

ABSTRACT

Educators at full-service schools in South Africa are required by policy, to respond to the diversity of learners in the classroom by means of differentiating the learning environment, teaching methods employed and the manner in which the learners are assessed. Within the South African context, three studies relate specifically to differentiated instruction and multi-level teaching: Nel, Kempen and Ruscheinski (2011); de Jager (2013); Walton, Nel, Muller and Lebeloane (2014). The above research was concerned with using differentiated instruction to modify the curriculum of the 'Learn Not To Burn' Programme to make it accessible for learners at a special school, challenges with regard to implementing differentiated learning activities within a high school context and investigating responses of educators at a full-service school in the long term, to training they had undergone in multi-level teaching.

The topic of this study aims to explore and describe Grade 7 Mathematics and English First Additional Language educators' understanding, knowledge of and ability to apply differentiated instruction in relation to inclusive teaching and learning within a full-service school. The research was conducted at two, full-service schools in Gauteng, over the course of three weeks. There were six participants in total, including three Grade 7 Mathematics and three Grade 7 English educators. A qualitative research methodology was adopted. Data was collected by means of an initial questionnaire, a preliminary interview, classroom observations, document analysis (analysis of lesson plans and assessment tasks) and post-observation interviews.

The patterns which arose from the data analysis were determined by initially summarising the data at an individual level for each participant and then comparing the six participants' responses with each other in relation to the codes. An analysis of the GPLMS lesson plans indicated that the lesson plans specified core concepts of the curriculum, essential questions relating to the topic were evident, where the topic was divided into specific units to be covered in a particular order. Curricular strategies in relation to content, process and product were stated. However, a key pattern to emerge was that there is an over-reliance on GPLMS lesson plans as opposed to independent planning for differentiation. During classroom observations, the Grade 7 Mathematics and English educators identified big ideas when covering the curriculum, visual supports were evident; the educators varied the format of their instruction and demonstrated sensitivity to the learning needs of individual learners that had been identified during the lessons. While 'common sense' inclusive practices were observed, they cannot be described as differentiated instruction per se. The third pattern to emerge was that assessments were not differentiated optimally, as the focus was centred too heavily upon curriculum coverage and ensuring performance on the Annual National Assessment (ANA) exams. Results from this research suggest that at a basic level, some aspects of differentiated instruction are being included in Grade 7 Mathematics and English classrooms in full-service schools in Gauteng. This is not at a sufficient level to facilitate transformation and inclusion. (Key Words: Transformation, inclusion, differentiated instruction, full-service school, GPLMS lesson plans, curricular strategies, assessment tasks).