Maria – Interview with Mrs van der Ryst

Tape 110907_002

Maria (M): Today on the 9th of September I’m going to do interview with Mrs, um…?

Van der Ryst (V): van der Ryst

M: van der Ryst. And I’m going to ask a couple of questions about 2 lessons that I was observing.
First question: How many years teaching experience do you have?

V: I have 21 years.

M: And how long have you been teaching grade 9?

V: 2 [chuckles]

M: 2

V: Big difference!

M: Ja. And what is your feeling about the first lesson?

V: The learners I feel were very very quiet because there was a camera and they were scared, so I feel maybe they didn’t respond as well as they normally do in the class. They didn’t participate as well as they normally participate. They were very quiet and very scared that they were going to make a mistake. And I said to them, “But you don’t need to be scared, we learn through our mistakes, so you’re allowed to make mistakes because we learn through the mistakes.” So ja, that was one of the things I noticed.

M: And what did the learners learn from the lesson? Did you achieve the goals for the lesson?

V: When I checked after the lesson in their books, um, most of them, I’d say half of them actually knew what congruency was and the difference between congruency and similarity, which I was quite pleased with because I hadn’t done it with them before. I had done triangles with them before, but I hadn’t done the congruency, so I was pleased that they came across that knowledge on their own, you know, through the lesson.

M: And how do you know that? You said when you see the book, the work in the book…

V: They had to stick, your worksheet they stuck it into the book. They had to make 2 columns, one was for congruent triangle… shapes and the other was for similar and they had to paste the similar ones together in one column and the congruent in the other column. The majority got it right. A few put it the other way around, they put all the congruency under similarity and all the similarity under congruency, but there were about 3 or 4 that did that.
M: So I actually prepared an activity for this lesson, but if, if I didn’t prepare this activity, what is your point, how are you going to do this lesson? You are going to use investigation or…

V: Um,

M: traditional way of teaching?

V: I would actually have given them like the 4 different states for congruency, I would have given them the first one and I’d have given them examples of that and then we do each one and show them how to prove each one, because they are slower learners. To do it all at once… We didn’t do it all at once. Um, how can I explain it? We did it… You gave them the drawing and I find drawing the triangles to prove the congruency because they didn’t have the knowledge of drawing triangles, it caused more confusion, OK, because then they were worried about ‘But I can’t do this because I don’t know where this must go or where that angle must go’ because they hadn’t had enough practise with drawing of triangles. So in my way of teaching I wouldn’t have drawn the triangles, I would have done it through tracing and we would have done just one step at a time, like one case of the congruency for side side side, I would have just concentrated on tracing triangles with the same sides instead of drawing it because of the difficulty of drawing.

M: So the previous knowledge can be one of the problems in the learning process?

V: It definitely is a problem.

M: And what about the time management? Because when I look at the first lesson how you did our activity there was enough time, so you manage well the lesson, so the students complete our activity.

V: What we didn’t… What they didn’t do in the class or didn’t finish at the class I gave them to do as homework. So they had enough to do during the class to understand what was going on, and I just asked them to finish it for homework.

M: What I see that in the class was only 15 learners in second lesson.

V: Mmm

M: Why? Usually the class is…

V: We have a setup at the school where the school’s divided into two – top school and it’s called Skip. Top school’s your normal stream of children and Skip is called the small class inclusive programme. We have many children with ADD, ADHD and other… dyslexia, um other learning disabilities in the class and therefore they’re not allowed to have more than 15 learners in the class.

M: So this will affect your teaching if you have for example Michael’s class you are going to teach different way or you’re going to prepare a special activity?

V: I don’t think I teach the same as Michael’s way. He can also… his time management, he can go through it a lot faster. My children need a lot of time to understand, so I have to
work at a slower pace and I try to do a lot of the work in picture form. I try to paint them pictures or paint them stories so that they can remember it.

M: During the first and the second lesson I said your mediation was very smoothly successful(?) How or what actually effect/affect (?) this way of teaching? How does ? explain… which training actually?

V: I’ve got foundation phase training. [laughs]

M: But this is, ja…?

V: I had foundation phase training, OK, and I’ve learnt that small children learn through pictures and I’ve noticed through my years of teaching that if you… if a child doesn’t understand and you draw it – not physically draw it as a picture, but paint a picture for them, they seem to understand it better.

M: So visual mediation is…

V: Always. I always try to bring it back to the visual. I always try to paint a little picture for them whatever I explain. I don’t just do it in words, I try and do it on the board in a picture form or using the words, you know, little key words, put them out in key words. And when they see it they actually can understand it.

M: And remember it.

V: And remember it. Ja, after they’ve seen it on the board I give them time to write it down.

M: I find your media… your communication with the learners are very good. What is your suggestion for productive communication?

V: [laughs]

M: Maybe good experience all depends on the nature of the teacher?

V: I think it has a lot to do with your personality as well. And experience is… I’ve learnt through the years that kids don’t just understand and you need to ask them when they don’t understand and we need to take time to listen to what they’re saying to you. And as teachers we don’t always have the time to sit and listen, you know, and sometimes we, we assume that they understand what we want them to do, but they don’t. So you need to take time to make sure that they really do understand what you want them to do. We’ve been proving congruency… now that you’ve gone I’ve given them a whole lot of triangles that they have to do the proofs of the triangles and they still haven’t got that they’ve got to start with: In triangle so-and-so and triangle so-and-so. And I’ve been very specific that they label the triangles the same. So AB is the length in the one triangle, then in the other triangle the same lettering must occur. I said because if you look at the two triangles then you can see which should be matching together. I just can’t get them to grasp this. They keep telling me, ‘But Ma’am, it doesn’t make a difference.’ I say to them, ‘But it does. In the long run it makes it easier for you to write down that this and this is the same by just looking at the lettering of your triangles.’ I just can’t get them to understand that.

V: Like when I said…

M: And corresponding angles

V: You see, if I say to them… When they start with their proof I’ve got A, B, C here and I’ve got D, E, F there and I said that angle and that angle and that angle and that and that and that side. Then I say when you write it you must say: In triangle A because A, B, C. And I say, “Your second triangle must be written in the same order. So if angle D is equal to angle A, then you start D is… then you find B. Which one is equal to B? It’s E. Which one is equal to that one? It’s F. And then I said then you just need to look A, B, D, E then you check A, B, D, E. Yes they are the same. You can find the answer from how you’ve written your triangles.

M: But for them it’s still new and they can’t…

V: It’s still new and they can’t see…

M: grasp the…

V: No

M: this is because it’s meta(?) level learning in the, for them it’s not obvious to them.

V: No, it’s not obvious to them. They can’t see that it doesn’t make a difference. They say to me, ‘But it’s still F, D, E is the same as A, B, C.’ I say, ‘OK, let’s just leave it.’ And now all I do is I’ll say to them, ‘Alright as long as you proof the 3, um, reasons are correct I’ll leave it’. But every time I go around and I check then I say, ‘Why did you write that number first… uh, that letter first and not this letter first?’ ‘Oh, I see what I’ve done Ma’am.’ And they will quickly cross it out and start again. So I’m getting there, but not all the children have grasped that.

M: So they need time to understand the…

V: But we don’t have time.

M: I see that when you start the second lesson you summarise through learners, actually you elicit the information from the learner.

V: Mmm

M: It’s usually in your lessons

V: Mmm. I always… I always start off with what they’ve learnt the day before, I consolidate what I’ve taught them the day before and then I carry on with the knowledge the next day. We try to do it that way. It doesn’t always work, but we always try to follow that format.

M: It’s a… it’s a usual practice for you?
V: It’s the usual practise, yes.

M: In the lessons you’re acting as facilitator and I see that you pay particular attention to different learners. Is it possible in big classes to do that?

V: No. No, you don’t have enough time to do that in a big class. Here you’ve actually got enough time to go and see that each one has grasped what you’ve done. There aren’t so many in the class that you can’t get around to everybody during the teaching time. In the big class… I did teach in big classes, I didn’t get around to everyone.

M: So it’s practically impossible?

V: Practically it is, yes.

M: Practically it’s impossible.

V: Mmm

M: How does the teacher feel in the new condition of learning, collaborative learning? Actually you’re teaching in a way the learner, you ask the question and the learners answer the question, it’s like discussion all the time?

V: Mmm

M: And you find that in this environment you feel… I, I when I see you it was like a natural environment for you…

V: Mmm

M: the way your teaching actually wasn’t like old traditional method – teacher standing and give the facts and for you it’s completely different.

V: Mmm

M: So you all the time ask the question and you elicit from the learner or confirm the information or maybe provide a right? …

V: If there’s… Yes, if there’s a problem then we provide the right answer, but I try and get it from them.

M: So in most of your teaching practice you use this eliciting, clarifying, insert, confirm and very seldom you actually give the facts straight, straightaway?

V: We always do it in…

M: You always…?

V: We always try to, yes. We try to but it doesn’t always work. Sometimes you just have to give them the information because you’re not getting… Some lessons are very good
and they work out and the kids give me what I want, but it doesn’t always work. Sometimes you have to give them the information because it’s a failed lesson. [chuckles] Then we start again.

M: Can this lesson become more interesting if we’re using technology?

V: [sighs] I did rotational symmetry and line symmetry this week and I had a lot of activities, as you can see on the board there, where I couldn’t get the children to understand how rotational symmetry worked. And I went onto the internet and if you had a projector in your class and immediately at your disposal, then it would be wonderful because I could show them all the different kinds of rotational… you know, the order of rotational symmetry. Otherwise I still use the practical. I trace my picture onto transparencies and then I make two and then I do it through the transparencies on the overhead. And that also works, it’s just the teacher has to put in extra effort.

M: Effort, ja.

V: Yes, whereas on the internet you just put on your computer and say, ‘Look here, this is how it works.’ I can google it and I can show them a demonstration if you had a projector and a smart board it would be wonderful. We still do it the old way, though. [laughs]

M: Ja, because the technology…

V: I don’t have the technology to use, ja.

M: And not the old(?) school actually offered this…

V: No

M: this type of… they’re expensive actually.

V: Yes, the smart boards are, they’re very expensive.

- Tape 110907_003

M: In NCS propose a significant shift in the way that teachers carry out their work. The Department of Education call for teachers to think and prepare interesting and appropriate learning activities. Do the teachers have enough learning materials?

V: I think it all depends on which schools or where you are teaching as well. There are some schools I know the the Department has got lots of LTSM materials available, but not all schools have access to them. Um, I know where I’m teaching now it’s a private school and I feel that I don’t have enough resources. You know, yes I make use of the internet, but you can’t always use what you find on the internet, it’s not always appropriate to the class. You can’t always find, um, activities related to South Africa. A lot of them are from the United States and the grading is different, so you don’t know if it’s at the level of your learner either. So I’d love lots more learning materials [laughs] but that’s just me. And worksheets… I find I like practical worksheets. I like them. Like we did that with the grade 8s. We drew
pictures using co-ordinates, OK, to teach the co-ordinates. They made a big mess of the first activity and then I found that on the internet and they loved it.

M: And it worked beautifully.

V: They still…

M: Ja [chuckles]

V: But they battled. They still battled with the co-ordinates. So I said, ‘Alright co-ordinates is very important because you can’t draw graphs if you don’t know how to work with co-ordinates.’ So I said, ‘Instead of just rushing through the co-ordinates let me find one more activity.’ But I battled to find more activities that are related. And not all the same. I mean yes it’s all nice drawing a picture, but it needs to be a little bit more advanced and I just can’t find enough activities that I can consolidate whatever you’re teaching with.

M: And do you share in Maths department different activities or…?

V: Here at this school?

M: Mmm

V: No, here we work very individually. There’s very little sharing that goes on here. [chuckles]

M: No collaborating among… [laughs]

V: No

M: between teachers

V: No. No. The grade 8s I tried to share with my colleague down at Skip, but they all seem to have their own way of teaching and doing, their own way of… have their own way of doing things.

M: And I… I just like to ask, um, is the workshop or do the teachers need workshops and for more information how to actually implement the new curriculum? Because we’re talking about the… we’re not… the teacher doesn’t have enough material to teach and at the same time they’re also not very clear how to…

V: use the worksheets

M: use the worksheets, ja, and how to teach because there is a different way of implementing different activities…

V: Mmm

M: group work and, ja, work in pairs and…
V: I do... I’ve been doing a short course this year for Maths and this year I’ve been doing data handling and probability. And what I’ve learned from them and the activities I’ve got from them I’d much rather use what I’ve got from Radmaster(?) than out of a textbook because it’s been so much more practical and we’ve done the practical so I know how to teach it to the children. So I enjoy going, but many teachers don’t like going on workshops. And you’ll find those that need to go, they don’t go. And that was in my experience – and that’s my personal opinion. [laughs]

M: But this is going to actually improve good facilitation.

V: It does, yes

M: Ja

V: It most definitely does. I mean what I’ve learnt this year, it’s been phenomenal. It’s really been very good.

M: And if I like to move to discipline problem because I can’t see any disciplinary problem in your class. The class is so quiet, they’re working. So why you don’t have disciplinary problem and why?

V: They were scared of your video camera!

[both laugh]

M: Maybe it’s one of the reasons, but even in the second lesson I see you are not struggling with discipline. What is your opinion?

V: I think it’s got to do with all the years’ experience that I have. And I haven’t just taught high school, I’ve taught primary school. So I think I’ve got a good understanding of where the child comes from and hopefully where he’s heading. I really think it’s experience throughout the years. And it was maybe a good day. There are days that the discipline isn’t fantastic, you know, the children aren’t well behaved because they’re not having a good day – especially with your ADD children and your ADHD children, you know, that they’re up and down every day. I have children that forget to take their Ritalin and believe you me then it’s…

M: Difficult time

V: a very difficult time to get them to focus on what they had to do. But…

M: I think you understand the children and you quickly react when they don’t understand. That is one of the reasons as well, you’re very close to their thinking.

V: We try to be. [laughs] It doesn’t always work. It doesn’t always work, but once again it comes down to my experience from primary school to high school.

M: So the training affects the way the teachers teach as well?
V: I do think… I do think it’s your training and through the years I’ve learnt that we assume children to know, which is wrong. You can’t assume that they know. They don’t. You’ve got to make sure that they do understand what you are asking of them and what you’re trying to get from them or what you want them to understand. I mean that’s one thing I’ve learnt through the years, you… you can’t… Today I did co… With the grade 9s I introduced the quadrants today and I said to them, ‘You know what this is.’ And they looked at me. I said, ‘What is the line going down?’ And they just looked at me. And I said, ‘Have you never done this before?’ They were never taught this before. I said, ‘It can’t be!’ because I’ve just taught my grade 8s this. ‘We’ve never been taught this.’ So I said, ‘Alright, the line going down is the vertical line, OK. And the line going across is your horizontal line.’ And then I taught them the X axis, but I went right back to grade 8 work. And then instead of just giving them the knowledge that they were supposed to have already known, I tried to build the knowledge for now which they should have already had and that lesson shouldn’t have taken me a whole 45 minutes, it should have taken me 5 minutes of just reviewing. It didn’t. It took me a whole lesson to do.

M: So first you always ask and check the learners what is their object level learning?

V: Mmm

M: You say, ‘What is the…?’ They know.

V: And they told me, ‘I don’t know what this is.’ So then the whole lesson was wrong, so I had to start, ‘Alright, that’s OK, let’s now just start from what they do know.’ They know nothing, so we’ll start building it from there.

M: That’s why they always understand because if you, you can’t plan because you don’t know.

[both chuckle]

V: We plan but it doesn’t always work because they tell you they don’t have the knowledge. I had the same with my grade 10s…

M: So not because you… was this particular small class?

V: Mmm mmm

M: So the learners doesn’t have previous knowledge not because they…

V: It’s happened with my grade 8s class that I teach and it’s happened with the grade 10s

M: That it’s not the small class, that it’s the normal…?

V: Mmm

Tape 110907_004
M: So what actually helped you to do this good, excellent mediation? It’s also the behaviour of the learner because the learners are quite open now to answer the questions and…?

V: I think if you’ve built a relationship with your learners and they understand that you’re here to help them, you’re not going to criticise them when they make a mistake in your class, then learning takes place easily. They don’t mind making a mistake and they know they can come up to you and say, ‘Ma’am, just check if I’ve done this right.’ And they know that you’re not going to throw your toys out the cot and say, ‘I haven’t taught you to do it that way, I want you to do it…’ So I think you’ve got to first build a relationship with your learners so that they know that it is an open environment and it’s an environment where you are allowed to make mistakes because we learn through those mistakes. And your mistakes help the others learn as well. And I make mistakes and I allow them to show me I’ve made mistakes. Today I labelled a triangle S instead of R and the one child said, ‘Ma’am, you know that it’s not S it’s supposed to be R.’ So I said, ‘You’re quite right, thank you, I made a mistake.’ They must know that it’s OK to make mistakes.

M: And I also saw in one lesson that you say, ‘I didn’t see that these 2 triangles are different because one it’s all angles are acute and another one all… one of the angles was obtuse.

V: obtuse

M: So you’re quite… Ja, also open to them to… You’re not a…

V: I think you need to, you need to build that. You need to show them that you don’t know everything, that I also learn from them. And they need to know that they also bring something to the table. They also enlighten me.

M: Contribute to the lesson and…

V: Yes, they contribute. And they also enlighten me and they also broaden my knowledge. They need… But it’s all got to do with the relationship that you build up.

M: Mmm. So what is it… What will be the difference in the lesson, or you’re going to prepare different activities if you have learners with 40… if you have a class with 40 students?

V: I think I’d be… I wouldn’t be a facilitator, I’d be sitting up there and dictating this is what you know, and this is how you do it. It’s just the smaller class that makes it more interesting to teach that way and it’s manageable. A bigger class it’s not manageable to teach that way because you cannot watch what Johnny’s doing in that corner while you’re helping Sue in the other corner, you know it’s… I’ve tried but it doesn’t work in a big class.

M: So investigating activities is more possible in small…

V: It’s more…

M: Small class?
V: Most definitely. Most definitely. It’s much easier to control in a smaller class than a bigger class. I don’t… Michael’s class is double my size.

M: Ja

V: I mean he has 23 in his class and I’m sure he finds it a lot more difficult to control than what I do with just my 15. You see my 15 I had sitting here and I had them right under my wing. Because they’re so small you have them right there and I can see what Johnny is doing when my back is turned because there’s only a few of them and when one moves you can notice it. In a big class you don’t see all the movement.

M: You can’t manage 40 and what are they doing at the same time?

V: No, you can’t. You can’t. And you can’t be with everyone.

M: That’s why teacher-central practice is more suitable…

V: More suitable

M: for big class and this investigation activity and discussion…

V: I’ve tried it in that group of 40. It didn’t work. I didn’t have the response like this. I don’t know if it was because they weren’t as… And it’s not that these children are more disciplined. And it’s not as if my discipline is different with these children than in a big class. I have the same rules, I have the same approach. It didn’t work because there were learners in that class they knew Ma’am’s busy helping group number 1, I can get on with something else here in the corner. It didn’t work. And the knowledge wasn’t given to all. Or not everybody took in the knowledge. [whispers] I don’t like?

M: ?

[both laugh]

V: Definitely not. But then I’ve been in private schools where I’ve had, been privileged enough to have small classes, you know.

M: And you, actually your teaching practise it’s also continued this way, that investigating and discussion – the same way?

V: Mmm. Ja, but in a big class you can’t teach that way.

M: In government schools when the classes are big?

V: No, you can’t teach that way. You could, but it’s not as effective.

M: So the learning process it’s not… Ja, maybe it’s not happening?

V: With many of the children it doesn’t happen in the big class, the learning process doesn’t take place. They are not participating in your lesson, you only have the few that you
can have control over at that specific time are actually participating in the lesson and taking in. The others aren’t.

M: So what is your suggestion in a big class? How are you going to teach?

V: The old way. Old school. [laughs]

M: Traditional method of teaching.

V: The traditional way. Teacher stands, teacher says, learner does – which is not always the best way of learning.

M: But practical…

V: Practically everybody is doing what you’re expecting them to do. And you can see everybody’s doing what they should be doing.

M: Is it clear for South African teachers how the new reform in the classroom should be implemented … because we have been taught different ways, now it’s a new way of teaching…

V: Mmm

M: But how to do it. Are all teachers knowing how to do it?

V: No, I don’t think all teachers know how to do it. I think your new teachers may know the new way of teaching, but a lot of the older teachers…

M: So they continue to teach the way they know how…

V: The traditional way

M: to teach.

V: They continue to teach the way they know how. I sometimes feel I still teach the way that I was taught 20 years, 25 years ago, how to teach.

M: Maybe in some lessons also?

V: But then with the foundation phase it falls more into this picture because foundation phase teaching you were taught to teach that way, you see, so maybe that is my saving grace. I don’t know.

M: I think it’s definitely…

V: [laughs] My pictures.

M: Ja. Not only pictures. The way you teach the learner it’s typical collaborative learning because the learner’s participating…
V: participates

M: all the time in class and you elicit most of the information from them …

V: Mmm

M: that I’m observing in both lessons doesn’t matter, I think both of them were investigating activities, but even if you start to explain meta(?) level learning you continue to ask the question to the learner.

V: Mmm

M: So the training will…

V: It is, it’s part of what I’ve been trained to do because that’s how the little children learn.

M: Ja. In fact you actually(?) practical work. And I prepare one table that they say insert, elicit, clarify, time management, confirm, give facts, describe a new concept, summarise… And most of these are teaching action during the lesson.

V: Mmm

M: Practically, which of these actions do you use most or in different lessons you use something? Depends on the type of lesson?

V: It all depends on what you’re teaching and what you’re trying to… what your goal is at the end of that lesson. I’m now going back to my co-ordinate… Today I had to go back and revise with them because in the activity that they did they had negative numbers and they didn’t understand where the negative numbers were on the Cartesian plane. So I said to them, ‘But you saw where the Xs are and you saw where the Ys are and we drew the cross and we had our origin, so what do you think those numbers on your left hand side were?’ ‘Oh, they’re the negative numbers.’ I said, ‘Oh, really?’ I said, ‘Now do you know how to go back and fix your mistakes?’ So they had drawn… Instead of drawing they forgot that it’s a Cartesian and they only drew the first quarter. And they tried… they put all the negative numbers in the first quarter. So I said to them, ‘Where did you see the negative numbers there?’ ‘Oh, I just thought they were there.’ So I said, ‘No they’re not. What was on this side of your line when we extended the number line to the other side? What did we discuss was on that side?’ ‘Oh, the negative numbers.’ So I said, ‘So now where must that dot disappear to?’ ‘Oh, I must find x minus 2 and x minus 2 it’s that one over there and I’ll put my little dot there.’

M: So they’re struggling when working with negative numbers?

V: Oh, they don’t like negative numbers.

M: Why do you think so?

V: The minus sign!
M: The minus they don’t like?

V: [laughs] They don’t like that little minus sign in front of the number, they just pretend it doesn’t exist. They just pretend it’s not there. But it’s with algebra as well. There are children that pretend with trinomials and binomials, you know, when you’re multiplying out, they just pretend the numbers aren’t there.

M: And they don’t like to work with minus…

V: No

M: sign…

V: No

M: with the sign because maybe in a real life situation we’re most of the time working with positive numbers…

V: numbers. Ja, they don’t work with…

M: And they’re used to…

V: the positive numbers, ja.

M: used to work…

V: We don’t give them negative numbers. And I mean our temperatures if you look at the temperature gauge as well, in South Africa you don’t really have minus numbers, do you?

M: [laughs]

V: So did you feel minus 5 degrees today grade 10s?

M: [laughs]

V: ‘Hello Ma’am, what is minus 5 degrees?’ you see. So in our reality, in our context we don’t have it to share, so they don’t have that knowledge. And it’s hard. It’s… I just couldn’t understand that they didn’t know where that minus… And my girls, my children are in grade 7, so I know what they should have learnt or what they are learning and when I’m now teaching grades 8s, 9s and 10s and they haven’t got this information, I just keep asking, ‘But where has it gone?’

M: Maybe they never get it. They never understand.

V: But how, Maria? How could they not have got the negative somewhere along the line from primary school to here because we do do negative numbers in primary school. We do discuss it with them.

M: But in later classes, and obviously they don’t… Ja…
V: They just don’t have…

M: They don’t have enough time to understand, so it’s take time for them. We start with positive numbers and they have 7 years time to understand how to deal with positive.

V: How to do them. And then all of a sudden…

M: Then last, maybe grade 6 and 7,…

V: 7

M: they start with negative numbers and for them it’s still new, it’s still meta(?) level learning.

V: Mmm

M: And it does affect each chapter that you…

V: It does

M: teach with negative numbers.

V: It does. It’s horrible [both laugh] because I don’t know how to change it. Now you don’t know how to change it.

M: Ja you just have to repeat maybe until you get used to it.

V: But you see the thing is I think children are also very used to… We seem to teach in little compartments, OK, like today I’m teaching graphs, next week I’m doing statistics

M: Following the curriculum?

V: Yes, following the curriculum. And I feel that it’s been put in little boxes, OK, so I’ve finished with negative numbers so I don’t touch it again until next year in grade 10. It’s too long a time period for them not to see negative numbers, you understand what I’m…?

M: Ja

V: So we teach it in a week or 2 weeks, I think the Department gives you a week to teach negative numbers in grade 8. It’s not enough time and then you don’t see the negative numbers again because you haven’t got time to go back and consolidate. You haven’t got time to just quickly say, ‘Right, grade 8s, today let’s forget about what we’ve been doing now, let’s… let’s recap what we did last term. Can you still remember negative numbers? What did we do?’ You need to make them think about it all the time. But I feel we’re putting them in little boxes, they lock it, they put it away and they leave it there till next year. And then when they take it out the box is empty. [laughs]

M: So we’re struggling with curriculum because it’s so many topics to cover and time consumption(?) so the learners don’t have enough…
V: enough time
M: time to grasp all these concepts in one grade.
V: Give them a little bit and build on each one each year, you know, or... I don’t know.
M: Not so many topics in...
V: Not so many topics. They can’t...
M: They can’t do...
V: The children can’t handle it. They can’t handle everything that they need to know. I mean algebra is another big headache for teachers. The children just don’t get it. They just don’t get it.
M: So not only geometry...
V: Mmm
M: But they have to construct the triangle in grade 9
V: No...

[both laugh]
M: So most of the sections in Maths they’re still struggling. They don’t… Ja.

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V: … this to them. And I just find transformational geometry and I did that with them and they love it and they’re doing their homework for the first time. [laughs] They’re actually doing the work, you know, because they feel they’re able to do it. And I said if I can just build their confidence then I can go to the more difficult stuff and then hopefully they’ll understand the more difficult stuff because you’ve built their confidence. Children also they need to know Maths is practise, practise, practise.

M: It’s prac… It’s a lot of work, ja.

V: No, they always complain, ‘You always give us homework Ma’am, why?’ I said because with Maths you’ve got to practise. If you don’t practise…

M: I also saw… I also saw in Michael’s lessons when he says, ‘This is for homework’ oh they immediately react, they wasn’t happy. So…

V: You see my children know it’s homework every day – weekend homework, tests every week. Every week they get a test. If it’s not a test on transformational geography…
um, geometry then I’ll give them a bonds and tables test and then I’ll time them. But every week they know they’ve got to learn something for Friday.

M: To build step by step.

V: Mmm. They just get into the habit. Oh, this… They hate it. They’ll walk into my classroom every day, ‘Can we have a free today?’ I said, ‘In Maths you want a free?’ I said, ‘Not while I’m standing on my two feet.’

[both laugh]

V: ‘Oh Ma’am please it’s Friday.’

M: Ja, it’s Friday.

V: Then I’ll pick up my books and I’ll say, ‘Look here, you see what I have to do this weekend?’ I said, ‘You just have to do this one little worksheet, I have all this to do.’ I said, ‘If I can work this weekend you can do one worksheet this weekend.’ And we’ve got that arrangement. They now know you do not have a free when you come to Maths and you do get homework every day.

M: That is important. They work and you work. [chuckles]

V: I’m not going to work and they sit and do nothing! They’ve got to work as well, yes.

M: The…

_End of recording_