

Teacher Knowledge: Unbridling Teacher Agency in the Context of Professional Development for Transformative Teaching and Learning

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Abstract : This article addresses a persistent challenge related to teacher agency in knowledge acquisition in professional development (PD) workshops in contexts of educational change, given that scholarship identifies a need for more teacher involvement and amplification of teacher's voices. Theoretical concepts are drawn from Bandura's Social cognitive theory, incorporating the triadic causation model of agency to examine the reciprocal nature of the context, teacher characteristics, and systemic influences that shape how knowledge is transmitted and acquired in PD workshops. This qualitative study, using a mix of classroom observations and interviews, explored the political, contextual, and personal characteristics of teacher agency in PD through an analysis of data extracted from a PhD study. The narratives of six teachers from three township schools are examined to show how PD efforts in South Africa have failed to take account of the holistic development of teacher agency in knowledge dissemination and how this shapes teacher self-efficacy beliefs about being able to masterfully apply the tenets of the reform. Agency, teacher voice, and contextual considerations were used as markers of the quality of the training provided to understand how knowledge is acquired and meaning is made. The findings suggest that systemic influences of institutionally imposed PD offer partial understandings of the reform, which is offered in traditional formats that do not consider teacher empowerment in knowledge production and the development of teacher agency. Common in all the participants' responses is the need for more information and training on the prescribed approach for teaching English as a second language; however, this paper holds the view that more information may not solve teachers' dilemmas. Accordingly, it recommends a restructuring of the programme with facilitators being more cognisant of teacher agency for the development of transformative teachers. The findings of the study contribute to the field of teacher knowledge, teacher training, and professional development in the context of educational reforms.

Keywords : teacher professional development, teacher voice, teacher agency, educational reforms, teacher knowledge

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