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INVESTIGATING LANGUAGE TEACHERS' 'TAKE-UP' FROM AN IN-SERVICE SHORT COURSE

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English Language Education

Johannesburg, 2005

Investigating Language Teachers'
'take-up' from an in-service short course

ABSTRACT

For the last twenty years teacher professional development and teacher change have received considerable attention in the international teacher education literature. One question of interest to teacher educators is whether sort, in-service courses provided by tertiary institutions or NGOs are likely to result in improved classroom practice. What counts as 'improved practice' and how such improvement can be identified are other important questions. The purpose of this research was to investigate Grade 5 language teachers' 'take-up' of input on classroom questioning presented at a short in-service course. Data were collected from questionnaires and interviews and classroom observations. Analysis of the questionnaires and interviews suggests that the majority of the (number) teachers who participated in the course claim to have gained confidence in working in new ways as a result of the course and to be using questions more effectively in their classroom than they did before participating in it. However, analysis of data from observation notes and from videotaped lessons in the classrooms of five teachers suggests that closed, lower order questions still predominate in most lessons. With the exception of the classroom of one of the five teachers observed the was little evidence of questions being asked by learners, even though this had been one of the key topics addressed during the course. Though it is not possible to generalise from a small scale study, there is some evidence from both the questionnaires responses and the classroom data that teachers with higher qualifications (in terms of years of pre-service teacher education or in terms of degrees rather than diplomas) were more able to engage with new ideas from the short course and from Department of Education curriculum documents than those with more limited academic and professional education.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in English Language Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

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....10.... Day of .....FEBRUARY....., 2005

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Yvonne Reed, my supervisor, for her advice, support and unselfishly sharing of her expertise in the area of language teaching and outcomes-based education throughout this research project.

A special thanks to schools that allowed me into classrooms for data collection. To the principals, teachers and learners who were patient in accommodating me and work with me, I wish to express my sincere appreciation.

To Elizabeth Hladik and Alison Chisholm, my special thanks that you believed in me when I started with my research work and that you encouraged me even when I had rough times. Also to Hilary Janks and Pippa Stein thanks for your contribution at the beginning of my studies. Despite some of my weaknesses you always said something which gave me courage to move on.

To the Wits Wonder Women 'sisters' (2003) I want to say that you are caring and special people to have met. The support you gave me when I was emotionally down is highly appreciated. You always encouraged me to be strong and not despair, and sharing your experiences made me brave.

I would like to thank my sister Mokgadi Mokgawa and my friend Lele Tshukudu for inspiring and encouraging me even when I found it difficult to cope.

To my beautiful children, Peter and Esther-Sue, I would like to say you are wonderful and brave for giving me time to be away from home when you needed me. Thank you 'Mangwevu'.

In loving memory of my late partner

Daniel Ramolao Makhene

'Love will always remain in my heart'

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 **Introduction to the research project**

Amid the political changes in 1994, the new Minister of Education launched a national process to rid the school curriculum of offensive apartheid racial content and outdated, inaccurate subject matter (Jansen,1999:57). The introduction of outcomes based education (OBE) 'marked a turning point for education and curriculum development in South Africa. It provides a platform for developing a sense of national identity, based on dignity and respect for all people, rather than on artificial gender and class division' (Department of Education, 2000:4). The Department of Education (DoE) states that Curriculum 2005 (C2005) is directed towards achieving a 'prosperous, truly united, democratic and internationally competitive country with literate, creative and critical citizens leading productive, self-fulfilled lives in a country free of violence, discrimination and prejudice' (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999: 110).

C2005, which has been phased in since 1997, is based on learning outcomes. It has been developed in response to perceived needs for major changes in education and training in South Africa. One of these needs was to bring together the previously separate and unequal apartheid era departments of education. Another was the need to transform curricula. C2005 also aims to enable learners to achieve to the maximum of their ability. Outcomes based education attempts to do this by setting the outcomes to be achieved at the end of the process. The outcomes encourage a learner-centred and activity-based approach to education (DoE, 2002:1). The Department of Education has stated that an outcomes-based system attempts to make goals, standards and expectations coherent as the foundation for the instructional system. It stresses the need for a shift from the traditional aims-and-objectives approach to outcomes-based education (DoE, 2000:4).

The Outcomes-based education vision is captured in the goals formulated by the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA 1997) in its seven critical outcomes which are to underpin all curricula. The critical outcomes envisage learners who are able to:

- identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking;
- work effectively with others as members of a team, group, organisation and community;
- organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively;
- collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information;
- communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes;
- use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others; and
- demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation (DoE, 2002:1).

In addition, there are five more developmental outcomes which support the critical outcomes to help in achieving higher order learning, as well as tying the skills components of the curriculum to the need to understand the knowledge principles underlying the skills (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999:110-111). The developmental outcomes envisage learners who are also able to:

- reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively;

- participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national, and global communities;
- be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts;
- explore education and career opportunities; and
- develop entrepreneurial opportunities (ibid:1-2).

The expectation of the compilers of the curriculum statements is that knowledge and skills should be related to the social, political and economic context in which they are acquired and applied.

All of these curriculum changes have implications for pre-service and in-service teacher education. The review of the National Education Policy Act (1996) resulted in the compilation of the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) which detail seven roles for teachers:

- Learning mediator
- Interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials
- Leader, administrator, and manager
- Scholar, researcher and lifelong learner
- Community, citizenship and pastoral role
- Assessor
- Learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist (Government Gazette, 4 February, 2000).

Some roles relate directly to the teacher's performance in the classroom, whereas others are realized in other education and community contexts. In outcomes based education it is expected that the teacher involve learners more than was the case when using the various 'traditional' pedagogies. A teacher as an assessor and learning mediator has to master techniques for challenging and stimulating learners' thinking

and for engaging learners in the classroom. Questioning is one such technique, whereby the teacher can engage learners and develop their thinking. To assist teachers, the national and provincial education departments have offered a range of teacher development programmes which give teachers opportunities to revise their existing approaches or learn new approaches and techniques in regard to teaching. This research investigates teachers' 'take-up' from a short course which focussed on the use of questions in the classroom.

1.2 Aims

'The goal of much teacher education research is the identification and description of activities that make a difference to teachers' classroom practice' (Adler, 2002:9). This study aims to investigate teachers' 'take-up' from a short-term teacher development programme, which included input on questioning techniques in the classroom. I use the term 'take-up' as I agree with the researchers who investigated teachers' responses to the University of the Witwatersrand's FDE programme that 'take-up' 'best captures what occurs through participation in INSET. Teachers take up aspects of the programme, and different teachers do this in different ways' (Adler, 2002:9).

The input on questioning was part of a short course which grade five language teachers were offered, during an outcomes based education in-service programme. The course is one of the ongoing courses organised by the Gauteng Department of Education as part of teacher development. The implementation of the overall programme was outsourced to the then Johannesburg College of Education (JCE), and most of the College staff contributed to it.

One of the aims of many teacher development programmes is to improve the variety of strategies that teachers use and the learning opportunities for learners. O'Keefe (1974:39) suggests that the philosophy behind teacher-centered in-service training is that it serves the needs of the teacher, so that the teacher can respond effectively to the educational demands of the learner and society. The outcomes based education short course, which provided the starting point for this research, included input on questioning techniques offered by this researcher in conjunction with inputs on the teaching of reading and writing in the Languages (formerly LLC) Learning Area which were presented by lecturer colleagues. Attempts were made by each lecturer to assist teachers to see connections between questioning and input on approaches to the teaching of reading and of writing.

The sessions on questioning focused on purposes of questioning, types and levels of questioning, critical questioning, learners' questions and teachers' responses to learners' questions and answers. Questions were used to bring to the attention of the teachers learning-centered approaches to their classroom work, given that learner involvement is at the heart of outcomes based education. Both teacher and learner questions have a potentially significant role in learner participation in lessons and in the development of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. One of the critical outcomes that underpins the new curriculum states that learners should be able to identify and solve problems by using creative and critical thinking. Questions can be used to stimulate and support the development of such thinking.

The questions that frame this research are as follows:

1. What do teachers claim to have 'taken-up' from a short course on questioning?

2. What are the similarities and differences between the ways in which teachers responded to an interview about their questioning practices and their actual use of questions in the classroom?
3. What do the findings in relation to questions 1 and 2 suggest about the relationship between short in-service training (INSET) courses and teacher change?

1.3 Rationale

Fitzpatrick (1995:13) argues that developing outcomes based education requires making tough decisions about learning outcomes that truly matter, and that these must be distinguished clearly from the information learners have been exposed to superficially in the past. An in-service programme affords teachers opportunities to be introduced to new ideas and to share experiences of classroom practices. However, education researchers and teacher educators have expressed concerns about whether the time spent at short courses (or for that matter longer ones) leads to better performance by the teacher or better outcomes for learners. Hoadley refers to literature on teachers' socialization into the profession which suggests that 'teachers' work identities are constituted largely around their own experience of schooling and in relation to the structure of schooling' (2002:46).

This research aims to find out if teachers who spent a week in workshops that aimed at providing improved understanding of outcomes based education teaching and learning strategies, have taken course inputs on questioning into their classroom work and if so, in what ways.

1.4 Chapter Outline

Chapter one: Introduction to the research project

Chapter two: Literature Review

Chapter three: Research Methodology

Chapter four: Presentation and Analysis of Data

Chapter five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature that informs this research has been selected from the extensive literature on teacher education in South Africa, teacher development programmes and teacher change both in South Africa and internationally, and the literature on questioning as a classroom practice and on questioning techniques.

2.1 Teacher Development in South Africa

2.1.1 A brief history of teacher education in South Africa

Prior to 1994, education in South Africa was divided along racial, cultural, religious and political lines, resulting in eighteen (18) different education departments. Though the roots of segregated education predate apartheid (Cross and Chisholm 1990, cited in Welch, 2002:18), after 1948 such segregation became official government policy. It was a policy that promoted inequality. Teacher education for whites was located in post-matriculation colleges or universities while training for blacks was only offered at colleges which offered two and then three year qualifications to students who, in many instances, entered these colleges with a standard eight (Grade 10) qualification. This segregated education resulted in unequal professional development, and unequal opportunities in the segregated schools (Welch, 2002: 19).

In 1976 the political uprising that started in Soweto filtered to townships in other parts of South Africa. The students' dissatisfaction came about after Afrikaans was introduced as a medium of instruction in main subjects like Mathematics and Physical Sciences. This was not the only problem experienced by black learners, but it pushed the already angry community to take action against the injustice and inequalities in the education system. The 1970s and 1980s had been a period when an increase in access

of black learners to schools happened. However, no provision was made for 'providing additional teaching resources at a comparable rate' (Fedderke et al. 1999, cited in Welch, 2002:21). As a result, there was more demand for additional teaching posts.

In the early 1980s a concerted effort to improve the qualifications of teachers and to increase the number of teachers in black schools was put into place. One such effort was the creation of Vista University, which as an 'urban university' was dedicated to providing distance education upgrading programmes predominantly for black teachers. Critics of these upgrading programmes claim that 'they very often provided qualification without quality, and the time teachers spent on them took them away from their classrooms' (Welch, 2002:21). Another concern was that teachers' interest in upgrading their qualification was primarily related to salary incentives. Instead of curbing the problem of teacher underdevelopment, the upgrading programmes produced more qualified teachers without impacting on the quality of teaching and learning in schools. The upgrading curriculum or furthering of qualifications 'made very little effort to address classroom practice,' (ibid: 21).

After the political changes in SA in 1994, it became imperative to transform education in order to redress the imbalances. Teacher education, both pre and in-service professional development, was among the priorities for repairing, redressing, professionalising and changing education practices in SA (Adler, 2002:2). With the release of *Curriculum 2005* (C2005) and later the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) there has been a need for teacher development and support to guide teachers' implementation of the new curriculum. The introduction to the Learning Area Statements in the curriculum document states that:

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... a teacher must be qualified, competent, dedicated and caring. The teacher must be able to fulfil the various roles outlined in the Norms and Standards for Education. These include being mediators of learning, interpreters and designers of Learning Programmes and material, leaders, administrators and managers, scholars, researchers and lifelong learners, community members, citizens and pastors, assessors and Learning Area or Phase specialists (Government Gazette, 4 February 2000).

2.1.2 Curriculum 2005 (C2005), the Revised National Curriculum Statement and teacher professional development

The adoption of a new curriculum is directed towards achieving 'a prosperous, truly united, democratic and internationally competitive country with literate, creative and critical citizens leading productive self-fulfilled lives in a country free of violence, discrimination and prejudice,' (DoE 1997c, cited in Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999:110). The vision of education is captured in the critical outcomes formulated by the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA). Through critical outcomes, and additional developmental outcomes higher order learning is not the only goal targeted, but the skills components of the goals are tied to the need to understand the knowledge principles underlying the skills. The outcomes are also to relate knowledge and skills to the social, political and economic contexts acquired and applied (ibid: 111).

Gultig (1999), cited in Welch (2002), states that the emphasis in C2005 is on learner-centred and experience-based learning. Learners are not expected to be passive recipients of knowledge, but to be able to reflect and apply what they learn. C2005 is outcomes-based and has redefined discipline-based subjects into performance-based learning areas, (2002: 28). This means that the teaching and learning process has to shift away from the fundamental pedagogics approach that was characteristic of much of teacher education prior to1994.

Welch describes fundamental pedagogics as follows:

> '...this philosophy claimed to arrive at a set of immutable truths about education – divorced from the socio-political context or education. In this way it avoided a critique of the ideology which informed its own world view. It positioned both teacher and learner as passive subjects, and the child as a product of original sin, needing to be led into adulthood by the wiser adult teachers, who in turn were led to enlightenment by wiser pedagogicians' (2002:20).

To succeed in implementing C2005 teachers need theory and practice to give them:

1. a deep understanding of 'higher-order' concepts and perspectives...rather than the acquisition of low-level facts and information;

2. reflexivity, which is an ability to rigorously evaluate and if necessary, reconstitute our own thoughts and actions and

3. the ability to think metacognitively where the teacher will enable learners to recognise that stated knowledge claims are always susceptible to further and ever higher forms of evaluation. (Welch, 2002:28).

To ensure that teachers are trained to enable them to discharge effectively the new responsibilities expected of them, the government has to provide and support them with necessary knowledge and skills.

To assist teachers to succeed in achieving the aims set out in C2005, the provincial and national departments of education have undertaken to train teachers and guide them on how to teach in an outcomes-based classroom with an emphasis on learner-centredness. In collaboration with other stakeholders in education, a series of teacher professional development programmes have been put in place by the education departments. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999:261) argue that many of the most highly publicized initiatives in professional development are oriented to 'knowledge-for-practice'.

'Knowledge-for-practice' programmes are led by experts and teachers are expected to take the new knowledge and skills offered by these experts into their classrooms in order to improve their practice. This type of knowledge acquisition is contrasted with 'knowledge-in-practice' which is generated by teachers from their own experience.

2.2 Teacher Development and Teacher Change

Teacher development programmes are regarded as important means of contributing to the creation of more effective schools and as integral to learning organisations (O'Brien and MacBeath, 1999:71). As noted by Wilson and Berne, after education reformers had noted that changed curricula did not necessarily lead to changes and improvements to classroom practice, teacher professional development was 'touted as the ticket to reform' (1999:173). In such programmes teachers are exposed to various ways of teaching that are assumed to benefit the process of learning.

It has been assumed that the teacher whose learners make good progress, often attends development programmes. Fullan (1991:23) argues that continuous development of all teachers is the cornerstone for learning, improvement and reform. In his view professional development and school development are inextricably linked. In addition, Millman and Darling-Hammond define professional development as the process or processes by which minimally competent teachers achieve higher levels of professional competence and expand their understanding of self, role, context and career (1990:117).

Adler argues that in-service programmes need to work with teachers on new topics and approaches to subject knowledge as well as new approaches to learning and teaching of that knowledge' (2002:4). In the South African context, in addition to providing

opportunities for teachers to improve their classroom practice, in-service programmes attempt to redress the educational imbalances of the past. Research findings indicate that although there is strong support for C2005 from the majority of teachers, there is still evidence of teachers feeling insecure. This is because it is perceived by some as too complex; some feel they are not equipped to conduct lessons and assess learning in the ways expected of teachers using outcomes-based approaches to teaching (Taylor and Vinjevold,1999:157). In order for central policy makers and educators to understand the fears and resistance of teachers, it has been suggested that they should first learn more about what is happening on the educational periphery (teachers' working environment) rather than assume that educational change is the responsibility of the teacher. They need to give up their 'virtual educational goals' for a little more classroom reality (Elliott 1999, in Swain et.al, 2003:74).

According to Marris (1975, cited in Fullan, 2001:30) 'all real change involves loss, anxiety, and struggle'. He challenges observers of change 'to recognize the phenomenon as natural and inevitable'. Marris further argues that 'whether the change is sought or resisted, and happens by chance or design; the response is characteristically ambivalent' (ibid:30). People react differently to new experiences depending on how they attach meaning to them. In his view, teachers with compatible knowledge of content and skills are likely to 'consolidate skills and attachments, whose secure possession provides the assurance to master something new' (2001: 30).

Schon (1971, in Fullan, 2001:31) also regards change as involving movement 'through the zones of uncertainty' and describes its initial phase as 'a situation of being lost, of confronting more information than you can handle'. Fullan makes the following observation on change:

> 'Real change, then, whether desired or not, represents a serious personal and collective experience characterized by ambivalence and uncertainty; and if change works out it can result in a sense of mastery, accomplishment, and professional growth. The anxiety of uncertainty and the joys of mastery are central to the subjective meaning of educational change, and to success or failure thereof – facts that have not been recognized or appreciated in most attempts at reform' (Fullan, 2001:32).

Within the South African context it is not difficult to relate the descriptions of these writers about fear of change to the responses of teachers. The teacher who had never been exposed to teaching skills or methods as proposed in the new curriculum is likely to find it difficult to adapt to new experiences and to change from old habits.

Apart from transforming and redressing the imbalances of education in SA, teacher development programmes are necessary to revitalize teachers to assist them to experience new ideas relating to individual teaching skills and to knowledge in their different learning areas. According to Fullan, teachers may be uncertain about how to influence learners, and about whether they even have any influence on learners at all. In some classrooms teachers cannot deal with different learners' behaviours and teaching decisions are often made on 'pragmatic trial-and-error grounds with little chance for reflection or thinking through the rationale' (2001:32). Consistent learning by teachers is imperative in order to help them to cope with daily challenges. Teacher development programmes are a means through which the majority of teachers can be reached, and also allow teachers opportunities to interact with one another.

Riegle (1987, in Millman and Darling-Hammond, 1990:117), includes four general areas in a conceptual framework for thinking about teacher development. These areas are a reflection of the continued growth that is expected to occur during development.

Instructional development emphasises the development of skills; *professional development* emphasises the growth of individual teachers in their professional roles; *organisational development* emphasises the needs, priorities and organisation of the school; *career advancement* and *personal development* emphasises life planning, interpersonal skills and the growth of teachers as individuals. These general areas may be of help when planning specific teacher development programmes. Knowledge, skills, methods and techniques may need to be specified for any organised course. Well thought out organisation of course outcomes is likely to impact on teacher's 'take-up' and affect the teaching and learning process. In order that a programme be evaluated, the facilitator may have to focus on a particular aspect[s] that will reflect the success of or limitations to the achievement of outcomes set out for the course.

2.2.1 Teacher efficacy

The concept of 'teacher efficacy' is described in Ross (1994:381) as a belief that teachers have about their proficiency in teaching that leads to effective learner-centred classroom learning. In 1994 it was not possible to place the bulk of the teaching force in South Africa in this category. The findings of many of the research projects conducted for the President's Education Initiative (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999) suggest that most teachers, especially those from disadvantaged education backgrounds, were using teaching approaches based on fundamental pedagogics. The solution suggested to repair and redress this situation is 'to propagate a liberatory ideology, and to institute systems to encourage teachers to follow learner-centred classroom practices' (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999:133). The Department of Education has a two-fold task: to expose teachers to an approach, which may be new to most teachers, and to close the gap between those with greater and lesser teaching efficacy. Throughout South Africa OBE in-service workshops are aimed at culturally, professionally and economically diverse

groups of teachers. One can assume that the needs of these teachers probably vary since they come from different social and educational contexts. These different contexts are likely to affect their perception of their professional needs, as determined by their understanding of the social order (Solomon, 1995:251) and also to affect their 'take-up' from workshops.

2.2.2 The need for and possible impact of teacher development programmes

The impact of teacher development programmes needs to be investigated in relation to both short-term and long-term changes. Doff (1987:70) argues that in the short-term, the content and design of the training materials may increase the chance of teachers adopting a new methodology, but that it is unrealistic to expect training material to have an immediate effect on teachers' classroom behaviour. The acceptance of new approaches from the in-service programme that is the focus of this research is no guarantee of any impact on subsequent classroom teaching. At the conclusion of a workshop, most teachers give the impression that they have understood theories and practices introduced in the sessions. The question is how much of what has been introduced at such workshops will be 'taken up' in classroom practice. As indicated in some of the teacher development studies reported in Taylor and Vinjevold (1999) and in Adler and Reed (2002) there may be differences between teachers' 'espoused and enacted practices'. It should also be noted that researchers such as Wilson and Berne have criticised teacher professional development through workshops as a patchwork of opportunities stitched together into a fragmented and incoherent curriculum (1999:174).

Lewis and Johnson (cited in Swain et al, 2003:73) warn about attempting to transfer educational reform from one context to another. Their argument is that a programme of

educational purpose that fits a particular social context, must be connected to teaching and learning, and hence outcomes in that context. The emphasis on context suggests that there is a parallel between the observation of a mirage and the perception of the possibility of change to classroom practice. Those further from the mirage see an alluring reality, and those closest to the mirage are painfully aware of the immaterial nature of the 'oasis' of educational change. They may find that the dream of a new and enlightened pedagogy for learners is, in fact, the reality of their old classroom (ibid: 74).

In the South African context the improvement of teachers' subject knowledge is considered a priority. According to Taylor and Vinjevold (1999:139) findings from the PEI research projects indicate that teachers' low levels of conceptual knowledge and poor grasp of their subjects lead to a range of errors in their teaching when they present content and concepts to their classes. In order to improve their classroom practice, teachers need to feel confident in their knowledge of the subject they are teaching. Teacher education programmes have to be structured in ways that will 'help teachers develop both subject content and pedagogic knowledge' or 'the disciplinary base of content knowledge, methodology and relevant pedagogic theory' (Welch, 2002:28). Pedagogic knowledge need not only be perceived in regard to teaching methods, but it 'should include the theoretical basis for various approaches to teaching' (ibid 28).

A teacher with knowledge of education theory is likely to have understanding of learners' difficulties that will lead to better decisions and approaches that can be used to improve learning. The teacher's knowledge of subject content has serious significance for making teaching and learning a success. 'Without knowledge the teacher would not be able to engage their learners in high-level conceptual thinking,'

(Adler, Slonimisky and Reed, 2002:136). Most research reports acknowledge the fact that the kind of training offered in many teacher training institutions in South Africa during the apartheid era was inferior and produced teachers with limited knowledge and skills in such areas as selection of teaching materials and selection of teaching approaches. Teachers' limited knowledge of the subject content, and lack of creativity resulted in poorly structured activities that did not challenge learners to see beyond the information presented. The teacher's limitations made it difficult for him/her to make the best choices when presented with poor resources. Many teachers accepted whatever materials were offered and made available by the Department of Education and publishers. It was common to find that a teacher would not have ways of manipulating and using the texts effectively, but simply relied on the questions provided in the textbooks. Many teachers were not equipped to create opportunities for learning that stimulated learners' thinking and that produced independent learners who could take responsibility for their learning. Effective questions can be a major tool for learning, and the second half of this chapter reviews literature in the area of questioning practices.

2.3 The Roles of Questioning in the Classroom

Questions and responses structure much of classroom interaction. This interaction has been described in both positive and negative terms by a number of authors. On the positive side, both the teacher's and the learners' questions have the potential to stimulate interest in any particular subject matter. As a feature of classroom discourses, questions can spark ideas, provoke imagination and involve both the teacher and learners in a shared and creative learning experience. In many societies questioning is considered to be a natural form of communication between the teacher and the learners. However, it is important to understand what kinds of questions are considered to be

beneficial in promoting better teaching and learning. Dillon (1982:128) argues that questions are the predominant technique for initiating, extending and controlling the conversation exchange in the classroom. Koufetta-Menicou and Scaife (2000:79) suggest that good questions are those that recognize the wide possibility of thoughts that are built upon varying mental operations. In their view, classroom questions can help learners develop more effective and diversified thinking, which should prove valuable throughout their lives and enable them to become independent learners.

In discussing the role of questions in teaching and learning, Morgan and Saxton (1994:7) suggest that questions can be effective in generating learners' thoughts and interests. Questions may not only elicit the responses expected by the teacher, but also unexpected responses. They argue that the purpose of questions is to generate thinking at different levels. Questions may offer opportunities for expressing many different views. For King, 'the use of questions is crucial to good enquiry practice' (1999:172). The teacher is expected to analyse and reflect on the context and nature of the topic during which questioning takes place. The demands that questions place on learners, the appropriateness of the language of questions to the individual or group concerned, and the effect of questions on subsequent learning and related activities have to be given priority (Wragg 1999, cited in King, 1999:172).

According to Dillon (1988:1), for a long time, questions have seemed promising devices for eliciting learners' knowledge. It is through questions that the teacher can assess both learners' prior knowledge and the comprehension of new knowledge taught. The learner can also ask questions to satisfy curiosity and to extend knowledge. In Morgan and Saxton (1994:9), Postman is cited as claiming that all our knowledge results from questions. Questions have been categorized as relating to three domains,

namely: the cognitive, the affective and the psychomotor. The cognitive domain refers to what the learner thinks and knows, the affective domain to what the learner feels about what he/she thinks and knows, and the psychomotor domain to what the learner does as a result of his/her knowledge, thought and feelings (Morgan and Saxton, 1994:5).

On the negative side, questions in the classroom have been described as contributing to 'highly strung nervous tension' and a 'high-pressure atmosphere' in that, questions can make learners passive and halting in their self-expressive and independent mental activity (Dillon, 1982:142). Questions may constrain learning if learners are confined to producing 'correct' forms of answers to fit into teachers' frameworks (Young, 1992:88).

Roberts (cited in King 1999:169) suggests two dimensions to questioning. The one dimension is that questions must increase cognitive demands on learners, and the other refers to the extent to which learners consider a range of possible answers in their attempt to respond successfully to the teacher's questions. Other researchers argue that many classroom questions and answers are 'guessing games whereby the teacher has the knowledge and tries through questioning to extract the right answers from learners. They in turn reach towards the preferred response, the correct answer. Alternatively they adopt a variety of strategies to keep their heads below the parapet' (Carter, cited in King, 1999:169).

Koufetta-Menicou and Scaife (2000:83) argue that asking more questions does not make a teacher a better questioner, as this practice does not guarantee higher-level learning because it is the types of questions that matter and not their quantity.