Searching for learners' voices: Teachers' struggle to align pedagogical-reform policy with instructional practice

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Abstract: Globally, pedagogical reform policy seeks to give space to learners' voices. But teachers often struggle to engage learners in knowledge construction, deconstruction and reconstruction; as advocated by official curriculum reform policy. Aligning classroom practice to pedagogical-reform policy remains an uphill struggle for most teachers. This article examines Zimbabwean teachers' efforts to align teaching methods to new curriculum policy which seeks to engage learners in classroom discourse. Using a qualitative multiple-case study and the theoretical lens of sense-making, a case study of History teachers assessed how they were implementing new pedagogical prescriptions. Data gathered from the document analysis, interviews and 47 lesson observations suggest that, although participants made efforts to open up a space for learners' voices, they often drifted towards teacher-centred practice. Some participants complained that the unavailability of technology-based instructional resources, recommended in the new reform policy, made them resort to rote pedagogy. Others believed that teacher didacticism and the dictation of notes were inevitable in History instruction. The use of learner-centric approaches (as advocated by policy) appeared to be just a drop in the ocean. This study recommends pedagogical reorientation for teachers if learners' voices are to be heard and large-scale instructional reforms are to be successfully enacted at classroom level.

Keywords: learners' voices, pedagogical-reform policy, curriculum alignment, sense-making, instructional practice

Introduction

In many countries the voices of learners are often not heard in classroom discourse. This is mainly because, consciously or unconsciously, learners are silenced by teachers and textbooks. Though often concealed, the tyranny of the teacher and the textbook has been pervasive in the classroom for quite some time. As a result, curriculum reform policies in many countries call for a shift from teacher-dominated to learner-centric pedagogy (Gherzouli, 2019; Holtman, Martin, Mukuna, 2018; Moyo, 2014; Schul, 2015; Prendergast, Treacy, 2017; Tekir, Akar, 2019). Du Plessis (2020) remarks that “learner-centred teaching is a global challenge” (p. 1); meaning that a learner-centred curriculum has not been attained in most classrooms. For centuries teachers have been “sages on the stage” (Schwerdt, Wuppermann, 2011, p. 62) who, intentionally or unintentionally, silence learners’ voices during lessons.

In his seminal work *Pedagogy of the oppressed* Freire (1970, p. 71) opined that “Education is suffering from narration sickness. The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalised and predictable... His task is to ‘fill’ the students with the contents of his narration – contents which are detached from reality.” It appears not much has changed since Freire made these observations some 50 years ago. Teachers continue to ‘pour’ knowledge into learners’ minds. The belief that teachers do not like changing their classroom practices has remained popular up to the present day (Du Plessis, 2020; Fryer, 2018; Fullan, Miles, 1992; Prendergast, Treacy, 2017; Reese, 2013). Weimer (2012) posits that “it is human nature to be uncomfortable with change” (p. 67). In the same vein, Harris and Graham (2019) found that “teachers are often seen as resistant to change” (p. 43); because they prefer rote pedagogy, which is the only teaching methodology most of them are familiar with.

However, some scholars do not share the popular belief that teachers are naturally resistant to change. For instance, Drake and Reid (2018) argue that, in Canada, there is little professional development for teachers; making it difficult for teachers to embrace innovative learner-centred methodologies, as required by policy reforms. In a study conducted in Zimbabwe, Chimbi and Jita (2019) concluded that “it is an overstatement to assume that teachers by nature dislike change and are not willing to acquire new knowledge and skills” (p. 66). They argue that a lack of knowledge and skills make teachers appear resistant to change when, in fact, they need to be empowered with new knowledge and skills to appreciate curriculum change and pedagogical reform.

In January 2017, the government of Zimbabwe disseminated the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015-2022 (MOPSE, 2015). The new curriculum discourages rote pedagogy as a teaching method and the secondary school History Syllabus 4044 prescribes the use of learner-centred and multi-sensory approaches, in place of teacher-centric methods (CDTS, 2015). Teacher exposition, lecturing, dictation, and writing notes on the board are not mentioned in the new syllabus. Instead, the new curriculum framework stresses that: "The focus will be on knowledge generation not just information delivery and treating learners as empty vessels ready to be filled with information" (MOPSE, 2015, p. 41). This is what policy documents say; but the existing literature shows that, very often, there is a yawning gap between what policy recommends and how teachers teach in the classroom. Teachers often struggle to align classroom practice with official policy (Tekir, Akar, 2019) and the current study explores the extent of this gap in Zimbabwean schools.

Review of Related Literature

Pedagogical reform as an uphill struggle

Despite many progressive changes in schools in developed countries, teachers continue to face challenges in reforming their pedagogy to align with official reform policy. Desimone (2002) points out that classroom practice is one area of the school curriculum that has proved most resistant to change. Summarising classroom practice in American and British schools, Reese (2013) concludes that "progressive ideas are easier to proclaim than act upon" (p. 322). The struggle to match policy with practice in schools appears universal and crosscuts all learning areas.

The literature indicates that History teachers are known for their predictable and unimaginative teaching methods. Warren (2007) remarks that many complaints have been recorded against secondary school history teachers' poor pedagogy. Schul (2015) also found that "there is a problem with the teaching of history...history, as a school subject, is often associated with memorisation of names and dates and a boring lecture by the teacher" (p. 24). For a myriad of reasons, History teachers seem not to change their classroom practice as expeditiously as policy demands.

Stoel, Van Drie and Van Boxtel (2015) established that classroom practice in Canada, Europe and Australia is generally out of sync with the policy goal of teaching historical reasoning. Most teachers focus on teaching and ex-

amining lower order recall knowledge, which relies on memory. In England, didacticism is the commonest approach in many history classes (Harris & Graham, 2019). Many History teachers in developed countries continue to struggle to transform their classroom practice in line with reform policy.

This is because very often there is the simplistic (and often misleading) assumption that “teachers will, machine like, alter their behaviour because they are simply told what is good for them and for their students” (Prendergast, Treacy, 2017, p. 129). However, the situation on the ground shows that when a reform signal is sounded teachers do not change their classroom practice in a mechanical manner. Teachers are historical beings who understand and try out new teaching methods within the context of their old experiences and practices (Cohen, 1990), making them appear resistant to change. They cannot shed off their old practices as if they are removing a dirty coat because the past influences their sense-making of new pedagogical policies.

Pedagogical reform in Southern Africa

If the policy-practice gap still exists in the developed world, the disparity is worse in developing countries. Despite numerous curriculum-reform initiatives in Malawi, Zambia, Botswana, South Africa and Lesotho, classroom practice has not changed much in the past two decades or more (Botha, Adu, 2016; Chirwa, Naidoo, 2014; Du Plessis, 2020; Hendricks; Tabulawa, 2013). Teacher-centred methods dominate the teaching of most subjects. According to (Raselimo, Wilmot, 2013), only secondary school Geography teachers in Lesotho were found to be transforming their pedagogy towards learner-centred instruction.

In Zimbabwe, the literature shows that classroom interaction has not changed much since independence in 1980. A study by Chitate (2005) indicates that, although reform policy recommends learner-centred practice, teacher-dominated methods persist in most classes. Moyo and Moyo (2011) also found that “lists of dates and strings of names” (p. 307) are the staple in History lessons. Mapetere (2013) concluded that “the power of the narrative seems to be gripping the teaching of history in Zimbabwe” (p. 136). Chimbi (2018) also established that, despite all the rhetoric about learner-centred pedagogy in Zimbabwe’s New Curriculum Framework, chalk-and-talk dominate classroom practice. The current study explores why rote pedagogy seems to persist in Zimbabwe; when reform policy advocates for learner-centrism.

Theoretical Framework

This paper taps into sense-making as its theoretical framework. People are by nature curious about what surrounds them. So, teachers are naturally inquisitive about policy prescriptions that seek to change their practices (Willingham, 2009). Wheat, Attfield and Fields (2016) explain that “sense-making is how a person gathers, restructures and reorganises information to help build a plausible understanding about an aspect that is puzzling or troubling” (p. 1). We found sense-making appropriate in exploring teachers' choices of teaching methods during reform implementation. This is because teachers make conscious (and unconscious) efforts to understand and make sense of new policies in the light of their past experiences, the knowledge and skills they possess and the resources available. Sense-making allows teachers to make decisions to use (or not to use) pedagogies recommended in new curriculum reform policy which seeks to make learners' voices audible in classroom discourse.

Objectives and Research Questions

The disparity between what policy says and how teachers teach has fascinated reform-implementation scholars for decades, but not much empirical research has been done to explore how history teachers make sense of reform policy and implement (or fail to implement) the policy prescriptions. Even when teachers have knowledge of what policy expects them to do, they still seem to struggle to implement the required pedagogical reforms. The objectives of this article, therefore, are to juxtapose Zimbabwean secondary school History teachers' understanding of the pedagogical prescriptions of the new History curriculum vis-a-vis the teaching methods they used to implement the new history syllabus. To achieve the set objectives, two research questions linchpin this study: (i) How did history teachers' make sense of the new secondary school History curriculum? (ii) To what extent did the lessons observed comply with the pedagogical prescriptions of the new History syllabus?

Methodology

Research design

This qualitative study is conceived within the constructivist research paradigm. Constructivists argue that there is no knowledge, truth and reality that can stand independent of the contexts and situations in which they are

created (Creswell, 2013). Constructivism was selected as the epistemological paradigm for examining how participants conducted their lessons in response to new pedagogical policy which seeks to give space to learners' voices. The research design selected for this paper is the multiple-case study.

Ethical considerations

Permission to collect data for this study was sought and obtained from the University of the Free State in South Africa and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe. The selected teachers participated in this study voluntarily and were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study with or without giving any reasons. To protect teacher and school identities, pseudonyms are used in presenting and analysing the findings.

Setting

This study was conducted in Chitungwiza, a dormitory town located south-east of Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. Four secondary schools were purposively sampled from a target population of 13 secondary schools in this sprawling residential town. These schools were selected because they were considered (by the curriculum supervisory authorities) to have the best teaching-learning resources in the residential town. The setting and context of research sites are particularly important for constructivists because "qualitative researchers observe people in their natural setting so that they can learn from them about what they are thinking, and more importantly, why they think and act the way they do" (Minichiello, Kottler, 2010, p. 12). For constructivists, truth and reality are not universal, but situational and contextual, so research sites partly determine teachers' sense-making of reform implementation in their unique school and classroom settings.

Target population and sampling procedure

Secondary school History teachers were the target population for this study. One History teacher was purposively sampled from each of the four schools. Certain selection criteria applied. Participants had to have a minimum of a degree in History; a diploma in History Pedagogy; and more than five years' experience of teaching History. Other considerations were that participants were pioneering the new History curriculum with a Form 3 class in 2017 and were willing to be observed over a prolonged period of eight weeks. Each of the four participants was observed teaching the new History curriculum to the same class over the eight-week period. The first

researcher did not manipulate or interfere with the classroom setting and lesson delivery during the lesson observations as he was a non-participant observer.

Instruments for data collection

Document Analysis. Two curriculum reform policy documents were analysed to glean insights into the teaching methods they recommend teachers use in implementing the new curriculum. These policy documents are: Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015–2022 (MOPSE, 2015); and the secondary school History Syllabus 4044 (CDTS, 2015).

Interviews. Three semi-structured interviews (of approximately an hour long each) were conducted with each participant, yielding a grand total of 12 interviews. These interviews were conducted at the pre-observation, intermittent and exit stages during the eight-week fieldwork period to explore how participants made sense of the new pedagogical policy and its implementation. But in this article (generated from a bigger PhD study), not all the 12 interviews were utilised in presenting the findings. The verbatim quotations from the interviews used in this paper were extracted from the four pre-observation interviews, three intermittent interviews and one exit interview; meaning that eight interviews were utilised in the current article.

Lesson Observations. Non-participatory lesson observations were conducted by the first researcher over eight weeks. The plan was to observe each participant teaching the new History curriculum to the same Form 3 class twice a week, yielding a target of 64 lesson observations. However, due to unanticipated interruptions (such as staff meetings, invigilation, and cultural festivals), a grand total of 47 lessons were observed because these unplanned disturbances differed from school to school. Each lesson was 35 minutes long, except for David's which were 70 minutes long each. Prolonged observations in the same class reduced the "observer effect" on teachers and students (Best, Kahn, 2006, p. 166). The observer-effect theory suggests that research participants are likely to change their behaviour (for better or for worse) once they realise that they are being observed. But prolonged engagement is likely to make teachers and students behave the way they normally do, thereby increasing the credibility of the observations made. But it is important to note that, for the purposes of this article (which was mined from a bigger PhD study), only five lesson segments (from five lesson observations) are presented in the results section.

Data analysis

Data collection and analysis were iterative, giving time and space to gather rich data. Data from the document analysis, interviews and lesson observations were transcribed, sorted, coded and arranged to make sense of the patterns, convergencies and divergencies which were emerging. The qualitative data analysis techniques used included: interpretive content analysis, intra-case and cross-case analysis, triangulation, thematic aggregation and data crystallisation. Using the sense-making theory, as propounded by Wheat, Attfield and Fields (2016), data were coded and classified according to the messages conveyed. Data with similar meaning were brought together and listed on a checklist so that a theme could be derived from them. For example, lesson observation transcriptions which showed each teacher's attempts to involve pupils in the lessons were grouped together. The activities the teacher used were coded as text study, map study, picture study, question and answer, class discussion, debate, role play, dictation and note writing; to decipher patterns (and ultimately themes) in the methods each teacher used.

Results

Evidence from the document analysis and interviews is used to corroborate or contradict data from lesson observations on History teachers' compliance or non-compliance with pedagogical-reform policy and its quest for the learners' voices to be heard in the classroom. Ten lessons were observed in Angela's Form 3A, thirteen in Bessie's Form 3B, nine in David's Form 3D and fifteen in Emmy's Form 3E. Sample lesson segments are used to illustrate the pedagogical methods frequently used by each participant in the lessons they were observed teaching.

Reform policy prescriptions

The Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015-2022 discourages teachers from "treating learners as empty vessels ready to be filled with information" (MOPSE, 2015, p. 41). The new curriculum encourages teachers to use learner-centric methods and desist from rote pedagogy. Learners' voices are expected to be heard in the lessons. The new History Syllabus 4044 prescribes that "the teaching of History will be accomplished through the use of the following learner-centred and multi-sensory approaches: games and quizzes, simulation, video and film shows, educational tours, case study, group discussion, discovery, research, debate,

role play, projects, folklore and e-learning" (CDTS, 2015, p. 2). This is what the policy documents say, but what exactly was happening in the Zimbabwean secondary school History classes? The following sections examine how teachers taught vis-a-vis policy prescriptions, what they said in the interviews and the extent to which they provided opportunities for learners' voices to be heard in classroom discourse.

Text study, teacher-directed discussion and dictation

In the pre-observation interview Angela was asked to explain if her pedagogical practice had changed as a result of the introduction of the new history curriculum. She responded that:

Methods have not really changed because of inadequate materials. The new syllabus requires us to use the internet, interactive boards, whiteboards, projectors, computers, but all these things are absent. So, we are resorting to our traditional teaching methods – lecturing and dictation.

Angela taught a lesson on *Mzilikazi's relations with whites*. [Mzilikazi was the King of the Ndebele who rebelled from Shaka (the Zulu King) in 1823. In 1830 he met the Scottish missionary Robert Moffat for the first time in the Transvaal. The two became close friends. To secure himself from the Zulu, the Griqua and the Boers, Mzilikazi later moved his people northwards and crossed the Limpopo River to create the Ndebele kingdom in modern day Zimbabwe]. Angela used a question and answer session as the introduction to this lesson. She then referred learners to a passage in Barnes et al. (2010, p. 53). She wrote three questions on the chalkboard to guide learners as they studied the text individually for five minutes. Teacher-directed discussion followed.

Lesson Segment 1

Angela: Why did Robert Moffat want to be a friend of Mzilikazi?

Learner 1: To spread Christianity, commerce, and civilization.

Angela: Yes, that is what he said, openly. But you must explain that this was the Whiteman's civilisation. Don't just say civilisation because Africans also had their own civilisation. But what was the hidden agenda?

Learner 2: To spread British imperialism.

Angela: True, and what did Mzilikazi benefit from the friendship? Remember, in politics, there is no friendship for nothing – you scratch my back, I scratch yours.

Learner 3: Maybe some guns, because he was always involved in fights with other tribes.

Angela: Yes, that is correct. Now take the following notes.

Angela started dictating notes on what they had discussed. Angela's classroom practice vindicated what she had said in the pre-observation interview – that her methods had not actually changed although she was aware that the new pedagogical policy required her to use learner-centric approaches. She appeared not to be making any serious effort to put policy into practice mainly because she associated learner-centredness with new technology only. In the absence of the internet and associated technologies, Angela did not see any other possibilities to teach the new history curriculum using learner-centred methods, as required by policy. Her sense making of the new history reform policy appeared incomplete because she did not mention or consider the use of other learner-centred methods which have nothing much to do with technology like simulation, group discussion, debate, role play and folklore.

Map study, question-answer and note writing

Bessie taught a lesson on *Origins of the Slave Trade* to Form 3B. As the introduction she explained the meaning of the word 'origins' and asked learners to sit in pairs. Each pair was given a one-page handout with a map showing *Routes of the Slave Trade* (Figure 1). She instructed learners to study the map and exchange ideas for five minutes. After the pair work, Bessie initiated a question-answer session.

Lesson Segment 2

Bessie: Let us look at this map. Where were the slaves taken from?

Learner 1: Africa.

Bessie: Where were they taken to?

Learner 2: Europe and America.

Bessie: Yes. Some were taken to North America, Central and South America. Others were taken to European countries like Portugal, Britain, and France. Now, can you identify the places from which the slaves were taken from?

Learner 3: Near the Congo River.

Bessie: Yes, they were taken from the Congo Kingdom. This kingdom lost many people to the slave trade. Any other place from where the slaves were obtained?

Figure 1: Routes of the Slave Trade

Source: Moyana, Sibanda, Gumbo, 2005, p. 119

There was no response from the class. Bessie looked frustrated and said, “So, you don’t want to discuss? Ok, let me give you the notes.” She wrote notes on the slave trade on the chalkboard and the learners silently copied them into their notebooks. The lesson, which had started with a learner-centred activity, degenerated to note giving by the teacher. Many such lessons were observed in Form 3B.

However, during the pre-observation interview, Bessie thought that she had reformed her practice. She explained that: My attitude was changed by going to the university to do B.Ed. in History. Prior to that, I gave pupils notes and sometimes never cared to explain them...But when I came back beginning this year [2017], I started to see the teaching of History with another eye ...

Nonetheless, the 13 lessons observed in Form 3B showed that not much had changed in Bessie's classroom practice, contradicting what she had said in the interview. Bessie's sense making of the new history curriculum and her pedagogical practice appeared contradictory.

Multiple sources, class discussion and dictation

David used text study in conjunction with class discussion in most of the nine double lessons observed in Form 3D. In the lesson on *Why the Ndebele settled in Zimbabwe*, David used three different textbooks to illustrate different perspectives on the same issue. The textbooks used in this lesson were by: Mavuru and Nyanhanda-Ratsauka (2008, p. 64); Moyana and Sibanda (2007, p. 18); and Mpofu, Muponda, Mutami and Tavuyanago (2009, pp. 63-64). Below is an excerpt from the lesson.

Lesson Segment 3

David: Why did Mzilikazi and his people decide to settle in Zimbabwe?

Learner 1: There were good pastures for cattle, which were important to the Ndebele.

Learner 2: But this book says they settled for security reasons – it was far away from the Zulus and the Boers.

David: Yes, both books are correct. The Ndebele had rebelled against Tshaka, and the Zulus still wanted to punish them for that. Remember, the Zulus and the Boers attacked the Ndebele several times, forcing them to move further north. And cattle were also important in their lives. Any other reason?

Learner 3: The area also had a lot of elephants, which were important for external trade.

David: Yes, but who can explain this point more clearly?

Learner 4: Elephants provided ivory. Mzilikazi could trade ivory with the Portuguese coming from the east, and the Boers and the British from the south.

David: Very good. So, we say that Matabeleland was strategically located and that is why the Ndebele decided to settle there permanently.

Learners in Form 3D were eager to participate in the class discussion as they could articulate and justify their ideas in fluent English. After the discussion David dictated notes to reinforce what had emerged during the class discussions. In the pre-observation interview, David had explained that “the 20 students who chose to do History are of above average intelligence and

the number is an appropriate class size for the new curriculum. So, I expect a 100% pass rate.” Teacher judgment on learners has far-reaching implications on how a teacher conducts lessons with a group of students. This judgement serves as a basis for assessing students' work and performance during lessons (Drexlerová, Šeďová & Sedláček, 2019). David considered Form 3D to be a class of gifted learners. Indeed, based on the discussion that transpired in this lesson, learners in Form 3D were of above average cognitive aptitude, and their voices were heard in this lesson.

But in the intermittent interview, David argued that “making students write their own notes is like leaving your students in the wilderness. You must guide them ... In History, the teacher remains the master of the subject”. David's classroom practice seemed to justify his belief that History teachers cannot totally do away with exposition and dictation. His sense-making of the pedagogical demands of the new history curriculum and classroom practice appeared to be a concoction of old teaching habits and new practices. He seemed to be at the cross-roads of teacher-centrism and learner-centred pedagogy.

Picture study and class discussion

The first lesson observed in Emmy's Form 3E was on *Rhodes and the colonisation of Zimbabwe*. [Cecil John Rhodes was a British mining magnate and politician in Southern Africa. He was Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1890 to 1896. He founded the British South African Company (BSAC) which spearheaded the colonisation of Northern and Southern Rhodesia (now Zambia and Zimbabwe respectively). The BSAC named the two territories after him in 1895]. Emmy used picture study (Figure 2) as the initial stimulus for the lesson and a class discussion followed. Below is an excerpt from the lesson.

Lesson Segment 4

Emmy: What can you say about Rhodes' personality and character from this picture?

Learner 1: He looks a serious man and his haircut reflects a touch of class.

Learner 2: He looks ambitious and determined to achieve his goals.

Emmy: Can you elaborate on this point?

Learner 2: His goals were to occupy areas rich in minerals so that he could sell the minerals and make profit.

Figure 2: Cecil John Rhodes
 Source: Mavuru, Nyanhanda-Ratsauka, 2008, p. 115

Learner 3: He looks wealthy from his suit; his ring is made of diamonds and gold, and the chair he is sitting on is expensive leather.

Emmy: Very interesting. So, why do you think Rhodes was interested in Zimbabwe?

Learner 3: He wanted gold and diamonds, as shown by his expensive ring. He wanted to find a “Second Rand” in Zimbabwe to dig for gold, diamonds, and other minerals. [The Rand is a mineral rich area in South Africa].

Emmy summarised the responses coming from the learners on the whiteboard. In the pre-observation interview, she had said: “There is no room for dictation in the new curriculum ... I don’t use lecturing and note giving. They write their own notes so that they will be able to interpret them.” Emmy lived up to her words and did not dictate notes to students. In the lesson on the economic reasons for the scramble for Zimbabwe, all 49 learners in Form 3E had written notes before the lesson. The lesson was used for discussion and learners added new points to what they had already written in their notebooks.

Role playing

Emmy’s Form 3E used role playing in three lessons: *The signing of the Rudd Concession (1888)*, *The Shangani and Mbembesi Battles (1893)* and *The Matopos Indaba (1896)*. These role plays enabled learners to develop skills of empathy and communication in recreating historical events. The most outstanding role play was on the signing of the Rudd Concession. Les-

son segment 5 captures this role play. [The Rudd Concession was signed in October 1888 between Charles Rudd (a representative of Cecil John Rhodes) and Lobengula (King of the Ndebele and son of Mzilikazi). John Smith Moffat (son of Robert Moffat) played an intermediary role and persuaded Lobengula to sign. Lobengula trusted John Moffat because of the close friendship that had existed between their fathers (Mzilikazi and Robert Moffat). But the trust was misplaced because John Moffat wanted the destruction of the Ndebele Kingdom and its annexation by the British].

Lesson Segment 5

The narrator explained that we were to witness the negotiation and signing of the Rudd Concession. Chairs and tables were arranged in front of the class. The different characters took their positions. Lobengula and his indunas were on the right side sitting on chairs. The interpreter, Thompson, and the missionary, John Smith Moffat, were sitting on the floor in the middle as intermediaries. The lawyer, Rochfort Maguire, Charles Rudd, and a few other 'whites' were sitting on chairs on the left. The negotiations started:

Moffat (clapping): My King, if you sign this paper, you will become a friend of the great white Queen.

Lobengula: Why must I become a friend of a white Queen? I am not interested in putting my hand on the white men's piece of paper. I don't want to see these whites on my land; and the land of the Mashona is my land too.

Moffat: But, Nkosi (King), if you become a friend of the great white Queen, she will protect you when you are attacked.

Lobengula: Attacked? By who? Remember, we, the Ndebele, fear no man.

Lotshe and Sikombo (Lobengula's indunas; clapping): Nkosi yamakhosi! (King of kings!) The great bull elephant! These whites are our good friends. They have promised us a lot of guns to use against the Boers and the Zulus, our great enemies. If you sign this paper, we will be stronger than the Zulus and the Boers.

Moffat: And, my King, only 10 white men will come to dig only one hole [mine] on your land. They will surrender all their guns to you. In fact, they will be your servants.

The learners convincingly re-enacted the roles of persuasion and trickery to spice the verbal agreement, which deviated significantly from the written concession. Learners laughed heartily when Lobengula (with a shaking hand) was assisted by the missionary, John Smith Moffat, to put an X on the agreement as his signature. The actors were able to use "the power of hu-

mour” (Yoder, 2020, p. 12) to make the lesson interesting and easier to remember for the whole class. The role play was a captivating comic relief and a lively depiction of one of the most critical episodes in Zimbabwean history.

All the 15 lessons observed in Emmy’s Form 3E were learner-centred and activity-based. Learners’ voices were active in all these lessons. This supported what she had said in the pre-observation interview: “Even before the new curriculum, I had already moved from the teacher-dominated approach.” In the intermittent interview, she declared, “I have been using these learner-centred methods. To me, the new methods are old. I have been using them before the new curriculum ...” Indeed, Emmy was a progressive History teacher, even before the rolling out of the new curriculum. In the exit interview she explained that the post-graduate teacher education programme at university introduced her to learner-centric pedagogy and she embraced the approach the way a duck takes to water. As a result, she found it easy to make sense of the new pedagogical reform policy and give apace to learners’ voices in the classroom.

Discussion

Making sense of reform policy

McLaughlin (1987) established that, as teachers make sense of the meaning of new reform policy, they can respond in three ways: non-compliance, co-optation or mutual adaptation. Co-optation is a symbolic response. This is when teachers implement changes superficially. Bessie, for instance, used pair work and class discussion in a perfunctory manner as she always ended by writing notes on the chalkboard. Hoadley and Jansen (2009) found that some South African teachers responded to the implementation of the first post-apartheid curriculum (Curriculum, 2005) in a symbolic manner. They point out that: “These teachers simply interpret the new curriculum through the only lens they have, their old understandings of teaching and learning ... with no real changes in the teachers and the learners” (Hoadley & Jansen, 2009, p. 224). It appears Bessie was teaching History through her old lenses. She also used her old lenses to make sense of new pedagogical policy, thereby undermining her efforts to reform classroom practice. Although she talked of fundamental changes in her teaching methods in the interviews, her lessons remained teacher dominated.

Despite the use of text and map study, multiple sources and discussion (as recommended by the new curriculum), Angela, Bessie and David al-

ways reverted to teacher-centred practices, silencing learners' voices in the process. This reflected elements of what Ashenden (2012, p. 10) calls "a hybridised but clearly teacher-dominated classroom order." Teachers can articulately talk about new pedagogical approaches simply because they have heard or read about them, but implementation will only be superficial. Spillane (2000) found that "teachers can adopt new materials without ever changing the intellectual rigor of the content they present to students or the manner in which they engage students with this content" (p. 310). Tyack and Cuban (1995) point to a wide gap between "policy talk" and "policy action" (p. 40). The three teachers mentioned above appeared to engage more in policy talk than policy action.

Reform as moving through the fog

To describe the confusion and uncertainty that characterise the thinking of most teachers when implementing a new reform policy, Ganon-Shilon and Schechter (2017, p. 2) use the metaphor of "steering through the fog." In conceptualising the new pedagogical policy, Angela seemed to have blurred vision – like someone driving through the fog. She had difficulties in making sense of the new reform policy as reflected in how she contradicted herself in the pre-observation and intermittent interviews. In the pre-observation interview, she remarked that "methods have not really changed because of inadequate materials." But in the intermittent interview, held four weeks later, Angela seemed to contradict herself: "We used to teach using the lecture method, but with the new curriculum, there is need to do practical research. There is also need for students to write notes for themselves." But in the ten lessons she was observed teaching, Angela often started with teacher-directed discussion and then deviated to dictation and lecturing; showing that her sense-making was blurred by the fog of reform uncertainty. She was not sure whether she had reformed her practice (or not) as demanded by reform policy.

David's classroom practice also reflected that he was trudging a foggy road. His sense-making of new reform policy was not clear, as depicted in the interviews. Although he used multiple textbooks to present competing perspectives on one theme, he had not completely made sense of what the reform policy required him to do in terms of classroom practice. He still believed that:

The teacher must play a critical role in subjects like History, where we have limited text recovery. It's different from Science and Mathemat-

ics, where you can prove a theory again and again ... In History, the teacher remains the master of the subject and, so, must give notes.

Despite efforts to reform his practice, David still regressed to teacher-centric practice mainly because he believed that teacher-centred pedagogy is inevitable in History instruction. This regression tended to reduce the audibility of learners' voices in David's lessons; although the learners had both the capacity and interest to contribute to historical discourse.

Reform as mutual adaptation in a flipped classroom

It is important to recognise that teachers do not implement policy as given. Priestley and Philippou (2018) argue that "teachers do not implement policy; they enact, translate, and mediate it, through a process of iterative refraction, filtered via existing professional knowledge, dispositions and beliefs" (p. 153). Teachers modify and enact policy the way they understand and make sense of it. This implies mutual adaptation as teachers make sense of reform documents in the light of the knowledge they already possess and the classrooms in which they operate. Mutual adaptation, as envisaged by McLaughlin (1987), involves teachers modifying policy to suit contexts. This creates the image of the teacher as a curriculum maker rather than a simple implementer thereof. Even before the new reform policy was disseminated into schools in Zimbabwe, Emmy had already moved from teacher-centred didacticism to learner-centrism.

Emmy's pedagogical practice was the proverbial 'drop in the ocean.' Of the four teachers in this multiple-case study, Emmy was the only one who did not dictate notes, write notes on the chalkboard or use the lecture method. Emmy strongly believed in Form 3E's potential to write their own notes and contribute to lesson discourse. Drexlerová, Šedřová and Sedláček (2019, p. 12) point out that: "The way teachers perceive and evaluate their students is consciously or unconsciously reflected in teacher behavior towards the students." In the pre-observation interview Emmy insisted that, "I don't use lecturing and note giving. When children do it, it's exciting; they participate, they understand better, they are motivated..." Her classroom practice supported her words, reflecting her mutual adaptation to the new curriculum and strong belief in making learners' voices audible in the history lessons. Emmy was the only teacher in this study whose sense-making of the new reform policy was fully compliant with the official objective of affording auditory space to learners who are often voiceless in most classrooms.

Emmy used the concept of a flipped classroom (Koh, 2019), perhaps without even knowing it. Fitzpatrick (2016) explains that:

In a flipped classroom, students are expected to complete readings and recommended tasks before coming to the classroom. Class time is for engaging students in activities such as experiments or debates that allow students to use course concepts... Instructors play a facilitative role to help students glean insights from activities. (pp. 91-92)

Emmy was able to reverse the traditional roles of the teacher and the learners. Learners talked more than the teacher and engaged in a variety of learning activities, as reflected in the picture study, class discussions and role plays. Emmy appeared to have made complete sense of the teaching methods the new curriculum policy required teachers to use in their practice. Her understanding and implementation of the new pedagogical reform policy made her classroom practice stand out as unique and the most compliant to reform policy directives in this multiple case study.

Conclusion

This study on the implementation of large-scale, state-mandated curriculum reforms reflects the complex web of challenges and opportunities embedded in new instructional policy. It appears it is an overstatement to assume that teachers naturally resist change (Chimbi, Jita, 2019). Emmy seemed to have reformed her instructional practice and gave space to learners' voices in history lessons long before the dissemination of the new instructional reform policy. The other two participants (Bessie and David) showed willingness to implement the recommended learner-centred methods; but appeared to lack the knowledge, skills and resources to do so. But Angela seemed to lack the will power to align her practice to reform policy and seemed comfortable with teacher-centric practices and the silencing of learners' voices in her lessons. The grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) emerging from this qualitative study is that, for curriculum reform to be successful, what must change first are the teachers' mindsets and philosophical orientation so that they appreciate the value of giving space to learners' voices in the classroom. To simply roll out new policy into schools, expecting that teachers will automatically change how they teach, may be an exercise in futility. Teachers need continuous professional development to change their attitudes towards reform policy and make learners' voices more audible in classroom discourse. It may also be beneficial to involve

reform-orientated teachers (like Emmy) in the creation of professional learning communities for teachers and the crafting of new reform policy so that teachers have a sense of ownership of the changes they are expected to implement.

The main limitation of the current multiple-case study is that it cannot be generalised to a wider population without caution. Limited generalisability has often been the greatest weakness of qualitative case studies (McAleese, Kilty, 2019). But this lack of generalisability can also be one of the strengths of case studies. Spillane (2000) argues that the particularisation of the case study “can provide insights that may be useful in other related contexts” (p. 309). The current multiple-case study can, therefore, be used as a stepping-stone for future studies that use larger samples to explore the enactment of new pedagogical policy. Future studies can also take the form of surveys that include primary and secondary schools in peri-urban, rural, resettlement and commercial farming areas. Possible research questions that could anchor future studies are: How can pedagogical practice in urban and rural areas make learners’ voices more audible in 21st century classrooms; and: To what extent are learner-centred practices similar and/or different in primary and secondary schools located in diverse settings? Comparative studies in reform-policy implementation need to be promoted so that learner-centrism and students’ voices become more visible and audible in classroom discourse across different subject areas.

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