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Changing minds : Training educators to use drama as an alternative method for life orientation teaching

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ABSTRACT

South Africa's education system has undergone substantial changes in the last ten years. The shift to Inclusive Education attempts to provide **all** learners, regardless of their disability, learning difficulty, or disadvantage with access to education (Department of Education[1], 2001). Curriculum 2005, in the context of an Outcomes Based Education (OBE) philosophy was an attempt by the Education Department to address the inadequate 'Bantu' education of the past. OBE was intended to replace teacher-centred approaches by encouraging children to become actively involved in the learning process, to gain knowledge as well as skills, and to think independently and creatively (DoE, 1998b). School 'subjects' of the past were changed to 'Learning Areas' some undergoing dramatic shifts in content and teaching strategies. These new Learning Areas also emerged with alternative assessment practices. Life Orientation (LO) is one such learning area. Many educators were suddenly required to teach these new Learning Areas, despite having little or no training in them. As a result many educators experienced frustration with the demands now placed upon them, and some felt unable to teach effectively. This study used a qualitative action-research design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the educators' capacities to change their teaching practices in their Life Orientation classrooms. Six educators in a public primary school setting participated in a series of workshops aimed to introduce them to drama methods to be used in their Life Orientation teaching. The workshops were highly experiential in nature and were designed with the specific personalities and needs of each educator in mind. The results of the research indicate that educators are highly responsive to training, provided that they feel acknowledged as individuals and provided that the training builds upon their current expertise rather than attempting to change their practices altogether. Another key finding from the training was the opportunity for the educators to engage in the training as human beings with their own difficulties and frustrations being openly acknowledged. Many of the educators experienced the workshops as therapeutic and reported that this made the training both useful and personally fulfilling.

[1] From this point onwards, I shall refer to the Department of Education as the DoE.