TOWARDS PEDAGOGY OF RESPONSE: A MATRIX CONCEPTION OF TEACHERS’ ENGAGING WITH POST-POLITICAL EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to conceptualize teacher professional development in response to the post-political reform agenda within South Africa into a matrix notion of teacher professional development. The paper presents accounts of teachers’ engagement in teacher professional development as they respond to the various drivers informing reforms within schools and education in general. Through these accounts, the theoretical concept of response is used as a lens to understand how teachers engage with their professional development in response to the changes required of them to implement a reformed school education curriculum. Arising out of this understanding is a proposed new conceptual way of viewing teacher professional development within the context of post-political reform agendas. I call this the matrix conception of teacher professional development. The paper concludes with an argument that, in order to promote, effective teacher professional development, teaching and learning about response provides a useful vehicle to promote continuing professional development for teachers. The paper therefore argues for a shift from a sustained theory or model driven approach to teacher professional development to a response driven approach. There are several loaded concepts in the conceptualization of this argument. These include post-political reforms, response and matrix conception of teacher professional development. Each of these concepts will be explored in depth to provide a nuanced understanding to support the argument being proposed.

Keywords: Teacher professional development, Sustained theory, Matrix conception

Introduction

In a recent doctoral thesis that I supervised on teacher professional development, I encouraged my student to title her concluding chapter “Does the model matter? Development or disruption” (Msimango, 2008). Her study explored a peer driven model of teacher development, and throughout her engagement with this peer driven model, she found that contextual realities override any intervention in teacher professional development that leads to teacher learning or changed teaching practices. Initially, she was taken aback by my suggestion, and as I later learned, was very confused about my suggestion because, in her thesis she was theorizing about an effective model for teacher professional development, and here I am asking her to challenge the conceptualisation of models informing TPD. The failure of teachers to effectively translate their learning into changed teaching practices, as was clearly evident in Msimango’s thesis as well as in many other literature (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Day and Sachs, 2004; Barrow, 2006; Lieberman and Mace, 2009) on teacher professional development, through interventions conceptualized within theoretical models of TPD raises questions about our sustained focus on a model driven TPD approach. In this paper I argue, therefore, for an exploration of a response driven approach to TPD. Hence the conceptualization of this concept paper on pedagogy of response.

This paper has been developed from vignettes of an opportunistic (Ramrathan, 2002) and purposive sampling of Masters’ students’ engagement with Teacher Professional development as teachers and researchers. The
sample of four practicing teachers was part of my Masters cohort of student who was researching teacher development. Vignettes of their experiences and views about how they managed the demands placed on them as teachers, managers and colleagues within the context of transformational changes that were, and are still taking place in school education were developed. The vignettes had been constructed using a combination of first person and third person accounts of teachers’ views and experiences of teacher professional development. The purposive selection of the Masters students allowed me select case rich exemplars to support my argument for a conceptualization of the matrix conception of teacher professional development and response theory. In addition, this paper is informed by the changing policy context informing teacher development within post-apartheid South Africa, to illustrate the complexities that teachers had to navigate through to survive as teachers in schools within a transforming context.

Theoretical and conceptual tools informing teacher professional development

Conceptions of teacher professional development (TPD) have proliferated significantly within the recent literature on this issue, especially within the context of educational reform. Most conceptions are binary in nature. Some authors privilege initiator TPD binaries like managerial PD and democratic PD, and self-initiated and employer initiated; some privilege needs like deficit and aspirational PD; some privilege sites of PD like in-school and out-of-school PD activities; some privilege process like individual vs collaborative; and some privilege forms of learning like generic vs specific (Little, 1994; Johnson, Monk and Hodges, 2000; Day and Sachs, 2004; Hoban 2005). In these binary conceptions of TPD, the assumptions are that they exist as individual binaries that are in isolation from other conceptions of TPD. Increasingly, the binary conceptions of TPD are difficult to identify as there is a confluence of conceptions informing TPD. For example, the introduction of foundations for learning within the school system in South Africa requires employer and individual initiatives through collaborative engagement within a conception of learning communities where individuals provide learning opportunities for others as well as learn from others. Hence new conceptions of TPD are evolving as we, as researchers, explore the complexities associated with TPD.

The contextual concept of post-political reform

The idea of educational reform is quite clear and had been explored quite extensively in literature (Johnson, Monk and Hodges, 2000; Jones and Staker, 2008; Lieberman and Mace, 2008). The central issue in education reform is that of an external driver which creates the stimuli to influence educational change. These external drivers could include, for example, a state initiative of refocusing education to meets its strategic plan or it could include new curriculum directives to address particular development needs. Extending on this notion of an external driver that shapes education change is the notion that I call post-political reform agenda, as a strategic agenda to politically change the education system and focus, usually initiated by a change of government. The specific case of South Africa where, post 1994, the political landscape of the country had changed from an apartheid ideology to a democratic, values based ideology, is an example of what I call post-political reform context. In this significant political change, almost the entire fabric of our country needed to change in order to support this political ideological change. This is what I refer to as post-political reform agenda, where change is of a large scale, is deep seated and is underpinned by political ideological change due to new governance.

While the South African political change has been a fundamental change driven by decades of political struggle against oppression, our global political history suggests that most countries experiences periodic changes in government as different political parties come into power. Our political history also suggests that once new government comes into being, driven by oppositional politics and agenda, fundamental changes to key sectors are imminent in order to promote and drive the new political agenda. Hence, the notion of post-political reforms could be consider as an emerging and a sustaining
Theorizing about response

In recent times, most world contexts are experiencing fundamental changes initiated by several things. Changes are initiated by political issues, environmental issues including natural disasters and global warming, societal issues, cultural issues, economic issues, health issues, technological advancements, globalisation and rapid knowledge production. These changes sometimes have major implications to the fabric of societies and context. More importantly, each of these kinds of changes requires fundamental responses that are systemic in nature. Many countries respond differently, but what remains constant is the notion of response. What is the nature of response? How do we learn how to respond? What informs our response? Is there a response theory that shapes our thinking when responding to systemic issues? These are the questions that this paper attempts to address.

Response has been theorized largely in the field of psychology, linguistics and in the scholarship of research. In the field of psychology, response is largely theorized within the behaviorist and cognitive approaches that explores how certain conditions and actions results in particular responses of individuals. For example, in the works of highly acclaimed behaviorist like Skinner and Pavlou, behavioral responses have been influenced by rewards and punishments and by conditioning through association.

In the field of linguistics, response is theorized within the domain of structural and post-structural interpretation of linguistic texts and meaning making (Rheding-Jones, 1995). Further, within the domain of semiotics, response is the key component to the interpretation of signs and suggestions in the real world as is evident in the works of the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 – 1913) and in an American philosopher, Charles Sanders Pierce (1839 – 1914).

In research, borrowed from the domain of literary criticism, where scholars are interested in the readers’ response to text rather than the author’s intention or the intrinsic meaning within the text, “response” has become a useful method for deconstruction for enquiry (St Pierre, 1999). Here the response of the reader, or in the case of St Pierre’s ethnography – the response of the participants of her ethnography, is privileged above other traditional deconstructive methods of enquiry because it may contribute to new meanings through understanding (a) how response from a variety of relations to the phenomenon is being investigated that may radically interfere with each other; and (b) what the effects of this interference would be. In St Pierre’s (1999) ethnography, she highlights “member-check” response and extends on this to explore a new response category – “imaginary response” within her ethnography.

Elizabeth St Pierre (1999) in her ethnography on a group of older, white American southern women in her hometown, identified two kinds of “response” data produced in her study. The first: “member-check” response data is produced when, she gives back to the participants of the research, her (St Pierre’s) representation of the data produced. This data was produced from the source and the kind of knowledge her participants used in constructing their subjectivities during the course of their long lives. The participants respond to this data constructed by the researcher. This St Pierre calls member-check response – an activity common to fieldwork process for data production relating to data trustworthiness.

The second, she (St Pierre) refers to as “imaginary response”. Imaginary response “is the response we imagine our work (research) will produce, as well as others’ response to what they imagine our work will produce” (St Pierre, 1999: 271). Often, as researchers, we assume in our analysis that the research participants respond to the purpose of our enquiry and this is clearly articulated to the participants. We analyse the response to understand the author’s intentions or the intrinsic meaning within his/her response. Are we clear about the nature of this response from the participants? Is the participant responding to an imagined outcome of the research project? How can we tell whether there is a difference in the way they respond? What impact do these different kinds of responses have on the analysis of the study? These questions are the central issue in St Pierre’s ethnography on older, white Essex County women’s lives, which
led her to conceptualise the second type of response – “imaginary response”- that leaves her hesitant about writing an ethnography that claims to be the final representation of women and their culture.

Through St Pierre’s demonstration in her ethnography, a multiplicity of responses can be established. These could indicate, amongst others: (a) the different orientation one takes (positionality) in their response, (b) the audience it is produced for, (c) the variables that you want to privilege for interpretation, and (d) the impact you want to construct.

Deconstructing the response from research participants (including that of the author of the research project) would provide valuable information within the enquiry to construct new meanings within research. One of the ways of creating new meanings might be through understanding that there is a possibility that “imagined response” exists and that it can influence meaning making as demonstrated in St Pierre’s (1999) ethnography. Extending on this logic is the possibility that there may exist responses motivated by a variety of other reasons than that of an imagined response. The notion of an *interrogated response* as advanced by Ramrathan (2002) would, for example, make explicit the motivations behind the claims and responses by the research participants or the researchers. For example in his study of teacher demand within the context of HIV/AIDS, he explores the concept *data as agency* to explain how authorities use data to advance particular positions. He refers to the advocacy stance taken by an HIV/AIDS activist and researcher where she uses soft data as evidence to command immediate response and intervention by the state to do something about the disease.

Drawing from the above accounts of theorizing about response, it seems clear that response as a theoretical framing would be a useful way of understanding the nature and focus of teacher professional development amongst teachers as they account for their professional development activities as teachers.

**From theorizing about response to a pedagogy of response**

To understand response as a pedagogy, this paper presents teachers accounts (narratives) of their responses to the school changes that they had to undergo within a political reform agenda that required fundamental changes to the fabric of school education within South Africa. Further, through a snap survey of teachers on forms of TPD activities they engaged in, who initiated these engagement and purposes of these activities, a clear pattern of response by teachers emerges. Response, therefore, seems a central concept that influences TPD. Hence, if response seems to be a central concept in TPD, how can we explicate it to form pedagogy in teacher professional development?

**Vignettes of teachers’ narratives as they traverse systemic changes to school education**

In her academic essay on “challenges in the expression of outcomes based education”, Dono reveals that the introduction of the newly conceptualised Outcomes Based Education (OBE) school curriculum simply meant group work for teachers and the abandonment of old methods of teaching.

*This was a common response by teachers who were guided and sometimes forced to adopt learner centered approaches to teachers. For many, the OBE mean that one abandons teaching and replaces with learner activities to encourage learning. Hence, project work, group learning and self discovery became the mode of teaching. Teachers were required to engage in re-skilling programmes to explore new ways of facilitating a learner centred approach to teaching. Some took on further studies in the form of a newly introduced Advanced Certificate in Education programme that focused on reskilling, upgrading and access into other programmes or engage in higher studies focused on the academic and research development. Individual teachers initiated this form of reskilling and sometime the state would offer study bursaries to encourage teachers to participate in these forms of teacher development. No directed programmes were identified to meet this reskilling activity.*
In this vignette, two important issues emerge. The first relate to the superficial change that teachers employed in their teaching in order to change to a learner centred approach of learning as advocated by the new OBE curriculum introduced into the school education system. Changing the pedagogy seems to be the way teachers showed (strategic mimicry) their response to a fundamentally re-conceptualised school curriculum. The second issue relates to the learning activities that teachers needed to engage in, in order to re-skill themselves. Some initiatives were driven by teachers themselves while others acknowledge the pressure to re-skill and responded by enrolling in TPD programmes that ranged from workshops to whole qualification based formal programmes.

In another account by a visual arts secondary school teacher, Lucen, an experienced Art teacher and a practitioner was quite astounded that after professional development programmes organized by the state to develop teachers to teach section of the new Visual Arts curriculum, most teachers were confused and were left no different from where they were before the professional development activity. Yet these teachers were expected to teach these new aspects of the Visual Arts to the learner in senior secondary school. He related how these teachers identified specific individuals from amongst their peers who had a slightly better understand of the new learning and clustered around these individuals. Some who lived within close proximity to each other were fortunate to have their colleagues meet and learn about the new visual arts and the teaching of it. He was, of course, concerned that because visual arts is not a popular school subjects, there were not many teacher who taught this subject as well as not many schools offered this subject and that there was this huge possibility that many teachers were not able to form learning cluster because of their geographic clusters.

Recognising the potential of these organic clusters, various other learning cluster emerged to support teacher development within South Africa. These clusters include subject clustering, phase clustering, peer clustering, school district clustering, specialist clustering and resource clustering, to name a few. Each of these cluster types offer different kinds of support and teacher learning.

This vignette also suggests that states attempt to train and develop teachers to adopt a new approach to education, including curriculum changes envisaged in a reformed education system, cannot be considered as effective teacher professional development, as it has been found to be inadequate, superficial and mainly focused on presenting directives to teachers (Govender, 2009).

In most educational reforms, a management response to these reforms often takes privilege, as revealed in the follow vignette:

Iran, a senior teacher in a secondary school saw the opportunity of using his experience and knowledge through, what is now called, a Master Teacher position within his school. This category of teacher was established very recently, largely in response to the fact that there were a significant number of un- and under-qualified teachers in the system. These un- and under-qualified teachers, despite most having in excess of fifteen years of teaching experience and having up to two years of post-matric teaching qualifications, were deemed un-and under-qualified teachers because of the pegging of a qualified teacher status at a minimum of matric (grade 12) plus a three year teaching diploma. These teachers had to now undergo professional development to upgrade their qualification in order to re-achieve a qualified teacher status. In order to manage and support these teachers in their professional development, schools needed to have someone who would be able to mentor these under-qualified teachers. Hence, in part, a reason for establishing a category of Master teachers. Having been employed as a Master Teacher, his responsibilities to a large extent, is to manage and provide support to teachers within his school context.

The creation of a Master teacher post within the school context can be seen as a management
response to the need to upgrade and re-skill teachers to the new education system and the new school curriculum. This is one example of a management response to teacher professional development, especially when there are fundamental changes in response to political reform agendas. Other management responses include the establishment of Professional Development Teams in schools, District level professional development processes (e.g. the development of School subject advisors to become mentors using the Skills development levy system) and the introduction of new framework for directing, regulating and managing continuous professional development of teachers through a credit bearing system.

Managing change is an extremely complex process, especially when the change is of a system nature. In our historical segregated system of education, we had 19 departments of education, 261 teacher education institutions and a production of approximately 26 000 teachers per annum (Hall, 1995). To bring into being a single department of education and a common teacher education curriculum, national frameworks for teacher development had to put in place to manage this complex change. In the past decade and a half, three national frameworks for teacher development were developed, each with its own focus. The first, being the COTEP document, took on a symbolic focus of attempting to bring about a common vision for teacher education. Conceptually, it still focused on a curriculum structure framework which was very similar to existing teacher education curriculum offered in most teacher education institutions. This framework was subsequently replaced by the Norms and Standards for Educators (NSE) (Department of Education, 2000) which, in my opinion was a real conceptual shift on teacher education. It took on a competency based, roles and responsibilities approach to curriculum design for developing teachers. Within this framework, teachers were developed according to roles and responsibilities that they needed to perform within schools. Noting that the NSE was more of an idealistic framework (Morrow, 2007), the latest one, National Framework of Teacher Education (NFTE) (Department of Education, 2007) adopted a more pragmatic approach to teacher development. In this framework the realization was that there is an initial qualification in developing a teacher but that teacher development is a continuing process throughout the life of a teacher. Hence, this framework was premised on the notion of a continuum of on becoming a teacher to being a teacher. And in this conception of teacher development, teachers are required to respond to the various drivers that impact on them as professionals. To manage this process of teacher development, norms have been developed to suggest what an initial teacher education qualification should be and how and what forms of continuing teacher professional development could be recognized, recorded and regulated.

In part, this vignette suggests that the state envisioned a resistance to the reformed education system, and had, therefore, placed great emphasis on a management system that would support its political agenda. Structural changes in the form of policy frameworks as well as systems changes in the form of re-configuring human capital were a way of managing this humongous change envisioned by a new political ideology.

On a personal level, June, a Master’s student wrote in her academic essay on teacher identity and reform compliance as it relates to her experiences:

In attempting to unfold the influence of identity in teachers work, I will mention how marginalisation, pre-ordained curricula, curriculum reformation and aspects beyond my control influenced my work as a teacher. Whilst the western idea of teacher change is poorly suited to the South African context, the upgrading programs influenced me positively, allowing space for effective learning. As a ‘Coloured’ female I attended schools and institutions reserved solely for my racial group. This ‘coloured’ identity would unfold in my teacher life, even in the post apartheid era, reinforcing Spillane’s notion of identity as habits of mind. The post apartheid era posed many challenges, as there were large numbers of learners in classes, coupled with the language barrier and cultural differences, which overwhelmed me. As a child my disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances deflated my confidence, accounting for my lack of confidence in my teaching work, and complied with what was the ‘norm’. I must mention there were even
better established ‘Coloured’ residential areas for the ‘high society’ and financially endowed. This inferiority complex constructed my personal identity, rendering me powerless and subservient to challenge circumstances and express myself, shaping my teacher identity.

This vignette clearly signals the personal identity crisis that teachers have to cope with in trying to respond to the complexities teaching, resulting in a survival response to reforms. In trying to manage the contextually challenging context of education change, teachers identities were being challenged, both by themselves as well as that demanded by the changing context of school changes. How, then, is this teacher expected to respond to the identity crisis that she is experiencing.

**Conceptualising teacher development within the context of post-political reforms: A matrix conception of teacher professional development**

The samples of vignettes on teachers as they traverse the reform agendas provide a glimpse of the complexities of teacher development. In order to understand the need for teacher development and the response by teachers to teacher development, one needs to take a more complex view of TPD. The more complex view requires us to move away from conceptualizing TPD as binaries to conceptualizing TPD as a matrix of these binaries. In this matrix conception one can then attempt to manage the complexity of the drivers that compel teacher development to cope with the rapid changes that are expected of teachers. The matrix and the continuums within the matrix allows one to identify the various drives that teachers need to respond to in order to manage their teacher professional development activities and plans. A teacher could engage in teacher professional development activities that could address various things that the teacher needs to respond to simultaneously. For example, a teacher could engage in a teacher professional development activity that intersects on a “needs based” (who needs what) continuum, an “initiator based” (who initiates what) continuum and a “focus based” (to achieve what) continuum. In this way, teacher professional development would be regarded as an integrated approach that responds to several drivers demanding TPD of teachers and more specifically, teachers would make this decision of what professional development they should engage in that would meet their needs at that particular time. In addition, programme design could be influenced by such an approach to the extent of keeping teachers interested in such activities. The need to keep teachers interested in their professional development is accentuated especially in the context of developing a cultural change within teachers to view TPD as a way of life of teachers, rather than a largely externally driven imperative.

The matrix presented in the figure below appears to be made of rigid lines and dots. This appearance is just to show pictorially the complex nature of the intersections and is not meant to be rigid and in straight lines and symmetries. The fluidity of the matrix is being proposed rather than rigidity.
Towards pedagogy of response: A response continuum

The vignettes also suggest that there are different kinds of responses to reform that teachers can take. These responses range from a **compliance response** type to a **resistance response** type as opposite ends of a continuum, with a range of other types of responses in between. Compliance response suggests that a teacher will engage in TPD activities that will enable him/her to understand and implement the changes required of, for example, the introduction of an outcomes based education system. Lucen’s vignette is an example of this kind of response where teachers, despite them not receiving adequate state training, they used each other to learn about the new visual arts curriculum in order to implement the changed curriculum. A resistance response act would suggest that the individual resist any form of change. In Iran’s vignette, the state had to introduce management systems and processes in order to manage the resistance that they (the state) had anticipated from teachers, especially those that were teaching for many years, but have been declared under-qualified through changed policy.

At least three other distinctive response types can be identified. A mid-type response could be **survival response**, suggesting that teachers will respond in a way that will make it easier to survive and bear the context of change. Moving toward the resistance response end of the response continuum is a response category one could call **complacency response** that suggest a kind of response where the teacher will act is he or she feels so and is less concerned with the consequences of his/her action. A further response type of **strategic mimicry response** could be closer to the compliance response end of the continuum, and this response kind suggest that the teacher will act in a way that superficially or cosmetically resembles a compliance response, but the act is not embedded within the ideology and principles of the change act. Dono’s vignette is a classical example of strategic mimicry response. The figure presented below provides a pictorial representation of a response type continuum. There could be other types of response continuum. Another example of a response continuum would be one that has individual response on the one end of the continuum and collective response on the other end of the continuum, with several response categories in between. These could include, collegial, and collaborative responses. These two examples suggest that several response continuums could be constructed and used as a way to understand response as a theoretical framework.

Having identified these response types, how then can we use this as a framework for informing teacher development? This idea of a pedagogy of response contributes to the “knowledge how” of teacher development, i.e. the process issue rather than the content issue of teacher development.
development. Drawing from the vignettes, these new conceptions of teacher professional development would allow for teachers to find their voices and actions with regards to their professional growth without it being considered as an external imperatives, a burden on teachers, or “one-size fits all” approach, the implications of which are well documented in the literature on teacher professional development. These new conceptions of teacher professional development could also contribute to the management of education reforms, especially those that require fundamental systemic changes. In this kind of reform situation, resources for change can be located across the education system rather than just from state initiatives. Peers, Master teachers, managers, and the state are some of the resources that can be harnessed in order to promote teacher professional development within the context of systemic change.

Bibliography


