

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Conceptual Framework

The aim of the research is to explore the teacher perceptions of teacher-led curriculum initiatives on their own teaching practice in independent schools in Gauteng.

This study also aims to clarify whether the GISCDI is working successfully in schools that have participated in the process, and what factors are contributing to the success, or otherwise, of the initiative.

An empirical investigation will be done to examine the ways in which teacher-led curriculum initiatives have been a catalyst for the professional pedagogic and academic development of teachers and school improvement. Data collection strategies and an in-depth data analysis will provide a review on the effects of teacher-led curriculum initiatives on teaching and learning, and on school improvement.

Semi-structured interviews will ascertain whether the concept of distributed leadership, in the form of teacher-led curriculum initiatives, is evident in schools and the role it plays in teachers changing their practice to improve the quality of their teaching and learning. Distributed leadership, trust, collegiality and teacher development will be considered as important factors that assist the improvement of teaching practice.

In summary, the following will form the framework of this research:

It will endeavour to ascertain whether the concept of distributed leadership has played a role in these initiatives. The question of trust will be addressed, and the level of risk taking that teachers feel have allowed them to initiate change in practice, will be questioned. The research intends to highlight the motivation of the teachers to implement and take responsibility for the change they envisage.

An analysis of data to ascertain whether the ISASA curriculum development initiative has improved the professional image of teachers, whether it is a factor in affecting change in practice, and an assessment of how teacher-led curriculum initiatives contribute to school improvement will then form the next step of the research. It will also foreground these perceived improvements in practice and analyse why the teachers believe they have been successful in improving quality in their classrooms.

This research aims to consolidate the list of factors that promote and inhibit teacher-led curriculum initiatives, and add any relevant information for the benefit of school improvement strategies. It will strive to ascertain how teachers reflected on their practice and subsequently improved their classroom practice by being involved in the teacher-led curriculum development initiatives. Collegial models will be considered

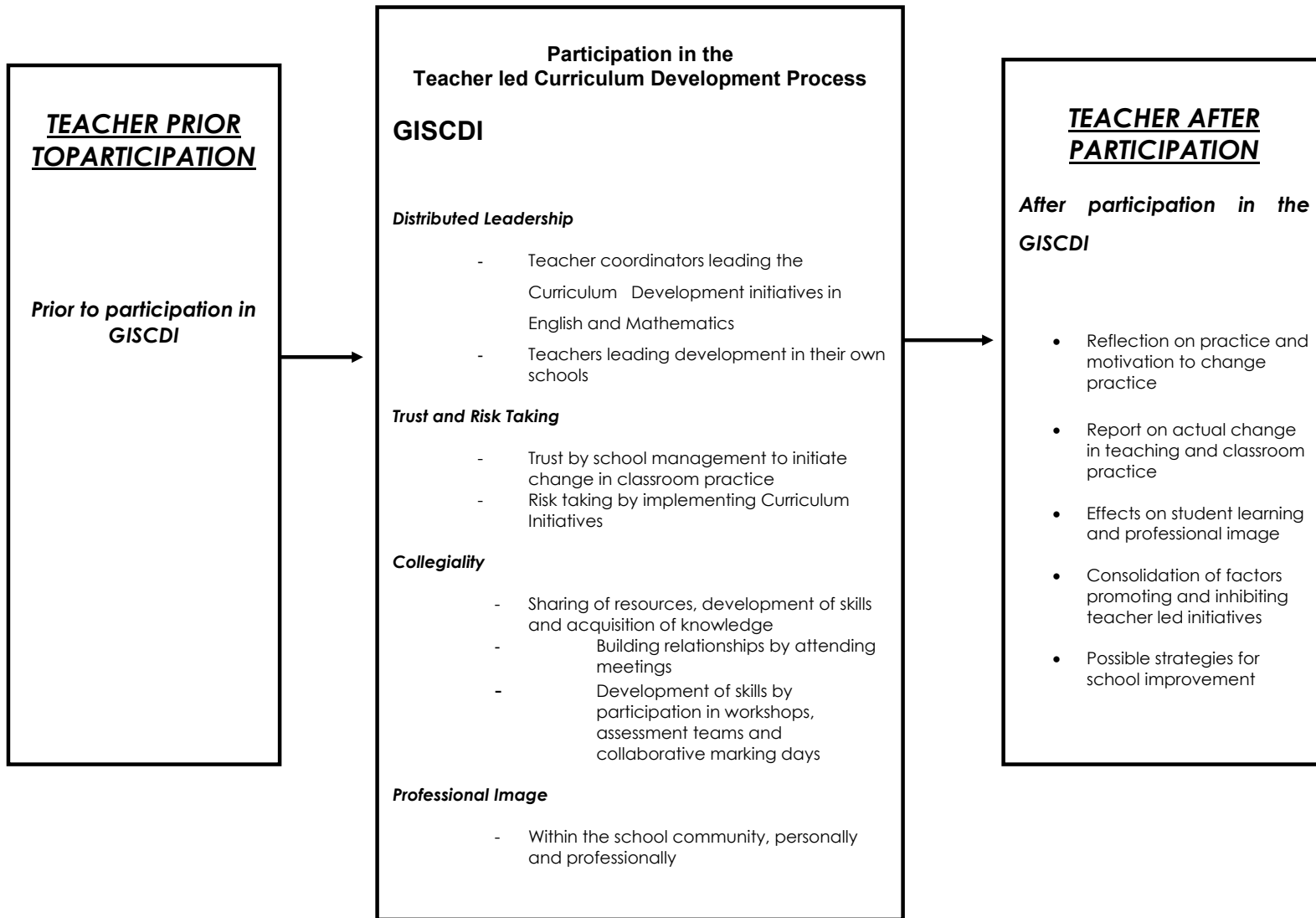
and the benefits of this type of collaboration in and between schools will be presented in the research.

It is hoped that practical and useful ideas for implementation to facilitate the changes that schools might need to make to affect improvement in teaching will be forthcoming.

In conclusion, this research aims to find out how this teacher-led initiative and teacher interaction has led to teachers perceptions of changing and improving their practice.³

³ See model overleaf

**DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATION OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
FOR INVESTIGATION INTO HOW TEACHER LED INITIATIVES CHANGE PRACTICE**



3.2 Research Design

What are teachers' perceptions of teacher-led curriculum initiatives in relation to change in practice?

The research has investigated the Gauteng Independent Schools' Curriculum Development Initiative (GISCDI), and reports on how the teachers have perceived these teacher-led initiatives to facilitate change in classroom practice. It highlights factors contributing to the success of the initiative, as well as how the process has been a catalyst for teacher development and school improvement.

Six schools involved in the GISCDI were the focus of the study and teachers in both Mathematics and English were interviewed. The teachers involved in the process were key to this research as their perceptions are empirically valid. Observation of classroom practice would have been a valuable method of research, but it is impractical. Semi-structured interviews were constructed to extract information that would reveal the mechanisms that facilitated change in practice. Interviews offer reliable data; according to Patton, interviews are a primary source of useful data (Patton, 1990).

The researcher was immersed within the context of research, elicited issues for investigation, and provided deliberate and intuitive reasons for the sample selection and selection of methods, on the grounds that these would provide the data to answer the question in issue. Thus,

according to Wolcott (1990) the researcher is the instrument and an emic perspective is possible.

3.4 Data Gathering

Semi-structured interviews were the main data-gathering technique used, as they allowed for exploration of the conceptual framework. These interviews were semi-structured, commencing with broad questions to engage with the informants and to elicit a range of general issues, or 'domains,' for further investigation. The interviewer took control of the interview as early as possible, followed clues and constantly checked information by corroborating data with the interviewee. (Spradley, 1979).

Prior to the commencement of the actual research, a semi-structured, pilot interview was done with a participating school, to help refine the data collection technique. The questions were analysed during and after the interview to check for ambiguities and leading questions.

After being interviewed, the participants completed a short, structured questionnaire to elicit personal and professional details, as well as the context of the schools at which they were currently teaching. The questionnaire also included open-ended questions on the participants' involvement in the GISCDI and their personal comments on how they fitted in to the process. The attitude to curriculum development and teacher growth of the leadership within their schools was also

requested, and honest, emotional responses were encouraged. This strategy was employed to broaden an understanding of the method and the phenomenon of interest (Janesick, 1998). This methodology allowed the researcher to engage with the actual experiences of the teachers participating in the curriculum initiative. The use of classroom observations would not have been suitable, as the trust that the researcher was attempting to establish as a factor promoting change in classroom practice after reflection, would have been compromised.

The data gathering is divided into three parts. The first part addresses the factors that determine the extent and nature of teacher-led curriculum initiatives that can be exercised by teachers, and their evidence in the selected schools. The second part highlights how this initiative has allowed teachers to reflect on their practice and how they perceive change to classroom practices. The third part uses the data gathered to identify strategies for the implementation of teacher-led curriculum development in schools, and to develop structures for schools to use in incorporating this approach into their school development and school improvement plans.

The qualitative approach adopted in this research suited the type of research that was undertaken, namely, to establish how teacher-led curriculum initiatives change practice in Independent schools in Gauteng. The findings were not measurable by quantifiable data, but

were insights into and perceptions of actual practices obtained by qualitative methods.

Interactive social roles were assumed to record observations. The researcher as instrument was used for recording of observations during the interviewing process. These interactive roles were maintained throughout the process. The primary data collection strategy, were interviews with the selected participants. These interviews were recorded manually and transcribed by the researcher. The transcripts were validated by the participants to ensure that they were verbatim accounts of the 'conversations' held during the interviewing process. The questionnaires were designed to elicit detailed personal and professional information and to provide accurate information on the participants. These questionnaires followed the interviews and were completed at leisure, and openness and honesty were requested. Discussions and conversations with three Heads of schools were not part of the formal methodology, but are included and the observations and comments of these school leaders, do add significance to the programme.

Context-bound generalizations are presented, as the research was strongly influenced by the settings in which the teachers find themselves, namely, the independent schools in which the research was being conducted. Information on the organisational environment of each school was gathered, as these structures, including management

arrangements, school culture and social capital of the school impact on the responses of the teachers and their practices. The research was evaluative, as it focused on the particular practice of teacher-led curriculum initiatives and resulted in an assessment of the worth or merit of the programme being evaluated (Fetterman, 1989).

An in-depth study, using face-to-face techniques, guided this interactive inquiry, as honest accounts of teacher-led practices needed to be highlighted and investigated, leading to 'conversations with a purpose' (Dexter, 1990). The data gathered was used to formulate stories, explanations and arguments for the benefit of using teacher-led curriculum initiatives in schools to facilitate professional growth and the improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. It was used to verify whether teacher-led curriculum initiatives are evident in the improvement of quality of teaching and learning in Independent schools.

3.5 Selection of Sample

The researcher selected six different independent schools at which to undertake this research. These six schools were within the Gauteng region and they were accessible to the researcher. All six schools had been involved in the GISCDI since it commenced and were relevant to the research, for the teachers participating to have a strong understanding of the initiative. Their experience would be valuable in gathering appropriate honest perceptions and feelings about the initiative. These teachers would have also participated in the Formal

Benchmarking aspect of the initiative for the four years and any feedback would be considered from an informed perspective.

Semi-structured interviews were held with the teachers who had participated in the curriculum development process for the past four years. They also completed a short questionnaire to reveal their personal details, teaching experience and information regarding the schools at which they were employed. Assurance of confidentiality and anonymity were given to the participants, and the intended use of the data was discussed prior to commencement of the interviews.

Research was done in both the English and Mathematics learning areas. Four English teachers and two Mathematics teachers were interviewed, and all were from different independent schools in Gauteng. The one Mathematics teacher is a co-ordinator for this area, and she had held this position since inception of the GISCDI.

This is non-probability, purposive sampling, as the teachers to be interviewed were hand picked by judgment of their typicality (Patton, 1990). The teachers all had first hand experience of the curriculum development programme, and were involved in this initiative from its conception.

All schools are independent schools in the Central Gauteng region and are members of the Independent Schools Association of South Africa

(ISASA). The heads of the schools are all members of the South African Heads Independent Schools Association (SAHISA). Two girls-only schools, three boys-only schools and one co-educational school were selected to participate. One girls-only school, one boys-only school and the co-educational school are connected to their own senior schools.

3.6 Biographies of the Participants, Schools and Researcher

The details of the participants interviewed are as follows:

- Sheryl has 30 years of preparatory school teaching experience, holds an HDE and is a mother, stepmother and grandmother. She has taught at preparatory schools in both Kwa-Zulu Natal and Gauteng. She is currently teaching English, Drama and History at a co-educational preparatory school and has an extensive teaching and extra-mural load. This preparatory school will be called School A. Its current junior school enrolment is 500 and it is linked to a senior school. It is situated in an above-average socio-economic area, and draws students from the surrounding area. The parents are wealthy and the school has a strong past pupils' network, with an active Parent Teacher Association. The management comprises a female Head, two Deputy Heads and seven Heads of Department. The Head is fairly trusting of the teachers to get on with their jobs in a professional manner and the Heads of Department are expected to update their skills and provide accurate information to their respective departments, yet they are not considered as being in

managerial roles. The Head adheres strictly to OBE principles, but acknowledges the work of the GISCDI as being valuable and useful if it conforms to the school's programme. This causes some uncertainty regarding her commitment to the GISCDI, and, although teachers attend all the meetings, she often shows little interest in the feedback.

- Jane, is in her early sixties, has children aged 28 and 24 and has taught for 40 years. She has a BA, H Dip Ed and a Diploma in Special Education. She is currently Head of Mathematics at a girls-only school. Jane has had extensive teaching experience in preparatory schools, both locally and abroad. She has also taught in special needs schools. The school, School B, at which Jane teaches, has 400 students in the preparatory school and is linked to a senior school. The school is over 100 years old and has a very strong history of achieving academic excellence. The preparatory school has a Head, two Deputy Heads and four Learning Area Co-ordinators. The management is actively involved in the GISCDI, so the teachers are encouraged and expected to attend meetings regularly. Jane is involved in the preparation of the Mathematics Benchmark Assessment, and plays an important role in the curriculum development process. She leads the Maths development at the school and is currently working with a professor from the University of Pretoria on the teaching and assessing of measurement in junior school.

Deleted: ¶

- Kate has recently turned forty. She is divorced and has no children of her own. She holds a BA, B Ed. Hons and an MA in English Literature. Kate has taught at the same school for 17 years and is committed to her career. She teaches at School C, a boys-only school, which is linked to a senior school. She is the Head of Department for English and is the only English teacher for Grade Six and Seven pupils. She also teaches Zulu and is Head of Curriculum and Staff Development. Her extra-curricular load is extensive. The management at her school consists of a Head, two Deputy Heads, Housemasters and four Heads of department. The leadership encourages attendance at the curriculum meetings, but the Head often neglects to communicate the dates of meetings to the staff, so they now contact the co-ordinators of the meetings personally to ensure they do not miss out. The school is over 100 years old and has an exceptionally strong Old Boys' community which continues to support and fund the school. The students are from wealthy families and the parents are involved in the experiences of their sons. A School Council, comprising old boys and parents, leads the school and ensures the continuance of the traditions and academic excellence,
- Len is 37 years old, has had twelve years of teaching experience and is married with two young sons. He has a B.Prim.Ed and a B.Ed. He first taught matric English before moving to preparatory

school. Len and his wife are both teachers at independent schools and both teach English to Grade Seven. He teaches at an autonomous boys-only school, School D, which is 83 years old and 'has a relatively wealthy client base'. The school has 380 students and 38 teachers. The management structures include the Headmaster, Head of Junior Prep, Head of Senior Prep, various Heads of hostels, music and sport. Len describes the school as being emotionally well balanced, although not perfect, with all stakeholders working continually to improve it. The leadership is supportive of the staff and encourages professional development and participation in the GISCDI. The feedback from meetings is encouraged, discussed at school level and implemented where appropriate. The teachers carry a heavy teaching and extra-curricular load, but the supportive structures of the management maintain the status quo.

- Mary is 45 years old. She has a B.A., H Dip Ed and a FDE in Education Management. She has had 17 years of teaching experience in senior schools and now teaches Grade Six and Seven English. She is married to a schoolteacher and has two sons in senior school. Mary has many responsibilities at her school and, being the Head of the English Department, attends the GISCDI curriculum development meetings. The school, School E, is an autonomous, girls-only school in a very affluent suburb. It has 206 students, 15 full-time teachers and several

part-time teachers. The management structure consists of the Headmistress, two Deputy Heads and Heads of subjects. The environment is not very collegial, and decision-making is fairly autocratic. Mary willingly attends the GISCDI meetings, but other teachers feel their load is too heavy to take on extra responsibilities. The headmistress believes in the value of the GISCDI, but does not invite feedback and allows Mary to get on with the job.

- Paige is in her late fifties and was previously involved in school management for twenty years. She has a BA and B Ed Hons. Paige now heads up the Mathematics department of an autonomous boys' preparatory school. She is married and both her children are finished school. The school at which Paige teaches, School F, is in a wealthy suburb. It is the most expensive boys' school in Gauteng and draws students from the upper socio-economic echelons. The management structures are very similar to other preparatory schools, with a Headmaster, a Deputy Head for Senior Prep and one for Junior Prep. There are Housemasters and Heads of Subjects as well. The Head has been a driving force behind the GISCDI and encourages teachers to participate in all curriculum development meetings. Paige leads the Mathematics Curriculum Initiative and gets much support from the Headmaster. The school encourages professional growth and provides support for teachers to grow

professionally. Paige feels that it is a very happy and nurturing environment, and the teachers enjoy what they do.

- Desiree, the researcher. Is in her early forties and has had twenty-one years of teaching experience. She holds a four-year Higher Diploma in Education and is currently completing her Masters in Education. She has taught in both senior and junior schools and is currently the Deputy Headmistress of an independent all girls' preparatory school, which is linked to a senior school. She was the co-ordinator for the English GISCDI for four years and has now passed the role on to a colleague from a different independent school. She teaches in one of the six selected schools, of which only the Mathematics department participated in the research. She teaches only English at this school, and chose not to include the English department in the research.

The researcher did not feel that her role as researcher impacted on the participants in any way, other than for those who were interviewed, to be honest and sincere as they have worked together on the initiative for over four years and have developed sound relationships of honesty and integrity. The sincerity of the responses in both the questionnaire and interview allowed the researcher to have 'honest conversations' with professional colleagues. These conversations are directly linked to the

teachers reflecting on their teaching practices and describing their commitment to putting into action, changes to their previous practice, after involvement in the GISCDI.

3.7 Development of Instruments

The questions for the semi-structured interviews⁴ follow the format of the sections described in the previous section on methodology. These were designed to elicit the opinion of the participants in the project. The interviews were designed to identify what teachers thought about the concept of teacher-led curriculum initiatives, its current application at their school, their experiences of the initiative, how it allowed them to reflect on their practice and change their teaching practice. It considered whether they thought or had actual evidence to show that it had improved their teaching practices and student achievement. A pilot interview helped to refine the instrument.

Semi-structured interviews (Cunningham, 1976) were conducted with teachers throughout the research to form the basis of the within-cycle calibration. Questions were presented in an open-ended manner, allowing the interviewer the opportunity to determine the limits of the respondents' knowledge and understanding of each question, and allowing probing in order to clarify misunderstandings (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

After the interviews, each participant completed a questionnaire⁵, which was structured to gain an understanding of the person behind the profile. The questionnaire also requested detailed information on the schools they found themselves at and the profiles of these schools, as well as the schools' involvement in and attitudes to the GISCDI.

These teachers, who had participated throughout the project, were used to identify the factors that had led to the success of the implementation of teacher-led curriculum initiatives.

3.8 Data Gathering Strategies

The semi-structured interviews were recorded on a tape-recorder and detailed transcripts are available and are discussed in the final report. Data in the form of field notes and observations from informal discussions at various meetings and inter school gatherings, proved useful to the researcher. Information from the questionnaire was added to the data. This data was written up in the form of action memos and utilised as the research progressed. This information provided a context for analysis of the responses in the interviews. They were used to provide an ongoing record of the teacher's development as a pedagogue and how change was implemented.

Detailed descriptions of specific changes to classroom practice made by teachers, after participation in the GISCDI programme and

⁴ See Appendix One

attendance at the curriculum meetings, will be presented. The impact the GISCDI has made, goes beyond opinions only, but actual evidence of reflecting on one's practice as a pedagogue and moving forward by implementing new ideas and strategies, will be explained. The conversations held with the school leaders will attempt to provide feedback and substantiate evidence of the teachers' reflection on practice leading to changes in teaching methodology.

Personal notes, transcripts and the questionnaire, which linked research questions to data collection, were used for the final write up of findings. These initial summaries will be used for reporting the findings to the staff involved, as well as to school management and other interested parties.

3.9 Data Analysis and Procedures

Semi-structured interviews contained open-ended questions requiring answers generated by the respondents, based on their impressions of a particular aspect of the programme. The analysis technique for this data was the colour coding of these open-ended responses and placement into bins, initially with data being used in matrix formation during the writing up of the findings. This data provided the perspective of the participants in the programme. This data proved to be useful in the identification of areas for further investigation and analysis in following cycles of research.

⁵ See Appendix Two

The pilot interview looked at the data generated, and these results assisted in refining the questionnaire to be used in the research. All subsequent interviews with the participants were transcribed and the gathered information was coded. A basic quantification of data led to an analysis of the themes presented, without misrepresentation of the interviews. Narrative analysis of the data (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) required the telling of stories of the actual change in classroom practice, and further analysis allowed for structural descriptions of actual experience (Katz, 1987).

3.10 Timetable of Research

All instruments were prepared for on-site research that was undertaken during May, June and July 2004. The results were collated and presented in the final report in February 2005, corrected in August 2005.

3.11 Dissemination of results

The results were discussed with the Heads of the schools and any dissemination of direct school data has met with their approval. I plan to write a Journal article for Independent Education and publish information on why teacher-led curriculum initiatives are important for school improvement and teacher development. I aim to present a paper on the findings, linked to international research, at the Heads of Independent schools' term breakfast and at the ISASA curriculum

development meetings. I also hope to attend an International School Effectiveness and School Improvement Conference to present my findings.

I will forward the results and findings to David Frost and Alma Harris in the United Kingdom. Their research on Teacher Leadership and teacher-led school improvement has guided my study.