported that the teacher showed her the assignments she had to complete and concluded by saying that she loved the course as ‘it makes the teacher’s work easier…this is what I want because I don’t have stress when I am doing this.’

It must be noted that no teacher on the course had succeeded in converting all their colleagues at their schools to the systems or the new methods of teaching they had adopted. There could be several reasons for this:

- **It was easier to influence a colleague who was teaching the same grade because often planning was a team effort.** This was confirmed by two of the principals. One of them described the interaction, ‘We have got two Grade 3s so she [the teacher on the course] is just working hand in glove with the other teacher. She doesn’t want the children or the parents to see a difference.’ The other principal reported that he often saw the teachers on the course planning with their colleagues in the same grade.

  One of the teachers said that her colleague who, like her, was teaching Grade 3s told her that she wanted to learn from her and that she had come with her to school on the Sunday to prepare for the week because ‘you are going ahead and I am staying behind.’

- **Some teachers were afraid of change.** One principal commented that the two teachers on the course were talking to the other teachers about what they had learnt and what they were doing but felt that the other teachers were a ‘bit scared’ to follow them.

- **Teachers felt comfortable adopting some, but not all, of the new practices of the teachers on the course.** A principal described how the teachers at his school had started following the way the teacher covered her desks in the classroom; ‘I saw the tables…they were just naked…but a number of classes are beginning to follow what she is doing.’ Another principal commented on the fact that his single teacher on the course had impacted on other teachers in the same phase and they had been influenced in the way the ‘learners are arranged in the class.’

- **Colleagues in a different phase, the intermediate phase for example, were influenced by the teacher.** The principal of this school said that a colleague in this phase was ‘keen to see her class looking the same.’ He intimated that this was true of some of the other teachers in the phase.
• **A clash of personalities was also a factor.** One teacher on the course described how difficult it was to work with one of the teachers despite the fact that she [the teacher on the course] was the HOD of the Foundation Phase. She said that for this individual ‘no advice was good enough…it is hard when you say ‘apple’ and that one says ‘pear,’ you say ‘black’ and that one says ‘white.’’

• **Some colleagues were not open to change because they were too lazy.** A principal felt that this applied to some of the older teachers who were difficult to change, ‘others are lazy…and are just getting resistant.’ This was confirmed by one of the colleagues of a teacher on the course who explained that the other colleagues were eager to learn but they ‘were lazy.’

• **Some colleagues liked the changes but were slow to change themselves.** This seemed to be the case at one school where a teacher described how she had tried to influence her colleagues to plant flowers outside their classrooms in order to make the environment more attractive. As she said, ‘they are still coming very slowly and they are willing; it is just that they are not acting. So the only thing is that if I plant the flowers for all the classes it will have to be my responsibility’

• **The Head of Department (HOD) in the Foundation Phase at the school did not support or promote the changes.** As one teacher explained she could tell everybody in the phase what she was doing but nothing much was changing in her colleagues classrooms as the HOD ‘does not push the other teachers’ She herself had influenced a colleague but that was very much an individual initiative by the particular individual concerned.

• **Some teachers resisted change and responded negatively to the idea of change.** A teacher described how negative some of her Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase colleagues were about the information she shared with them with regard to the children keeping a simple index book as a dictionary for Mathematical terms where they could write the explanation of the term in simple English. They made comments such as ‘Who said that?’ and ‘Who is this Rhodes, why should you come and tell us Rhodes said we should have dictionaries [for Mathematics]? Who told you that?’ This teacher did say that she had received some positive support from some of the teachers with regard to this innovation.

For the most part these teachers had either influenced a teacher next door, or a teacher working in the same grade. It was interesting to note that this also applied to the school which had eight teachers on the course. This was a little disappointing as one would expected to have seen a greater impact on the school because of the greater numbers of teachers involved.
Two teachers at one school in Kimberley had such an impact on the school that the principal said he had started a project based on their classrooms;

‘To standardise what a classroom should look like; what is on the walls, what is relevant, what relevant material should be on the walls, what grade specific things and how it should relate to the curriculum.’

If this project came to fruition it would make a substantial difference to the teaching at the school. The principal recognised that these teachers, the HOD and her colleague, were taking the initiative in meetings where ‘quite a number of creative things have come out.’ He said that the other phases were benefitting from these initiatives and that ‘we are sort of modelling ourselves against what the Foundation Phase is doing …That is part of the Rhodes programme. So, it is a wonderful impetus for our school.’

**Perhaps the school where the teachers on the course had the most impact** was the school which had a teacher in each grade on the course; Grades 1, 2 and 3. The principal felt that the fact that there was a teacher in each grade on the course allowed for continuity because ‘what they are doing in Grade 1, it will be continuing in Grade 2 and then Grade 3.’ It would appear that they were the most successful in sharing their knowledge with their colleagues. It looked as though they worked as a team trying to effect change in the school. The principal had given them his full support and, as has already been noted in the section dealing with new systems, allowed them to propose and implement a change to the way all the children at the school used the toilets. They had also succeeded in changing the way athletics was dealt with at the school. The principal elaborated on this by saying:

‘They brought in a different perspective of how we should approach the athletics; our preparations for the athletics. Now [First term] is the season for athletics. Usually we started in January and they come up with, no man, let us start towards the end of the year to get ready for athletics…We start with athletics in November then in January when the meetings, the athletic meetings, are starting then we are already prepared.’

- **The teachers experience of the BEd (In-service) degree:**

**It appeared that managing their time between their studies and their professional and personal lives** was the most difficult aspect of the degree and confirmed what had been noted in Phase 1. In reality completing the assignments seemed to be the most challenging aspect of their degree programme. This was confirmed at the Kuruman workshop where the teachers were required to submit the first assignment of the year. Several teachers arrived at the workshop having not completed the assignment and spent most of the afternoon working on their assignments instead of attending to the briefing by the field officer.

One teacher described her experience with the assignments and commented on the amount of paper they had to deal with; ‘I have to sit and write assignments; lots of assignments, a lot of paperwork. Like they will give us the notes, they don’t give us the books. So you will sit and go and look in the file, you are flicking, flicking [through the pages].’ Another teacher said she
didn’t get much sleep as she was preparing work for school and doing her assignments at night. This was confirmed by another teacher who was sitting up at night completing her assignments till early in the morning.

**Frustration with the computer classes** at the contact sessions at Rhodes was noted by one of the teachers who was of the opinion that the difference in computer skills amongst the teachers on the course was a problem. Those teachers who did have computer skills had to sit and wait for the lecturer to assist the teachers with the basic skills before they could move on with the lesson.

**The degree course meant a great deal to these teachers** confirming what they had written in the questionnaire in Phase 1. One teacher thought she would not be able to ‘make it and now it is my third year’ and she felt ‘very glad and I am very proud.’ She felt it was a great honour to be chosen for the course. Although one teacher felt that graduating would be ‘nice’ she was anticipating the future without studying by saying ‘next year I will be free. I will not study anything.’

Another teacher said she was really humbled to be chosen for the course and hoped that this course would be offered to other teachers and not to officials in the department. She felt very strongly about this because ‘we are the ones who sit with these learners and who have to get the knowledge across to the kids.’

Most teachers described the **positive impact** the course had on their teaching practice, while some teachers commented on **the change in mind set** the course had on their professional lives. Three teachers had not enjoyed their experience as teachers and had thought of leaving the profession. Exposure to the degree course had changed their minds. As one teacher said she had changed her mind since being on the course because ‘since attending Rhodes…I can stand the challenges. I love teaching now. I love my children.’ The other teacher felt that the course had motivated her to stay in teaching because ‘I feel now that I am a specialist in teaching.’ It was quite telling when a teacher with 20 years of experience confirmed that she was now enjoying teaching, ‘After 20 years! And I am proudly saying that I can do the Foundation Phase lessons now.’

Another teacher elaborated, ‘my mind is free now because I know I love my work. I love my colleague. Everything is good, my parents also.’ Teaching had become a passion for one teacher as well as reading for the assignments. She commented, ‘[at] Rhodes you understand, you must read a lot.’ She ended by saying ‘the strategies and all the things we got from Rhodes they make me stronger and stronger [as a teacher] every day.’

Developing a personal vision and a personal mission was a significant change for one of the teachers on the course; to ‘see myself as a positive contributor, a positive contributing factor towards the community that I am serving. So I have my own vision and as a person I am so determined to see myself working and being of assistance to everyone who is coming into contact with me.’ She said that she had learnt this from Rhodes and that she had shared her vision and mission with her family.
Some teachers commented on their **professional growth** which was the result of attending the course. One teacher described how the course had resulted in her growth as a professional by saying, ‘The Rhodes programme it has helped me to grow in my profession and it helped me to develop my teachers, even if they don’t attend there I give them feedback. They try to do what is expected.’ Some teachers commented that the course had encouraged them to apply for promotional posts such as Learning Area Managers so that they could be in a position to help other teachers.

Some teachers **favourably compared the learning experience at Rhodes** to other learning experiences they had been exposed to. It was apparent that the focus on Foundation Phase and the practical approach adopted by Rhodes as well as the use of an experiential teaching model was a successful one. One teacher explained that she had also completed a course at a well-known university and compared the differences…‘it was just theory for me. But Rhodes gives me something different. It gives me something that I must come to the class and implement and also share with my colleagues.’

Another teacher described her experience of the course with regard to identifying and helping learners with learning difficulties as follows;

‘Like in January they [Rhodes staff] were teaching us about the brain; how does the brain work, like laterality. I didn’t know because we were not taught at the school, even when we were at the college. We were just taught like we were in school, they didn’t go into details. So at Rhodes, they went into detail. I know what to do in class, how to help a learner, how to identify [a child with learning difficulties]… Because we were chosen as a pilot school for that white paper – we were taught how to treat the children but it didn’t, we didn’t understand it… We have to attend the workshop for two days at half past one [1:30 pm]. We go there and we are tired and we don’t concentrate and then they say you must go to the schools and you must implement. So, they give us a lot of books to read but we didn’t have the time to like understand at the workshop, and we didn’t have time to read the books and teach the learners. So we were just doing things that we don’t understand but now, since I have been at Rhodes, I know how to identify the learner which is having a problem, and which type of problem is it and how to help him or how to refer him or her to the relevant people.’

Even a principal had noted the difference in academic rigour between the management degree he was doing at another university and the Rhodes’ degree his two teachers were on. He stated that ‘the demand on my time does not compare to the demand on their time that they sacrifice, the number of assignment they have to do. Yet, they are positive about it. And normally you would expect people with such a tough ask to drop out or just be discouraged but they are really enjoying it.’

Finally, describing participation in the course as being difficult but worth it was one teacher’s view of the degree programme. As she said that she would tell other students to participate in this programme in the future, ‘I will tell them that it is not easy. I won’t, you know, put false
hope and say it is a walk in the park because it isn’t, but I will encourage them and inspire them to continue doing it.’

**There were four possible support systems** for these teachers and these were the field officer, the education department, the lecturers and the teachers themselves.

**Collaboration amongst the teachers** on the course was a feature of a group of teachers in the Kuruman district. They kept in contact and occasionally met as a group to study and share ideas. They also visited each other schools to learn from each other. One teacher described how this worked, ‘we phone each other when you have got a problem and you don’t know how to approach a certain child in your class you just phone.’

One of the Kimberley teachers described how she looked forward to the contact sessions because she had made friends with other teachers on the course and they kept in contact telephonically and through social media.

Observing the **field officer** during the week in her interactions with the teachers at their schools and at the Kuruman workshop and speaking to the teachers confirmed the key role she played in monitoring and motivating the teachers. It was clear that the field officer cared very deeply for the teachers and that the teachers themselves trusted her to assist them in their personal as well as their professional lives. As one teacher explained, ‘you can phone [the field officer] at any time and tell her this and this, what can I do? She will come and say I will phone the other lecturers who are doing that subject and ask whether you can write about that, so that you can understand to do that better. It is a great help.’ In support of this view another teacher confirmed that she would contact the field officer and ask for help when she ‘was not clear about something.’

The monitoring role the field officer played was also noted by one teacher who described how this took place. According to this teacher the field officer ‘makes sure that we implement those changes because she visits us every term. Even this term she is going to come, and when she comes she wants to see a new change.’

On the first morning of the week out in the field one of the teachers phoned the field officer in tears because of a personal crisis at home and the field officer responded immediately and visited her at her home as soon as we arrived in the small village she lived in. The teachers, bar one teacher who had a valid reason to be absent, were all present at the workshop and it was clear that they relied on her support to help them get to grips with their assignments.

The field officer was described as ‘a mother’ to the teachers and one teacher confirmed this by saying that ‘when we have got problems, we share with her.’

One of the principals noted that he had been interacting with the field officer for a year and that she was ‘very professional and very approachable and she is always available.’

The **supportive role of the lecturers** was noted by one of the teachers who said that ‘they are trying to help us a great deal because we are of this age; we are struggling because of
not doing reading.’ The fact that the lecturers tried to accommodate teachers who were not English speaking was noted by one of the teachers who said that their ‘teaching is very nice because they use the language that is at our level, simple English.’

On only one occasion did a teacher make a negative remark about the lecturers and that was because she felt that the teachers needed to know more about the ‘terms and conditions of the programme…it made things difficult for us because even if one lecturer said something that was offending us we couldn’t respond to our satisfaction because of the things that we don’t know about; what we should do that we don’t know.’” She felt that the funder and Rhodes were the only parties that were aware of these. She was offended when they were not happy with the accommodation and they were told by a lecturer that ‘we have been sent here for free so we don’t need to complain.’

The role of the department in supporting the teachers was not evident in the field. The field officer confirmed that subject advisors had not visited the teachers and as a result support from that area was not forthcoming.

As a result of the 2012 ANAs the DBE introduced intervention programmes to develop teaching and learning plans to improve learner performance (South Africa. DBE, 2013: 9). These included the development of teachers through workshops aimed at improving the skills of subject advisors, lead teachers, Mathematics and English teachers as well as district personnel.

The Northern Cape Education Department did run workshops for the teachers to assist them with their teaching but this was not viewed in a positive light by these teachers as has already been noted. It seemed that these workshops took place during the week, after school and the teachers themselves were not particularly receptive mainly because they were tired after a morning spent at school. It appeared that they were given information and readings but there was no practical side to these workshops. This made the implementation in the classroom of new ideas and methods problematic as a result as the teachers did not understand what was required from them.

The official from the Northern Cape Education department said that part of her role was to be present at the contact sessions at Rhodes but she was unable to attend because of the ‘austerity measures’ that the department had put in place. It must also be noted that she had not visited any schools with teachers on the programme at the time of the interview. She had also not interacted with the principals with the exception of one individual on this issue. She stated that the field officers involved in all three programmes (The Foundation Phase as well as two programmes in the Senior Phase) had, through presentations, kept her informed as to what was happening in the schools.

Despite having little experience of the programme the official had several criticisms of the Rhodes degree programme which included teachers involved in the English and Mathematics subjects in the Senior Schools as well as the Foundation Phase.
1. As has been already noted earlier in this section (The number of teachers on the programme at the schools visited) she was not happy with the way the teachers were selected for the course because of the number of teachers on the course in some schools. Her view was that the degree course should be spread to more schools. She acknowledged that Rhodes had followed protocol by seeking permission from the NCED to involve their teachers in the degree programme. She was not happy with the fact that they did not get to recruit teachers in under-performing schools in all of the schools in the Kuruman district. She also felt that the NCED should have had a greater say in the final list of teachers chosen for the programme and indicated that they were not ‘partners’ in the selection process.

2. She was critical of the high drop-out rate of the teachers involved in the Senior Phase but acknowledged that the drop-out rate at the Foundation Phase was negligible.

3. The way the teachers’ results were presented to the NCED was problematic as the official felt that a paragraph describing the results was not sufficient. Her comment was ‘it is serious and so we expect that kind of seriousness in the results as well and how you present it.’ She concluded ‘we don’t expect that from there [Rhodes]. We don’t expect their administration to be lacking from Rhodes because they have a tried and tested system. So why must it be done this way?’ It appeared that she wanted the results presented in a spreadsheet.

4. The fact that the NCED was never represented in a meeting with the funders was another problem. She commented that she had never spoken to the funders and that there was a representation from the department ‘but they are not with the big shots and that I don’t like.’

5. There could be better direct communication between Rhodes and the NCED with regard to future degree programmes. She felt that others learnt about these developments before the department did. According to her she would tell teachers ‘if you hear about it then let me know and if I hear about I will let you know if there are.’

Despite these criticisms the NCED official acknowledged that there was a lot of interest in the Rhodes degree programme, ‘I mean everybody and every school wants to know how to be on the programme.’ She was also very supportive of the role of the field officer in mentoring the teachers and compared the programmes offered by two other universities which appeared not to be as successful.

- **The impact of these teachers on their learners and their schools.**

The teachers had an impact on their learners. Their classrooms were attractive learning spaces for the children and as has been noted they acted as mothers to their children. Children felt comfortable at school and enjoyed coming to school as a result. It was interesting to see that the children did not rush home at the end of the day but would rather stay with their teachers in their classes or play outside their classes popping in to visit their teachers every now and then. A principal confirmed the mothering role played by the teachers on the course by
saying, ‘when I get to their classes, you can even see that the learners now take them as mothers.’

There was an improvement in the children’s attendance at school in some of the classes. A teacher on the course described how much she had changed and that her colleagues had noticed by commenting that ‘this course has built you so much…They say everything is so nice, the children are so spoiled.’ She reported that her children were always at school; ‘they don’t dodge, they come to school regularly’

The principals confirmed that these teachers had an impact on the ANA results at their schools. A principal said that the ANA results had improved across the board last year but the improvement was ‘significant’ in the class of the teacher on the course. Another commented, of the eight teachers on the course, that their ANA results had ‘improved a lot.’

One school had achieved ANA results below 50% according to the principal and since the two teachers at this school had been on the course the ANA results had reached 60%. At the school with three teachers on the course, one in each grade, the ANA results had improved by 20% in the last year, going from 30% to 50% and the principal hoped that they would be able to sustain the improvement.

In the Kimberley school with the teacher on the course who an HOD in charge of Foundation Phase the ANA results of the entire phase had improved exceeding the results of the Grade 6s. In fact the principal reported that they had to double check the results to make sure that they were correct as the Foundation Phase had done exceptionally well. It appeared that many of the schools with teachers on the programme were failing or under-performing schools in terms of their ANA results. This was confirmed by two of the principals and the official from the NCED.

Support for the programme and its continuation as well as extension into the Intermediate Phase came from several principals and the NCED official. The NCED official felt that the fact that teachers were not trained in the Intermediate Phase was a ‘shortcoming’ which needs to be looked at.

One principal said he wanted to believe there was a programme for the Intermediate Phase because ‘the Foundation Phase for me now is in good hands and now we have to go forward. Those learners, when they go into Intermediate Phase, they mustn’t get lost.’

As one principal stated,

‘Honestly I can say when the teachers are finished with the course, Rhodes, the donors or whoever they must continue. I am requesting that they must continue with the thing because it really helps. Because, like I am saying, if … most teachers … behave like the two [teachers on the course] are behaving, then we can have a change in terms of the school’s situation. And then we will have learners who now feel safe when they are coming to school. I am not saying that they are not safe, but when they come to school they be knowing that I am going to my mother.’
He had also noted that ‘it keeps teachers at school’ and supported the fact that the teachers doing the course were not absent from school but attended the university during their holidays.

There was a need to focus on subjects such as Social Science according to one principal who noted that everyone was focusing on Languages and Mathematics and other subject were being neglected. He was strongly in favour of continuing the programme into the next phase.

One principal commented on the pressure he was under from the children, who had been taught in Grade 3 by a teacher on the course, who reported to him that ‘a, b, c and d is not happening in Grade 4.’ He explained that these children had gone from a positive environment conducive to learning to a place ‘that is just sterile, clinical…there is nothing that motivates them, there is nothing that relates to the curriculum on the walls, there is not positive interaction when it comes to the teachers and the learners.’ He said that he had to challenge the Grade 4 teachers by saying ‘listen these kids in Grade 3 have become used to a certain standard of doing things so we need to step up.’ He felt that the school would benefit if they had a teacher on the degree programme in every grade from Grades 1 to 7.

Finally, an interesting point was made by this principle with regard to the gender of the teachers on the course. He wanted to know if there were any men on the programme as it seemed that there were ‘only ladies on this programme.’ He felt that men ‘can only do better with the positive input that Rhodes has been giving our ladies on the course.’

**Conclusion:**

Phase 2 of the report was the result of fieldwork in the schools where teachers were involved in the degree course. It represents a synthesis of interviews of the teachers, their principals, two of their colleagues and two of the parents as well as time spent in their classrooms observing them teaching. Some of the challenges noted in Phase 1 such as the lack of facilities, the need for hygiene, the lack of books in particular as well as other resources, the struggle to get the support from parents and the department were very much in evidence in the schools that were visited. The supportive role of the field officer was observed and confirmed.

These teachers however had introduced many changes to their teaching practices with regard to the layout of their classrooms, their systems to manage their classes, the tools and resources that they used as well as their teaching strategies in Language, Mathematics and Life Skills. These changes were significant and resulted in changes to their teaching practices which were fundamental and significant to their children and their schools. The successful implementation had resulted in a renewed vigour and enjoyment of their teaching in every teacher that was observed and or interviewed.
Some teachers understood and implemented some of the practices more successfully than others but all of them had made an impact on their children and to a greater or lesser degree on their colleagues and their schools.

PHASE 3

Introduction:

The purpose of this report was to investigate change in the Foundation Phase Teachers’ practice in the Northern Cape and the possible influence of the BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree run by Rhodes University on this change. The aim of the degree was to improve the teacher’s content knowledge and knowledge of theory as well as the quality of teaching in the Foundation Phase. The teachers needed to create clean, attractive and print-rich learning environments. In addition the teachers were required to create an environment where the children were not only disciplined but where the children felt respected and valued.

Phase 3 of the report represents a synthesis of the findings of Phase 1 and Phase 2. Phase 1 described the context of the research as a result of interviewing key staff at Rhodes University responsible for the course and the study of documents relevant to the degree course. The course design principles were outlined and issues and challenges associated with the degree programme were identified. The teachers who were students on the course gave written feedback in a questionnaire which informed the design of the questions used for the interviews of principals, colleagues, parents and teachers in Phase 2.

Phase 2 represents the findings of the fieldwork completed over five days in nine schools in the Kuruman and Kimberley districts. Eight principals and one deputy principal at schools with teachers on the course were interviewed, as well as eleven of the teachers, including a colleague and a parent at two of the schools. In addition, observations were made of the classrooms, lessons and the campuses of the schools that were visited.

Key findings:

The design principles which informed the teacher professional development degree programme had been, for the most part, successfully tailored to meet the needs of the teachers of the Northern Cape. This included the fact that the focus of the BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree was not of a general nature but specifically scaffolded to meet the needs of teachers in all of the grades (Grades R-3) in the Foundation Phase. Because of this, the course was coherent and relevant to the teachers’ needs. In addition the design of the course was focused on the new CAPS documents and the teachers were shown how to implement the curriculum in their classes.

The experiential teaching model adopted by the Rhodes’ staff was successful as it allowed the teachers to practise, at the contact sessions under the watchful eye of the lecturers until they got it right, teaching methods they would be introducing into their lessons when they got back to school. In contrast the teachers reported that the workshops run by the NCED did not meet
their needs because they were not of a practical nature but required teachers to implement changes to their teaching based on attending workshops where readings were handed out.

It must be noted that there were concerns with regard to the academic rigour imposed on the course by the Rhodes’ staff. This proved to be a challenge for some teachers who were struggling with the reading they had to do for the assignments as well as the writing of academic essays. Their lack of exposure to books as a result of growing up in the apartheid era and the fact that the readings were in English could be an explanation for this challenge as the teachers were mostly Setswana speaking. The issue of plagiarism when completing their assignments was also problematic for the Rhodes’ staff.

The degree programme had a significant impact on the teachers who, despite their commitments to their families, schools and communities, had persevered with the academic challenges presented by the degree. The teachers had changed the way they approached their teaching. They were all able, some more successfully than others, to articulate why they had chosen to make these changes to their practice.

These changes introduced by the teachers to their practice had improved the quality of teaching in the Foundation Phase.

This included:

- **The way the physical environment was managed.** Clean and safe water for drinking and hand-washing as well as the handling of food and sanitation were identified as major challenges by the Rhodes’ staff. Teachers had introduced changes by putting into place new systems to manage water for drinking and hand-washing; the way meals were served and consumed and, in two instances, the way the toilets were being used. The net result was a clean and hygienic environment for their children.

  The introduction of plants, and attempts to make the classrooms clean and attractive, by painting the walls in bright colours and using colourful containers, ensured that their classrooms looked inviting.

  The layout of desks and chairs had also changed and all the teachers had arranged their classrooms to facilitate group work. Where possible the teachers had created spaces for reading, mathematics and theme tables in their classrooms. Washing lines were used to teach and highlight the alphabet and/or numbers or to display the children’s work.

- **The way they managed their children in the class.** A new focus for the teachers was the introduction of a disciplinary system as a means of managing the children. All teachers had introduced class rules which were prominently displayed in the classroom and constantly reinforced and referred to in the lessons. The classes that were observed were quiet, calm and disciplined as a result.
Many of the teachers described how they had taken on the role of ‘mothers’ to the children in their class and this was a major change to their approach to teaching. All the teachers spoke quietly and gently to the children and said that this too represented a major change in the management of their children. The net result of these changes was that all the teachers were observed to have a firm, yet a quiet and gentle control of their classes. A few teachers had introduced a reward system as a mechanism to manage the class. This was a new concept for the teachers and some teachers had yet to adopt a system.

Duty rosters gave the children tasks that they had to do on a regular basis and this too represented a change in the way the teacher managed the children.

- **The tools and resources they used for teaching.** The teachers on the degree course all taught at no-fee or low-fee schools and as a result there were not many resources or tools that were available to them for teaching. These teachers however had proved to be very resourceful by equipping their classrooms with tools and resources that they had made. Some of the teachers had asked for donations for equipment for physical education or books.

All the teachers made use of the workbooks handed out by the DBE for Home Language, Mathematics and Life Skills. The teachers were also using themes and theme tables to teach Life Skills, weather charts and birthday calendars.

The number of book resources to support literacy was a major concern. Teachers did have a limited number of big books to teach reading but some of the classes did not have graded readers. There did not seem to be any urgency on the part of three of the teachers to grade the books they did have. All the teachers had created reading corners, but most of them had very few books for the children to read. The lack of availability of books to support reading was an area of concern at most of the schools that were visited.

All teachers had tried to create print-rich classrooms and there were mostly hand-made posters and labels of differing quality on the walls. These were mainly in Setswana in Grades 1 and 2, with some posters in English in Grade 3 alongside posters in Setswana, the home language of the children.

Many of the teachers had introduced counters and resources to teach Mathematics, most of them home made. The introduction of these resources was also new to their classes.

- **The way subjects were being taught.** The teachers had introduced many new teaching methods as a result of being on the course. They had also learnt to teach at a pace which suited their children. Some teachers planned their lessons according to a theme which they tried to integrate through all the subjects and one teacher was very aware of the need to teach to the different learning styles of the children in her class.
• **The teachers’ attitude to teaching.** Teachers described how their attitude to their profession had changed as a result of being on the course. They had become more self-confident and positive about teaching and many teachers reported that they had started to enjoy their jobs since being on the course.

The teachers on the course were becoming more professional in their approach to their teaching. This was commented on by several principals who noted that the teachers on the course were more committed to their work and spent extra time at school either on weekends or after school to prepare lessons for the next day or next week. In some cases there was a noticeable decrease in absenteeism on the part of the teachers.

**The teachers had influenced some teachers in their grade and phase** and in some instances in other phases. The extent of their influence on their colleagues resulted in visible changes to the physical environment such as the water systems and meal times, changes to their classroom layouts as well as attempts to make their classrooms more attractive learning environments. In some instances their colleagues had copied the way the teachers managed their classes with the introduction of class rules, reading corners and theme tables. In a few instances their colleagues had been influenced to change their teaching practices, particularly in Mathematics and Language, or the way they spoke to the children.

The **supportive and mentoring role of the field officer was pivotal** to the success of the programme. The teachers on the course viewed her with trust and affection. They also acknowledged how much they relied on her support in their professional and personal lives. It brings into question if this professional development programme would have been as successful without her, or someone else, in the role. The field officer was always available when needed by the teachers on the course. She identified many of the practical challenges faced by the teachers in their schools and helped them to deal with them. She also played an important role in supporting teachers when they were required by the lecturers at Rhodes to change their practice. At the same time she monitored their progress by conducting practicums each term and the teachers respected this role by trying to adjust their practice in line with the recommendations she made.

It would be interesting to investigate if there are certain characteristics or personality traits that are required to ensure that the person fulfilling the role of the field officer is able to win the trust of experienced teachers. It must be noted that the knowledge, passion and empathy which are characteristic of the particular individual in the current role of field officer may be crucial to the success of the mentoring and supportive role she or he is required to play. People who are appointed to this role who do not have these characteristics might not be able to achieve as much with experienced teachers who are working in difficult circumstances. If this is the case the success of the degree programme might be difficult to replicate.

**Parental support and involvement in their children’s education** was, to a large extent, a problem in all the schools. Although a few teachers had succeeded in getting the parents
involved, their input was primarily limited to practical tasks such as painting, maintaining or cleaning the classrooms or making teaching aids. Some parents did attend meetings at the school, albeit not in large numbers. The parents came from poor, disadvantaged communities where there was a high level of unemployment and some of them were reported to abuse alcohol. It appeared that the majority of parents were illiterate. This meant that they could not help their children with their homework.

There was however **parental acknowledgement and support for the teachers on the course.** The parents had noticed a difference in the way their children were being taught and they liked the changes they were seeing. This resulted in requests for their children to be taught by these teachers, thereby creating a problem for the principals of some schools.

The relationship between **Rhodes University and the NCED** would benefit from a greater degree of communication between the relevant stakeholders (Rhodes’ staff, NCED officials and subject advisors) with responsibilities for the various components of the teacher professional development degree. The selection and monitoring of teachers on the course should be a shared responsibility with all stakeholders playing an active yet supportive role.

**Principals supported the programme and its continuation but were concerned with what happened to the children once they left Grade 3.** They felt that the programme should be expanded and extend into the Intermediate Phase. This would ensure a quality education for children in the first two phases of their schooling.

**Conclusion:**

There is evidence that the broad aims of the Rhodes’ BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree, to improve the quality of teaching and the children’s achievements in the Foundation Phase in the Northern Cape, are being achieved in the schools that were visited. Since being on the degree course teachers had changed their teaching practice. This was evidenced by the teachers’ increased content knowledge, improved teaching methods, the introduction of the new curriculum (CAPS) into their lessons as well as the improving ANA results. There was evidence of personal and professional growth amongst this cohort of teachers in the Northern Cape whose influence was seen to extend beyond the classroom to other teachers in their schools.

However there are concerns around issues and challenges over which the Rhodes’ BEd (In-service) Foundation Phase degree programme has little or no control. These include the lack of parental involvement in the education of their children and the question of what happens to these children when they leave Grade 3. The number of books available to the children is a concern as there are not enough books to promote and develop a habit and a love of reading, so vital to the development of literacy. These challenges could have a negative impact on the degree programme unless they are addressed.

**References**


Cronje, S. (2013). *Northern Cape Map*.


Rhodes University. (date). *Submission of new teacher education qualifications for approval by the Department of Higher Education and Training*.


### Appendices

#### Appendix A

**Open ended questions for the Rhodes’ teachers on the BEd (In-service) course.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What do you feel about the programme?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What has it been like to be on this course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How has the course affected your practice?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. How has the course affected you personally?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Interview guide for teachers and principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Questions (TEACHERS)</th>
<th>Prompts</th>
<th>Reason for question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tell me a little bit about your journey towards becoming a teacher.</td>
<td>Why teaching? Training? Where and what qualification?</td>
<td>To build a picture of the participant’s life story with regard to background and qualifications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you enjoy reading?</td>
<td>Did you have access to libraries or a print-rich environment as a child?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where and what Grades have you taught since qualifying as a teacher?</td>
<td>Describe the schools. Site, situation? Background of children?</td>
<td>To establish the physical location and socio-cultural context of the schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were your aims and goals when you started off teaching?</td>
<td></td>
<td>To establish if the course has influenced their aims and goals as a teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have these changed since you have been on the course?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you changed the way you do things in the classroom?</td>
<td>What? How? Dress? Talk? Brief story?</td>
<td>To establish how the course has influenced their practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What tools and resources are you using in the classroom?</td>
<td>What do you use?</td>
<td>To establish if the course has influenced their ways practice in the class (Ways of doing).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does this compare to your teaching practice before you started the course?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How have you tried to create a print-rich classroom?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you introduced any new systems into your class since starting the course?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What material structures are obstacles to your teaching?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How have the material structures influenced your learning on the programme?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>What social structures are a help to you in your class?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Health? Poverty? Peers? Parents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What social structures are obstacles to your teaching?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What social structures have influenced your learning on the programme?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How have you changed the way you think about the lessons you prepare?</td>
<td>Example?</td>
<td></td>
<td>To establish if the course has influenced their ways of thinking about their practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has the theory you learnt at Rhodes affected the way you think about teaching?</td>
<td>Example?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does what happens in your class relate to the theory you have learnt?</td>
<td>Example?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you talk to the children in the class?</td>
<td></td>
<td>When giving …. Instructions? Disciplining? Commenting on work?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has this changed since you started the course? How has it changed?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To establish if the course has influenced their ways of communicating with the children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you talk to your colleagues about your teaching practice?</td>
<td></td>
<td>If so, what do you talk about?</td>
<td>To establish how the teachers talk to their colleagues, if at all, about their change (or not) of teaching practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
<td>Prompts</td>
<td>Reasons for Question</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>How have your interactions with the Rhodes staff influenced your teaching?</td>
<td>Lecturers? Field Worker?</td>
<td>To determine how they have been influenced by interactions with others in their teaching and learning on the course.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been influenced by other teachers on the course with you? If so, how?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>At your school how have other teachers influenced your teaching and learning?</td>
<td>Give an example.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you influenced other teachers in your school since being on the course?</td>
<td>Example?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How have your interactions with people in the community (Including parents of learners) influenced your teaching and learning on the programme?</td>
<td>Negatively? Positively? Support from parents?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How have your interactions with your learners influenced your teaching in the school and your learning on the programme?</td>
<td>ANA results? Attendance? Discipline?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the most difficult aspect of the programme?</td>
<td>Time? Distance? Accessibility of resources? Own understanding?</td>
<td>To establish perceived problems if any with the programme as well as suggestions that might enhance the programme.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding that your course upholds the standards of Rhodes university, what changes or additions to the course would you like to see?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has the BEd programme meant to you personally?</td>
<td>Growth? Self-esteem? Professionalism?</td>
<td>To establish what the programme has meant to the individual.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Have you noticed change in your teacher/s on the course? If so, what is it?
- Teaching?
- Personally?
To establish how the teacher has grown personally and professionally.

Has there been a change in the way the teacher interacts with other teachers at the school?
- Talking to others about the course/course material?
- Material changes in other teachers?
To see what impact, if any the teacher is making on the school as a result of her being on the course.

Have the learners been affected by this teacher? In what ways?
- Behaviour?
- Attendance?
- Attainment – ANAs?
To determine what impact the course has made on the individual’s interactions with the pupils.

Has the change impacted on the people of the community in any way? How?
- Parents?
- Community Leaders?
To establish if the course has made, or is making an impact on the community?

Would you say that this course has benefited your school? In what way?

---

Appendix C

An example of the assessment rubric for one of the teaching practicums

Rhodes University
NC Bachelor of Education (In service) Foundation Phase Year 2

Teaching Practicum 4: Assessment Rubric

2013

| Assessment Criteria | 49% - 50% | 50-59% | 60-69% | 70-74% | 75+%
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2A</td>
<td>2B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Maintenance of resources and classroom displays (see TP1 requirements)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Health and hygiene</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.1 Washing and drinking routines and facilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance of health and hygiene practices introduced in TP2 &amp; TP3: routines for washing hands, facilities for washing hands, facilities for drinking water, routines for meal times, environmental awareness such as systems for saving water and planting gardens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.1 Introducing healthy toilet routines and facilities in the Foundation Phase</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that toilet paper is available for the learners every day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a pleasant atmosphere in the toilet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss toilet routines with the learners and display a poster for using the toilet in the toilet area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that the toilet floors, walls, toilets bowls and seats are cleaned daily with disinfectant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence that the student has held a Staff Meeting with colleagues to discuss the introduction of a system to ensure hygienic toilet routines in the Foundation Phase (e.g. Minutes of Meeting, Staff Roster, allocation of toilets for boys and girls, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Classroom Management: Discipline</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continued implementation of Group Rules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher speaks kindly and respectfully to disruptive children. (positive, motivational, consequent)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Interaction with Children:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence that the student has designed a table of comments she can use to provide favorable feedback on the children’s efforts. There should be 8 comments <strong>each</strong> for good, average and weak work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher asks the children for their opinions in class discussions and tries to find something positive to say about their responses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher walks among the children when they are working and comments <strong>favorably</strong> about their efforts or achievements.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher gives constructive feedback when she observes that children are off-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Organization of group guided reading:

Graded readers are available in the classroom.

Graded readers are stored separately and sorted according to the different levels of difficulty.

Storage boxes are covered and sorted according the different sublevels with dividers. Use a colour coding system to indicate the different levels. (Easy – yellow box with yellow dividers, Average – green box with green dividers, Difficult – red box with red dividers). All dividers must be the same size.

6. Organisation of personal studies:

Stationary is kept in a suitable container/bag and is readily available.

The assignments due on 17/18 August 2013 and 22 September 2013 have been carefully planned and scheduled on the Monthly Planner. Study time and personal commitments are also indicated.

Assignments are ticked off on the Check List as they are completed (self-monitoring)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>F3 Less than 39%</th>
<th>F2 40 – 44%</th>
<th>F1 45 – 49%</th>
<th>3 50 – 59%</th>
<th>2B 60 – 69%</th>
<th>2A 70 – 74%</th>
<th>1 75%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

LECTURER’S COMMENTS: (Shortened for this document)

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

Lecturer’s signature: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
Appendix D: The contact session programme for January 2014

Northern Cape C B Ed (In- service) FP 2014 (Year 3)

Contact Session 1: 7 – 10 January 2014

Venue: Emfundweni, CSD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Tuesday 7 January 2014</th>
<th>Wednesday 8 January 2014</th>
<th>Thursday 9 January 2014</th>
<th>Friday 10 January 2014</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TEA (10:30 – 11:00)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LUNCH (13:00 – 14:00)</td>
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<td>14:00 – 16:00</td>
<td>Education Environment (SK)</td>
<td>RPL: Professionalism (CvdM)</td>
<td>Professional Studies (SK)</td>
<td>Curriculum Studies: Language (FAL)(SM)</td>
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<td>WORKING TEA</td>
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