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Life skills in the foundation phase : a multiple case study into how life skills is enacted in two grade 3 classrooms in Johannesburg

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Abstract

In this study, teachers' understanding of the Life Skills subject in the Foundation Phase, and the consistencies and/or disjunctures that exist between teachers' classroom practice and the Life Skills CAPS has been investigated. Although three study areas are outlined in the Life Skills CAPS, only one study area, viz Beginning Knowledge and Personal and Social Well-being, was explored. Two Grade 3 teachers at two different schools in Johannesburg were interviewed, and observed teaching Life Skills lessons.

The data revealed that the two teachers regard the teaching and learning of Life Skills very differently. Due to the scope of the subject, particular aspects are foregrounded, while other aspects are downplayed or avoided. The teacher in the private school context foregrounded science-based content related to Beginning Knowledge, and the public school teacher foregrounded a values-based focus related to Personal and Social Well-being. This indicated that not all aspects included in the study area Beginning Knowledge and Personal and Social Well-being, are equally addressed.

In addition to different Life Skills aspects being foregrounded or downplayed, the Life Skills subject itself, is not positively regarded, as Languages and Mathematics are considered to be the more important subjects in the Foundation Phase. In order to raise the status of the Life Skills subject, teachers' attitudes towards Life Skills needs to be more positive. However, teachers' attitudes appear to be related to their understanding of the subject. The purpose of Life Skills and each of the study areas is absent in the Life Skills CAPS. Thus, issues essential to the South African context associated with transformation, multicultural and citizenship education, and the various dimensions included in these, are not emphasised, not understood by many teachers, and not included in their teaching practice. The exclusion or downplaying of Life Skills is detrimental to young South African learners.