

THE PRAXIS OF CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA: THE VIEWS OF TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

In 2007, South African Council for Educators (SACE) was mandated to implement, manage and exercise quality assurance of a Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) system. Key to the implementation of CPTD system is to enhance the quality of teaching in public schools by means of recognising, supporting and tracking teacher professional development. However, the introduction and implementation of the system did not come without controversial views and questions about the quality of some professional development techniques. Therefore, to theoretically and empirically position the arguments of this article, the mixed approach, which is predominately qualitative in nature was used to collect data from principals, deputy principals, heads of departments, and teachers in the three schools in one of the townships in the Free State Province in South Africa. This method was adopted in order to establish the views of teachers regarding the effectiveness of the implementation of CPTD system in schools. Consequently, based on the findings and the lessons from international practices, this paper recommends some measures that need to be taken into consideration in order for teachers in South Africa to be aware and understand the importance of the system and the reason why they need to support and promote it.

KEYWORDS: South African Council for Educators, Continuing Professional Teacher Development, Department of Basic Education, Teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2007, South African Council for Educators (SACE) was mandated to implement, manage and exercise quality assurance of a Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) Management System (The Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE), 2015a:9). Key to the implementation of CPTD is to enhance the quality of teaching in public schools by means of recognising, supporting and tracking teacher professional development (PD). Later on, in 2012, the implementation of CPTD was approved by SACE Council; and since January 2014, it has been implemented in phases. The principals and deputy principals were the first cohort since then (CDE, 2015a:9). However, the introduction and implementation of the CPTD did not come without controversial views and questions. For instance, there were views to the effect that some activities that qualify for points, are highly unlikely to improve teaching quality (CDE, 2015a:12). Therefore, taking into consideration the international practices on PD of teachers, this article provides recommendations to SACE and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa. In order to achieve this, an empirical study was conducted using principals, deputy principals, heads of departments (HODs), and teachers of the three schools in one of the Free State townships.

2. THE DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The literature provides a plethora of definitions for PD. Just to mention a few, Mizell (2010:1) regards PD as a strategy that is implemented by schools and districts of education to ensure continuous strengthening of teachers throughout their career. Hassel (1999) cited in Reading First Notebook (2005: on-line) defines PD as *the process of improving staff skills and competencies needed to produce outstanding educational results for students*. Organisation for

Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2009: on-line) defines PD as *activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher*.

The commonality of the above definitions is that, they all regard PD as a critical factor to enhance teachers' learning (Gómez-Blancarte & Viramontes, 2014:1). However, Steyn (2008:17) cautions that PD should not be only a matter of skills development or acquisition of new knowledge, which is based on compulsory training. Rather, should be based on the realisation of one's inability or incompetence on issues related to their performance. This then suggests that PD activities should address the needs of teachers. Regarding this, Lee (2005:41) recommends that schools should have strategies to determine in which areas a teacher needs development.

Therefore, based on a teacher's needs, PD should be provided in many ways, ranging from the formal to the informal (OECD, 2009: on-line). For example, a formal process of PD includes contexts such as a conference, seminar, or workshop, collaborative learning among team members, and a pursued for a qualification at the university. On the other hand, informal processes of PD occur in instances such as discussions among school colleagues, independent reading and research, observations of a colleague's work or learning from a peer, and visits to other schools (Mizell, 2010:5; OECD, 2009: on-line). These informal processes relate well to Wenger's (1998:7) Social Learning Theory. According to Wenger (1999:32), learning should be linked to people's participation in communities of practice and in organisations.

3. COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

The concept of communities of practice (CoP) was first introduced in 1991 by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. In 1998, Wenger extended this concept further to other domains, such as organisations (Wenger, 1998:8). CoP can be defined as a social learning that occurs when people who have common interest in a subject or learning area work together over a long period of time, sharing ideas and strategies, determine solutions, and generate innovations (Community of practice, n.d: on-line).

According to Wenger (2000), cited in Brown (2013) CoPs are *groups of people who share concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly*. In this context, community refers to a group of people who are prepared to collaborate and support each other's *coming to know*. Furthermore, some members in a community are core, long-term leaders, while others are newcomers who often are in a peripheral role, at least for some time (Brown (2013). From the above definitions, three components of CoPs are realised. Firstly, there has to be a domain. Meaning, a CoP has an identity defined by a common interest of people involved. For example, a domain could be formed by teachers who teach a particular subject or perhaps, a school management team (SMT) in a school. To be a member of a community implies commitment to the domain (Community of practice, n.d: on-line).

Secondly, there has to be a community. This implies that there has to be members of a specific domain (teachers who teach the same subject) interacting and engaging in shared activities, helping each other, and sharing information with one another. These manner of engagements build relationships that support teachers to learn from each other. Therefore, it is obvious that by merely sharing the same job does not constitute a CoP (Community of practice, n.d: on-line). Obviously, the fundamental principle of a CoP is that, people should interact and learn together. What is interesting is that, members of CoPs could also involve teachers from other schools. Meaning, there is no hard and fast rule about the formation of CoP, as members do not necessarily have to work together (Community of practice, n.d: on-line).

Thirdly, there has to be a practice. Another requirement for a CoP is that the members should be *practitioners*, not just individuals who have interest in activities, for instance, sports. In other words, members should have repertoire or range of resources, such as stories, helpful tools, experiences, and ways of handling common challenges. Moreover, as shown earlier, members' relationships and interactions must have been developed over a long period. Unlike the conversation with a stranger who happens to be an expert on a subject matter – that does not constitute a CoP (Community of practice, n.d: on-line).

In view of the above, Wenger (1998:46) points to the example of claims processors who were aware of their usefulness to one another. According to Wenger (1998:47), the claims processors were exchanging information, making sense of their situations, sharing new tricks and new ideas, and were buddies influencing each other's working days. Therefore, in the final analysis, it is apparent that CoPs should be fundamentally established for specific areas (domains), for learning purposes, and for people who are in the practice. In this case teachers. However, in practice, Leepo's (2015:94) research conducted in the Free State secondary schools, reveals that the CoPs (commonly known as professional learning communities (PLCs) in schools) have been successfully established in the districts; but they are not as effective as they should be.

To this end, Leepo (2015:94) points out that it is challenging to assemble teachers from different schools, having diverse cultures to work together in PLCs without conflict and personalities strife. Again, this researcher bemoans that districts officials apparently are *not readily available to play an effective leading role* – the end result is that many PLCs have stopped functioning. In view of the above exposition, it is then become evident that a thorough reflection is needed regarding the practice of the CPTD system in South Africa. This would help to identify and deal with fallacies that underlie the system.

4. THE PRACTICE OF CPTD SYSTEM IN SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, the SACE Act of 2000 as amended by the Basic Education Laws Amendment Act of 2011 provides the mandate to SACE to manage the system for promoting the CPTD of all teachers (Catholic Institute of Education, 2015). According to SACE (2013:5), CPTD system is to assist teachers to organise and focus their PD in order to achieve maximum benefit and recognition, and to ensure that external providers provide high quality services to teachers.

Another key point is that participation of all teachers in PD is compulsory and is part of SACE's Code of Professional Ethics for teachers (SACE, 2013:7). Therefore, all teachers are expected to have personal Professional Development Portfolios (PDPs) that should be in line with SACE guidelines. The portfolio would serve as a personal record of a teacher's PD activities over three years. Consequently, a teacher would acquire points of PD activities as *per* a schedule of points approved by SACE (SACE, 2013:5). When teachers achieve points for their PD activities, those points should be captured into a personal account opened with SACE for every registered teacher to participate in the CPTD system – and this account is called Personal Professional Development Points Account (PPDPA). Regarding this, it is envisaged that every teacher should achieve at least 150 PD points in every three year cycle. Then the certificates would be awarded to those teachers who achieve the required points in this manner:

- 150 points qualify for bronze certificate of achievement;
- 151-300 points qualify for silver certificate of achievement; and
- 300+points qualify for gold certificate (SACE, 2013:5).

As mentioned above, this is a process of every three year cycle, this means that PD points are not carried beyond the next three year period. Every three year cycle should start with no points in PPDPA (SACE, 2013:5). The next sub-sections outline how the processes should unfold.

4.1 Orientation and sign-up for participation in the CPTD management system

It is expected that all teachers must sign-up to participate in the CPTD system a year before the beginning of their three year cycle. Considering the signings that have been made to this far, as of March 2016, 32 217 (92.1%) of the orientation and sign-up of principals and deputy principals (first cohort) were done, where 32 266 (92.81%) of them had commenced their third year of the first three year CPTD cycle from the first of January 2016. A total of 34 041 (74.91%) of the second cohort constituted by the HODs, who went through the processes as well (Mokgalane, 2016:8). Furthermore, a total of 65 290 (34.83%) of post level one teachers in secondary and combined schools (third cohort – A), started their first year CPTD cycle in January 2016. While, the last cohort, that is, third cohort – B, constituted of post level one teachers in primary and special education needs schools, their first year of the three year cycle started in January 2017 (Mokgalane, 2016:8-9).

4.2 The modalities for teachers to accumulate points

As shown earlier, teachers are expected to earn at least 150 points in a three year cycle. Thus, in order for teachers to acquire these points, they are required to engage in three PD activities set out as shown below.

4.2.1 Educator-initiated (type one) professional development activities

These are activities initiated by a teacher. In other words, such activities should be chosen by a teacher based on their PD needs. To put it differently, teachers are expected to take responsibility of their own PD (SACE, 2013:9; Mokgalane, 2016:9).

4.2.2 School-initiated (Type two) professional development activities

These are PD activities initiated by a school. Meaning, they are school-driven activities in order to address issues that are common among teachers or school management teams (SMTs). Such activities could include attending a school meeting and a workshop or course based on the identified common needs of all teachers in a school – and importantly,

the execution of these activities should be part of the normal professional work of all teachers (SACE, 2013:10; Mokgalane, 2016:9). Equally important, these activities should be executed in order to respond to the identified needs of a school environment. For instance, they should be used to respond to a School Improvement Plan/Whole School Development Plan, an Annual National Assessment/National Senior Certificate School Diagnostic Reports, School's Academic Performance Improvement Plan, and projects that form part of development initiated by a school (Mokgalane, 2016:9).

4.2.3 Externally-initiated (Type three) professional development activities

Type three PD activities are those that are offered by the DBE or the private providers. These type of activities comprise qualifications, short courses and skills programmes – and they should be evaluated for points accumulation. However, the prerequisite is that such courses and programmes should be endorsed by SACE before teachers could be subjected to them (SACE, 2013:5; Mokgalane, 2016:15).

5. PUBLIC SCHOOLS ENVIRONMENT

In view of the discussions in the previous section, one gets a sense that the challenges and dynamics of South African public schools would have to be given more attention. For instance, issues related to the public schools operational environment, such as teaching work-load of teachers, teacher-learner-ratio and financial support would need to be given a thorough thought if this system is to effectively meet its expectations, particularly in the townships and rural public schools. Maharajh, Nkosi and Mkhize (2016:375) retort that in South Africa new policies are introduced without due regard of the environment.

It is important to realise that the shortage of well-qualified teachers in the country has led to high teacher workload, especially in rural schools (Brynard & Netshikhophani, 2011:69; Maharajh, *et al.*, 2016:384). Therefore, the DBE and the school governing bodies (SGBs) of public schools would have to find ways of dealing with such dynamics. Their planning, should establish clear objectives and actions regarding the promotion of quality teaching and learning (Mancera & Schmelkes, 2010:12), as well as ensuring the success of PD of teachers. In relation to the above, Maharajh, *et al.* (2016:377) maintain that policies that ignore the environment upon which they are implemented are likely to be unsuccessful. Hence, Fotaki (2010:10) suggests that policy-makers should develop attainable policies that are based on realities and not ambitions.

6. SINGAPORE AND FINLAND TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

Singapore is one of the few countries in the world that provides the most coherent systems of teacher education and employment. In the first place, Singapore does not use the “sink or swim” system for new teachers. As new teachers enter their induction period, they become part of the PLCs that are there to support and help them learn to be successful teachers (Sclafani, 2008:2). In the second place, in Singapore, a new teacher's workload in the first year is reduced to 80 percent in order to give them time to plan, observe other teachers, talk with their assigned senior teacher mentor, and meet with other teachers outside the school. But the support does not end there. They are observed and coached by grade level chairs, subject area chairs, and heads of departments. In the event a teacher fails to perform well, more and more support and coaching is provided through PLCs. It becomes everybody's business to help a new teacher to adjust and improve. However, lack of improvement, poor attitude or lack of professionalism is not tolerated (Sclafani, 2008:2).

What is even interesting is that, all teachers in Singapore are given opportunities to attend more than 100 hours of additional training and courses annually (Sclafani, 2008:7). This implies that in a month, say for 10 months, teachers could spend 10 hours or more for training, and in a week, roughly 3 hours. As evidence, the research conducted by Ms Darling-Hammond, who was one of the President Barack Obama's top education advisers during his campaign for the White House, found that teacher training programmes of a certain duration; for example, 30 to 100 hours of time over six months to a year; positively influenced student achievement, while those with fewer than 14 hours had little impact (Sawchuk, 2009:1 & 2).

Indeed, this compelling evidence is very critical when looking at the hours spent every year for training of teachers, either for new policy implementation or subject capacity building, in South Africa. Another interesting key point of Singapore's success on PD of teachers is that, all teachers get S\$400-700 (equivalent to R3 712-6 496 in South Africa currently) yearly to spend as they choose, selecting from a wide range of developmental opportunities such as, taking foreign language or computer training, buy software, join a professional organisation, subscribe to journals, or enhance their cultural awareness (Sclafani, 2008:8).

Again, Singapore has the practise of allowing teachers to take PD leaves that are partially funded by government to work in an international school or work in a business enterprise to develop a better understanding of the applications of their teaching to the real world (Sclafani, 2008:8). In as far as Finland is concerned, Sahlberg (2007:155) reveals that most compulsory traditional in-service trainings of teachers have been annulled. In their place school- or municipality-based longer term PD programmes and opportunities have been introduced. Furthermore, Sahlberg (2007:153) indicates that in Finland, it's a must that all teachers should have Master's degree to be employed permanently. This author, citing Westbury *et al.* (2005), points out that the central idea of teacher education developments in Finland has been to prepare teachers for a research-based profession. Therefore, most teachers in Finland possess higher university degrees, since Master's degree in education is the basic requirement to be permanently employed as a teacher in Finnish schools.

The fact that in Finland teachers must have Master's degree, has encouraged many teachers to seize the opportunity of continuing their academic studies; and moreover, that has led to an upsurge in school principals and teachers obtaining PhDs in education. Research shows that teachers who are professionally competent, more often than not, are quite motivated and easy to engage in school development and [community development] projects. In a similar way, they are also predisposed to work seriously at developing their own personal knowledge and skills (Sahlberg, 2007:154).

7. EDUCATION STATUS OF SOUTH AFRICAN TEACHERS

In South Africa, research shows that the quality of most initial teacher education (ITE) programmes leaves much to be desired – result is that most of the current corps of teaching force has been inadequately educated and trained, whether during the period of apartheid or in the recent past (CDE, 2015b:1; Maharajh, *et al.*, 2016:371). For instance, CDE (2015b:6) indicates that the report on Teacher supply and demand 2013-2025 draws out some noteworthy and surprising findings related to the current teaching corps. On one hand, the said report reveals that 81 percent of the teaching force in South Africa is qualified; where 66 percent possessed M+3 qualification (matric plus three years of ITE) and 15 percent had M+4 (matric plus four years of ITE). On the other hand, the remaining 19 percent is unqualified; and is constituted by some 10 percent of teachers who had equivalent qualification to an M+3 but without professional teaching qualification, as well as another 10 percent of those who had an M+2 or lower qualifications (CDE, 2015b:6).

8. RESEARCH METHOD

Although, the enquiry was more qualitatively predisposed, it adopted mixed-methods, which is commonly known as triangulation. In other words, research approaches that were considered to be relevant for this study were qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative approach was accommodated to allow the use of percentages when analysing the results. The inclination to qualitative approach in this study was due to its interpretive nature, as the views of participants and respondents were solicited to determine how they interpret and understand the CPTD system in South Africa. For this purpose, a multiple or collective case study approach was employed to collect data.

Data was collected from three schools in one of the townships in the Free State. One secondary school and two primary schools were selected using convenient sampling method, as these schools were at the same proximity. The selection of one secondary and two primary schools was done mainly to check the consistency of the participants' and respondents' views and opinions on the practice of CPTD system. From the population of hundred and sixteen (116) teachers, including school management teams (SMTs); three (3) principals, three (3) deputy principals, twelve (12) HODs), and seventeen (17) teachers were selected as the sample of this study. The principals and deputy principals were interviewed, while the HODs and teachers were given questionnaires to fill.

9. DATA ANALYSIS

To analyse the views and opinions of participants and respondents in this study, content analysis was considered suitable, since it is quantitative as well as qualitative (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:142). Furthermore, content analysis could be used to determine how people interpret and understand a new situation. Therefore, the data was categorised according to the emerged themes from the study, which allowed norms of quantitative research such as percentages in this dominantly qualitative enquiry to be used for yes/no questions.

10. RESEARCH FINDINGS

10.1 Signing up and understanding of continuing professional teacher development system

Majority of respondents (teachers and heads of departments) have signed up with SACE to participate in the CPTD system. Although, another sizeable number of respondents showed that they are not yet signed-up. One participant expressed the concern that the progress of signing-up is slow as they are still waiting for an indication as to when they

will sign-up to participate in the system. One deputy principal further indicated that even the access to internet for signing-up is a challenge for teachers. Responding to the question that sought to establish whether teachers understand why they should participate in the CPTD system, those who signed-up indicated that they understand the reason for participating in the system. While others indicated that they are not fully understanding. One respondent indicated that *even if explanation was given before, CPTD is another burden to teachers*.

The foregoing sentiment was stressed by 18% of HOD respondents. One HOD indicated that *the system adds salt to a wound as teachers are once more overloaded with another extra-activity to do. And that it is time consuming*. Principals and deputy principals were also asked in what way teachers respond to CPTD system. One deputy principal indicated that, although teachers are positive about their development, particularly through PLCs at school level, but the practice of the system is cumbersome and teachers are complaining about compiling PDPs. This deputy principal went further to indicate that it is a challenge to assist teachers to compile the PDPs because even they themselves as SMT are struggling to capture some activities in their PDPs. Another deputy principal indicate that he does not understand how the system relates to subject contents or academic matters.

10.2 Schools capacity to develop teachers professionally

A question was posed as to whether the schools have capacity to develop teachers professionally, the study reveals that majority of the teacher respondents (78%) indicated that, yes the schools have the capacity as teachers assist one another through PLCs and at times workshops are conducted at schools if other teachers and school management teams (SMTs) have attended departmental workshops. This view was evident in the responses of the HODs, where majority of the respondents (82%) agreed that the schools have capacity to develop teachers professionally. One HOD went further to indicate that the SMT always takes the interests of the staff to heart. When time permits, they also get other people from outside the school to come and talk to teachers. However, 18% of HODs respondents indicated otherwise. To this, one HOD elaborated further to say *basic tools such as planning, meetings and programmes are not effectively adhered to. Execution is a problem, let alone teacher development activities*.

10.3 Advocacy of CPTD system

With regard to the advocacy or training of teachers on the system, majority of teacher respondents (93%) indicated that they received training. While 7% of the respondents indicated that they did not. One principal indicated that most teachers in the school were not yet trained, they (SMT) only informed them about the system. However, 43% of those who were trained insisted that teachers still need more training as they have little information about the system. This call was also reiterated by 18% of HOD respondents, who indicated that *not enough advocacy was done and little or no commitment is shown to make the system work*. It was also apparent that some principals and deputy principals have inadequate knowledge, or information with regard to the system. One principal and deputy principal in different schools did not distinguish between self-initiated and school-initiated PD activities. For example, the question was asked related to self-initiated PD activities of principals and deputy principals; these individuals indicated that their schools sometimes ask people from outside to come and empower teachers. This response indicated a lack of understanding of how those two PD activities vary.

The inadequate knowledge or information by the principals and deputies could be regarded as a concern. One deputy principal pointed out that it is difficult for them to be on top of the situation, because the last time they were trained it was in 2014, and they never received any support since then, hence they are struggling to assist teachers. This deputy principal made an example that they are not even aware of those externally-driven PD activities that are recognised by SACE. Furthermore, because of a number of ramifications, another principal indicated that they were given extension to complete their first year cycle of the system by the end of 2017, while they were supposed to have completed it in 2016.

Another principal and two deputy principals indicated that they were struggling with some of the PD activities such as research and community engagement activities. They argued that most teachers would find these PD activities, particularly research and community engagement, challenging because they do not have skills for research; and they do not have time for community engagement activities as other teachers are overloaded. The above-mentioned argument was also confirmed by another principal and deputy principal that they have inadequate knowledge about some of the required PD activities. Interestingly enough, one principal indicated that he had not even started with PD activities, and as a result, he has not even accumulated points.

11. DISCUSSION

It should be indicated from the onset that the findings of this study are not generalizable since only three schools were used to conduct this study. It is also important to indicate that this study reveals pertinent findings which are not only peculiar to an area in which an investigation was conducted; but the findings are also appearing to be similar to some findings of a research conducted on PD systems in other countries, such as England. For instance, the Institute of Education Manchester Metropolitan University's (2003) Research Report RR 429, reveals some commonalities with the perceptions of respondents and participants of this study regarding the practice of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in England. Hence, it could be argued that the findings of this study could provide a valuable insight that could be of value for policy- and decision-makers in enhancing the practice of the CPTD system in South Africa. To start with, firstly, the findings indicate that majority of teachers and SMTs have signed-up with SACE to participate in the CPTD system. Though, some teachers are still struggling to sign-up and others are still waiting for their turn. According to SACE Annual Report 2015/2016 (2017:38), a number of reasons are provided for not achieving the target number of teachers who are to be oriented and sign-up for participation in the CPTD system. The above-mentioned SACE Report provides reasons why provinces were behind. For instance, the reasons include the fact that some provinces have big teacher numbers; other provinces lacked funding for the PD, others were faced with the challenge of signing-up manually, and some were behind for unspecified reasons. This is concerning since PD of teachers should be a priority if government is to improve performance of learners and teachers.

Secondly, although the findings indicate that majority of respondents and participants have signed-up to participate in the CPTD system, some teachers and SMTs regard the system as unnecessary. The argument that CPTD system is another workload to teachers and they do not understand how it relates to academic matters shows frustration of teachers. Perhaps this could be attributed to continuous changes on curriculum that had been experienced since 1994 (Maharajh, *et al.*, 2016:371). Apparently, these changes have not been providing teachers a space to adjust; hence, the frustration. Sahlberg (2007:158) points out that the repercussion of education system that had undergone a series of reforms results flagrantly to frustration and resistance to change rather than the desire to improve.

Thirdly, the findings indicate that majority of respondents and participants agree that schools have capacity to develop teachers professionally, particularly through PLCs. However, research has shown earlier in this study that functionality of PLCs at district level is a challenge. Furthermore, majority indicated that sometimes workshops are conducted by teachers and SMTs at school level. This approach to workshops and other school-driven PD activities is concerning. The approach gives the impression that these schools do not have PD programmes, as they conduct workshops and invite people from outside the schools when time permits. The needs of teachers cannot be adequately addressed if schools do not have PD programmes that inform school-driven PD activities.

12. CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATIONS

PD of teachers has proven to be a very important factor for the improvement of performance of teachers in other countries. Therefore, the CPTD system in South Africa is one of the mechanisms that have been introduced to develop teachers in order for them to be effective and competent in their careers. To that effect, teachers need to be aware and understand the importance of the system and the reason why they need to support it. In order to realise the above, there is a need to effectively promote the system to teachers and ensure that everybody acquire its theoretical knowledge. As can be realised from the findings, a sizeable number of teachers feel that they still need more training. SACE should also ensure continuous monitoring, and that members of SMTs are well trained and equipped in order to be able to address factors, such as attitude of teachers towards the system as this could hamper its smooth implementation.

Districts should help schools to develop their PD programmes. The presumption that all public schools have capacity to drive PD activities needs to be investigated. It is also important that SACE should reconsider some PD activities from which teachers accumulate points. Although Professional Development Points Schedule (SACE, n.d: on-line) provides list of activities as examples for teachers, it should be stated that some of them, such as research require high level of skills and time. Therefore, SACE should take into cognisance the education level of some teachers and the conditions (shortage of resources) of the public schools in South Africa. Teachers in South Africa were/are not prepared for research-based profession like it is the case for academics at the universities. Therefore, maybe it is important that the DBE should adopt Finland's approach; where all teachers should have Master's degree in Education in order for them to have capacity to engage easily in developing their own personal knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, the plethora of PD activities could lead to teachers fail to focus on their PD needs, but only adopt a survivalist approach of getting 150+ points. Perhaps, without succumbing to pressure from the global trends of awarding

teachers PD points; in South Africa for a certain period of time, more focus should be on the effectiveness of PLCs at school and district levels, while concurrently support is given to teachers through bursaries to improve their qualifications. The DBE and SACE should deal with factors that seem to threaten positive intentions of PLCs. Finally, trainings at district level should be based on long-term programmes that address teachers' needs, particularly subject content knowledge and pedagogical skills.

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