



Towards a socially just continuous professional development model for teachers as adult learners

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Abstract

In 2020, the world experienced an unprecedented pandemic with devastating, lasting effects. For South Africa, it revealed stark inequalities in society and in schools. One such disparity was that between the digitally advantaged and digitally disadvantaged in the workplace. South African teachers, like their global counterparts, lamented about their readiness to teach online and in blended classrooms. This prompted our investigation into how teachers as adult learners experience continuous professional teacher development (CPTD) in times of crisis. An exploratory case study, with a purposeful sample of 26 teachers at an independent primary school in Johannesburg, was undertaken. We discovered that teachers struggled with emotional stress and pressure in their efforts to acquire digital skills and competencies within a limited time frame. Hence, appropriate CPTD to support teachers, especially in a time of crisis, is crucial. We present an innovative model for CPTD, which has the potential to meet the needs of post-pandemic teaching and learning as well as provide for socially just CPTD opportunities.

Introduction

COVID-19 has had a direct and undeniably catastrophic effect on education, training and development worldwide. According to Ali (2020: 16), '[t]he Corona virus has revealed emerging vulnerabilities in education systems around the world'. A United Nations Policy Brief (UN 2020: 2) declared that 1.6 billion learners across all continents had been affected by the pandemic, which has also exposed social and historical inequalities prevalent in their daily lives (Czerniewicz, Agherdien, Badenhorst et al. 2020). The unpredictable future we face as a society therefore requires flexible and resilient education systems (Ali 2020).

Owing to the pandemic, the mode of teaching quickly transformed from traditional face-to-face learning to remote, online learning using platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom. Teachers and learners are expected to use this new mode of teaching across the globe (OECD 2020). The rapid transformation to this type of teaching has posed many challenges for teachers as they strive to prepare and deliver quality content remotely. Teachers' pedagogical shifts because of this online learning landscape are also influenced by their pre-existing perceptions of this method of teaching (Pape & Lopez-Aflitto 2020). Nevertheless, in an immediate and urgent response to prepare to teach in a COVID-19 classroom, teachers diligently obliged by figuring out by themselves how best to support their learners. As this way of teaching will become the new normal, teachers need not have to continue to work alone (Hodges, Kerch & Fowler 2020). Instead, teachers need support through relevant CPTD. Guidance, support, and the effective use of resources will go a long way in helping teachers cope and successfully bridge the gap left by remote, online teaching.

For teachers as adult learners, COVID-19 provides a powerful platform to test the potential for online CPTD. Not only does it have the potential to reveal the key limitations teachers may have in terms of digital skills, the correct computer hardware and software components, and an Internet connection to engage in CPTD training, but it also has the benefit of allowing teachers ongoing, flexible training opportunities when face-to-face training is unavailable.

Although digital transformation in education and training is imperative, in South Africa, as in many other developing countries, the stark reality is that many learners and teachers lack access to the Internet, electricity and computer hardware. These components are considered essential conditions for successful online learning (Xaba 2020). This inequitable access to online learning in the education and training sectors brings the issue of social justice to the fore. The social divide is quite clear, as some teachers and learners have access to Internet facilities in order to work online, whereas others have neither the access nor skills to teach, learn and work virtually. High data costs have also impeded many learners from being able to connect to online lessons (Hedding, Greve, Breetzke et al. 2020).

In this chapter, we aim to highlight how current CPTD initiatives fall short in addressing the critical transitioning to online training opportunities for teachers as adult learners. We also address the issue of socially just CPTD and its implications, especially during and post-COVID-19. Finally, we offer an innovative, socially just model of CPTD to train teachers as South Africa moves into a thriving, technologically rich phase of online teaching and learning.

Social justice and CPTD

Social justice is conceptualised as a fair and just relationship between an individual and society. Such a relationship measures both explicit and implicit, fair and equitable access to social privileges, wealth and opportunity. According to Bell (1997: 1), 'social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure'. For him, social justice is both a process and a goal. Social justice in education relates to a concerted effort in challenging social, economic and cultural inequalities experienced by people because of an unequal distribution of resources, power, wealth or privilege. More specifically, in teacher professional development, social justice suggests that teachers are self-governing persons who have their own agency with a determined sense of accountability and therefore need to be dynamic contributors to society (Guthrie & McCracken 2010).

In this chapter, we argue that current CPTD in the South African schooling system neglects issues of social justice on a dual basis. Firstly, current CPTD models are inadequately designed to ensure social justice for both teachers and learners. Badat and Sayed (2016: 139) suggest: 'In sum, the analysis of educational outcomes post-1994 suggests that the cleavages of race, while still noticeable, have become more muted; and inequities of class, gender, and geography have become more apparent.' In both schools and universities, we witness how the inequality of access, opportunities and achievement is directly influenced by the social exclusion of disadvantaged social groups and classes. Secondly, while CPTD has the potential to help teachers navigate social justice issues that they may face in the classroom, this is not happening in South Africa. Instead, many teachers were complete novices to online teaching strategies and assessment methods. Teachers lacked training that would equip them to use online teaching platforms and online tools more effectively. McDonald and Zeichner (2009: 597) point out that 'social justice programmes explicitly attend to societal structures that perpetuate injustice, and they attempt to prepare teachers to take both individual and collective action toward mitigating oppression'. In South African schools, current CPTD models such as workshops, where a trainer speaks and teachers have no active role in training, create conditions that do not optimise learning and development for teachers.

Blended learning for socially just CPTD

Blended learning, by definition, refers to using a variety of methods like face-to-face learning, e-learning and online strategies in order to learn. A strength of blended learning is that it can accommodate various learning preferences, even simultaneously. Van Dam (2011: 16) states: 'Blended learning has become a buzzword in corporate learning. First it was used to mix e-learning (synchronous and asynchronous) with classroom training. Today, organisations also blend different learning technology modalities without a physical classroom.' Blended learning uses a combination of strategies to address learning needs of school-going as well as adult learners. Online learning also has the benefit of offering a variety of learning methods and instruction (Ausburn 2004). Differential learning approaches echo adult learning principles, since adults are the focus of the learning process and product. This is of particular significance for CPTD models, as they cater for teachers who are adult learners.

In the implementation of online learning strategies and the achievement of social justice, some of the issues that need consideration are: access to online learning, time to implement new teaching strategies, and teachers' digital competence. Rasool (2020: 3) indicates: 'Online learning is far cheaper for rural students than building learning institutions, so ensuring that they have online access is essential. Short courses must be recognised as a legitimate form of learning.' Access to online learning can help individuals learn and upskill. However, if access is difficult, particularly due to geographical and socio-economic conditions, it becomes a hurdle to learning and development. Learners reported that funding, technical difficulties, and less social interaction with peers were also barriers to learning online (Adnan & Anwar 2020). Notwithstanding such barriers, a blended learning approach appears to be an effective tool to address issues that South African teachers are facing in the current pandemic, and will face in the post-pandemic period. Electronic learning tools and approaches will be able to promote learning and teaching as the pandemic continues in South Africa and worldwide (Mhlanga & Moloji 2020). Teachers have been encouraged to implement, within a short time frame, a variety of teaching tools like radio, television, digital tools, digital platforms, and learning-at-home packs for learners (UN 2020).

However, in order to do this, CPTD teachers must be equipped to apply a blended learning approach in their teaching in the current global pandemic. Blended learning is an appropriate tool for adult learning and for the delivery of schooling, especially in times of overnight change and high anxiety levels caused by COVID-19. For example, learners were able to listen to radio or watch virtual classes on television in order to continue their education when the COVID pandemic prevented them from attending school with face-to-face methods (Mhlanga & Moloji 2020). However, implementing 'socially aware CPTD' requires a process of continuous reflection on the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes. In this endeavour, teacher engagement and

cooperation is essential in combating CPTD that keeps teachers voiceless, and represses their identity and their ideas around effective CPTD. Kohli, Picower, Martinez et al. (2015: 16) stress that 'developing a cooperative space for learning' creates an opportunity for teachers 'to connect and build community'. With this type of learning community, teachers are able to utilise their collective strengths in order to face new challenges and share learning experiences together. This is also necessary for them to cope with drastic change.

Adult learning principles for CPTD

When designing CPTD for teachers and trainers, facilitators and instructors should consider the well-documented approaches to adult learning. Adult learning principles take into account that adults are more self-directed in their learning and have a vast history and experience, and that learning should address a specific need (Collins 2004).

Van Dam (2011) identifies five dimensions of learning, customisation and personalisation for adult learners:

1. **Learning needs:** Personal learning needs are unique and depend on a large number of characteristics, including job/role, career, experience, personal career and development aspirations, professional education background, years within the workforce, recent assignments, and development feedback from manager/mentors.
2. **Learning preferences:** People learn differently. Learning preferences are based on individual learning styles, cultural differences, language difference, and generational differences – for example, for the younger generation, the use of technology-based learning solutions like mobile learning and game-based learning is a given.
3. **Location:** A geographically dispersed, mobile and virtual workforce drives the need to provide learning at any location, all the time.
4. **Time:** Daily business and performance demands, loaded schedules, and competing priorities require people to use their time as effectively as possible. The available time for informal and formal learning differs by industry, organisation, and job/role, as well as from person to person.
5. **Pace:** The pace of knowledge acquisition and the development of new skills differs significantly from one person to another. The more the learning experience is customised to the unique personal learning needs, the more effective the learning process will be (Van Dam 2011: 28).

With well-designed CPTD, the above-mentioned five dimensions should be implemented as tools to make the learning process current and applicable.

Furthermore, two additional adult learning approaches must be incorporated into CPTD to create socially just offerings for learning and development relevancy-orientated content and peer learning. These two approaches are as follows:

1. Relevancy-orientated content and skills focus on addressing social justice issues through the learning of relevant content and knowledge and the acquisition of relevant skills. This requires creating an individualised learning plan for each adult learner; in the present case, for each participating teacher (Valamis Group 2020).
2. The adult learning principle of peer learning ensures avoidance of learning in isolation. It requires an organisational school culture that is directed towards encouraging knowledge sharing, that is, one where teachers can ask peers for help and can share best practice (Valamis Group 2020).

Mannie (2020: 4) states: ‘Collaborations are key, and good practice must be shared, for us all to move forward. Learning by sharing is growing. The crises have shown that we can respond to change; people are able to work without being micro-managed.’

Thus, the demands created by the current COVID-19 pandemic have given rise to valuable lessons in terms of adult learning, and societal and individual values. In particular, CPTD for blended learning should adhere to the approaches and principles of adult learning in order to render it effective and compatible with the demands of social justice.

CPTD during a pandemic

In this section, we examine the role and CPTD needs of teachers undergoing the transition from conventional to online teaching and learning – more specifically, as a result of COVID-19 and the education sector thus being forced to evaluate how learning and assessment are implemented (Hedding et al. 2020). This discussion also occurs in the light of social justice issues, with special reference to South African teachers.

Affirming the role of the teacher

Teachers worldwide are being lauded for rapidly implementing new strategies to continue and sustain learning at schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The important role of the teacher in the learning process, as well as the social support that teachers offer their learners, has been confirmed during the pandemic (UN 2020). Ultimately, teachers are responsible for creating learning opportunities for learners (Van Niekerk 1999). When COVID-19 broke out, it led to a rethinking of how to keep learners and teachers safe. Innovative CPTD for the changing

circumstances became a top priority; traditional face-to-face CPTD simply could not take place.

Upskilling of digital skills was deemed an essential step in ongoing teacher training (Xaba 2020). This implementation of blended and/or online CPTD strategies was considered a safe way to upskill teachers and enable them to learn about online teaching and learning.

As a safety measure, many schools closed for prolonged periods, and social distancing was one of the first measures taken to promote the health and safety of individuals during the pandemic. Implementing remote learning and cancelling face-to-face meetings were just some of the changes that schools adapted to (McBride 2020). To accommodate this new way of teaching and learning, teaching professionals required adequate training in transforming their traditional classrooms into learning spaces that represented effective online or blended learning opportunities for learners (UN 2020). Both the efficient use of technology and various online teaching platforms were perceived as the best tools for emergency online teaching and learning. Consequently, the need for adequate teacher training in technology, assessment and pedagogy in order to implement online and differentiated learning methodologies became paramount (UN 2020) – and so teachers as adult learners needed CPTD that was tailored to their specific needs. Where institutions could not fully provide this kind of CPTD timeously, teachers were compelled to locate and access digital learning opportunities by themselves.

Teachers' implementation of self-learning

With the worldwide implementation of safety procedures in the form of lockdowns, individuals were encouraged to update their skills and knowledge remotely. Teachers had to be upskilled not only for content, but also for technical aptitude (McBride 2020). Of benefit was that they could teach and learn from their own homes without leaving their front doors. Gautam (2020: 3) suggests that 'reducing employees' commute time, in-person meetings, and other time-intensive activities at the workplace [affords them] the much-needed time to teach and learn (at work or home), as the top factor that prevents employees from learning, is a lack of time to learn at work'. Another opportunity was that teachers had more time to dedicate to their own learning and development in order to teach more effectively online.

The pandemic forced teachers to move out of their comfort zones to being completely dependent on technology and using online learning as the main tool for teaching. Where schools were unable to respond speedily enough with online CPTD, many teachers resorted to self-directed learning by viewing online videos or podcasts on how to utilise specific platforms for online teaching of their learners. Teachers could also contact their peers for advice and training on how to utilise the latest technology and platforms. This positive development was,

however, accompanied by an accentuation of the divide between the digitally advantaged and the digitally disadvantaged. Digitally advanced teachers and learners have access to virtual learning tools and have the skills to use the platforms effectively. In contrast, the digitally disadvantaged have difficulty accessing virtual-learning tools and may have difficulty using virtual platforms. Mannie (2020: 4) points out that '[t]here is also the problem of the digital divide in South Africa, which has to be overcome as a matter of urgency'. For some teachers, the switch to using only online learning was easy, but, for many others, the transition came with its own set of challenges in implementing this in their teaching. Online learning and blended learning programmes were an overnight saviour for those schools that were accustomed to face-to-face learning strategies (Gautam 2020). However, these schools were not in the majority. Unjust situations such as these further highlight social justice issues in relation to CPTD.

Teacher well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic

Teachers experienced different levels of anxiety, fear and stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. The negative effects and feelings of this impeding fear and anxiety will continue in all spheres of life for some time into the future (Fitzpatrick, Harris & Drawve 2020). During the pandemic, many teachers returned to schools eventually, and taught either face to face or using a combination of digital platforms and face-to-face strategies. This was exacerbated by the fear of working in close proximity with learners and colleagues who may have been infected with COVID-19. Again, the issue of social justice came to the fore, since some schools were able to give teachers sufficient psychological support, but others were not able to do this (UN 2020: 15). Teachers were expected to go 'online' and continue teaching within a short space of time while experiencing acute fear and anxiety caused by the pandemic. Many teachers were not proficient in using digital resources for online teaching and this contributed to higher anxiety levels and barriers to teaching and learning (Czerniewicz et al. 2020). Digital learning and training also brought its own range of emotions with it, including stress, anxiety and fear of change that teachers suddenly experienced and had to deal with (Gautam 2020). Teachers were faced with pedagogical and social challenges because of having to teach online during the pandemic (Ferri, Grifoni & Guzzo 2020). A lack of adequate pedagogical online training and development may have contributed to teachers' pedagogical challenges with online teaching and learning. In addition, the social challenges mainly related to the lack of human interaction between teachers (Ferri et al. 2020).

Teachers and the rapid transition from contact learning to online learning

The time frame for implementing online learning and other types of learning instead of traditional face-to-face teaching during the national lockdown in South Africa, was extremely limited. The turnaround time for many teachers to learn to use and implement new technologies and learning management platforms was

short. This compels us to question whether it would be socially just to insist that teachers with already high levels of fear and anxiety face the challenges associated with implementing new teaching and learning strategies within such a limited time frame. The UN Policy brief states:

From the onset of the pandemic, teachers were immediately tasked with implementing distance learning modalities, often without sufficient guidance, training or resources. In many contexts, teacher professional development has moved online or been disseminated via telephone and video applications, but marginalised teachers may have missed out on such support (UN 2020: 14).

The levels of support for teachers were not uniform. Some teachers had substantial support, whereas others had barely any support from peers or managers. Gautam (2020: 2) states: 'Teams and individuals across functions and levels are wading through uncharted waters, using technology they never had to before and doing things in a way never done before.' Implementing a new learning or teaching strategy, with high stressors and within a very short time frame, is problematic and may result in ineffective teaching or learning. Questions that arise are: Were teachers adequately trained to move rapidly from face-to-face learning to blended learning strategies and online strategies? Did teachers have any say in how they would learn to use online learning effectively? Mohamedbhai (2020) comments:

Experience has shown that quality online learning requires that the teaching material is prepared by a professional instructional designer, that the lecturer is pedagogically trained for delivering the programme and [that] the students are equally exposed to the pedagogy of online learning (Mohamedbhai 2020: 2).

This indicates that teachers need specialised training in the design elements of any online work, tasks and assessments, and that a mere duplication of the physical classroom is frankly just not good enough for effective learning. This investigation aimed to explore the role of teachers as adult learners, and their experiences of CPTD during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conceptual framework

In our argument for a socially just CPTD model for teachers as adult learners, we offer Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) professional-capital framework in order to examine the concepts of CPTD, adult learners and social justice. Essentially, professional capital occurs when human capital – in this instance, a teacher's knowledge, skills and disposition toward education – is supported by social capital that consists of collaborative networks with other teachers and the larger school

community, including parents, in order to arrive at collaborative and collegial decision-making. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012: 37) refer to this as '[using] the group to change the group'. The framework of professional capital relies on opportunities for skill-sharing with peer teachers. The professional-capital framework is able to frame learning and development within a community of teachers and education specialists. Professional capital speaks about using teachers to teach other teachers, and about teachers willing to learn from their peers (Hargreaves & Fullan 2012). Learning does not occur in isolation, and teachers can learn from each other to improve their craft. Applying professional capital to the design of a socially just CPTD model will, we believe, have a positive impact on how teachers learn and are able to apply what they learn in the rapidly changing contexts that they find themselves in. If we were to consider the human capital component of this framework, it would be important to establish not only if the teachers have the necessary know-how (knowledge) and ability to use online and blended pedagogies, but also whether they have the desire or passion to do so. A well-designed, socially just CPTD model would be able to assist teachers in making correct pedagogical decisions in order to ensure effective learning that is learner-centred. Applying the social capital component of this framework would mean that creative, meaningful, collaborative relationships between teachers, learners and the wider school community are forged. Teachers become support structures for each other, thus improving professional and personal support as well as teacher well-being. The final component of this professional-capital framework relates to decisional capital. This is characterised by the acknowledgement, acceptance and respect afforded to teachers in both their individual and collective positions to make informed decisions and exercise sound judgement in relation to the teaching and learning milieu.

A case study: Teacher perceptions of blended learning and CPTD needs during the COVID-19 pandemic

Against the above background, we used an exploratory case study inquiry to gauge teacher perceptions of the demands of the transition to blended teaching and learning, and of their need for appropriate CPTD, in an independent South African primary school in Johannesburg, Gauteng, during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a small case study where the focus was on ascertaining the personal experiences of teachers as adult learners and their experiences of CPTD in times of crises. The purposeful sample comprised 26 primary school teachers from the Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase and Senior Phase. Some teachers teach in more than one phase, for example a subject is taught in both the Foundation and Intermediate Phase. All the teachers were selected on the grounds of their participation in the transition from traditional classroom teaching to online teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown.

This study aims to investigate how teachers as adult learners experience CPTD in times of crisis. We propose implementing a socially just CPTD model to afford teachers effective opportunities for learning and development during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We obtained prior permission from the school principal to collect data and outlined the purpose and methods to be used in the inquiry. An electronic, online questionnaire was sent to the participants. Ethical considerations included ensuring that the identities of the participants were protected and that the request for voluntary participation was stated.

Using Google Forms, an online questionnaire was designed in order to gather data. Section A of the questionnaire contained closed-ended items regarding teachers' perceptions of the demands of the transition to blended teaching and learning and about their need for appropriate CPTD during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ten closed-ended statements and questions were put to the participants. The statements in Section A focused on online technology for learning, on support from school managers, and on feelings/emotions during the pandemic. Participants completed a four-point Likert scale where 1 represented the least agreement with a given statement and 4 represented strong agreement with the statement. Examples of the closed-ended statements were as follows:

1. I was anxious to teach in COVID-19.
2. My assessments were effective and valid for online learning.
3. I felt more comfortable teaching face to face than online.

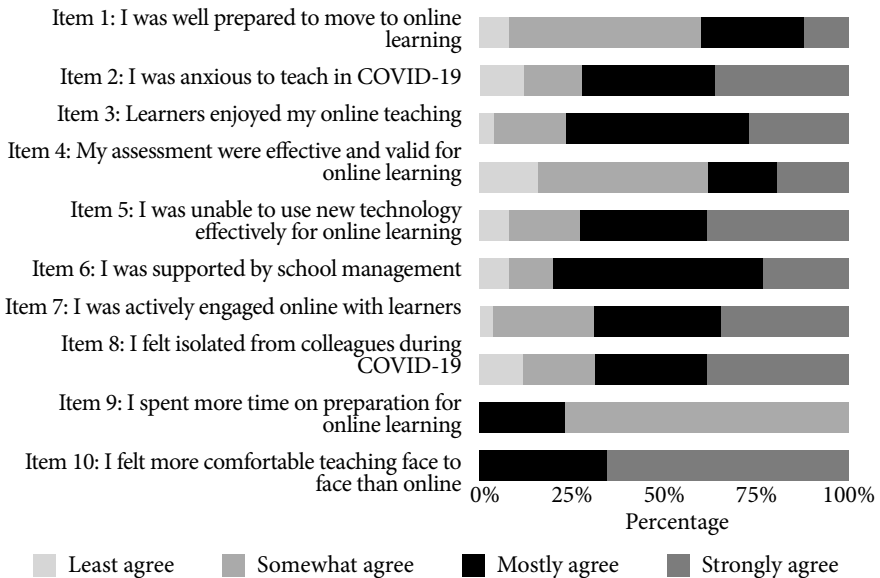
Section B of the questionnaire consisted of six open-ended questions. These questions sought clarification or additional, in-depth information on topics raised in Section A. Section B further sought explanations on teachers' preparedness to teach and assess learners using online learning platforms. Furthermore, it sought clarification on teachers' experiences as adult learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of the open-ended questions were:

1. What (if anything) would have prepared you better for online teaching?
2. Who were you able to contact if you needed help or more training when using online platforms such as Zoom, Teams?
3. What do you think would make blended learning a success?

Results

Quantitative data was analysed using Google Forms. The results of Section A are presented in a scale format ranging from 0% (least agreement with the statement) to 100% (strong agreement with the statement). The results indicate the responses of the teacher participants elicited by the questionnaire. Table 1 tabulates the responses to Section A of the questionnaire regarding blended teaching and learning and the need for appropriate CPTD during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1: Teachers' responses to closed-ended questionnaire items



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Themes 1 to 5 below represent the results of Section A of the questionnaire. Themes 6 to 8 below represent the results of Section B of the questionnaire.

1. Feelings of anxiety and isolation

Two statements in the questionnaire (Items 2 and 8) dealt with teacher anxiety and isolation (see Table 1). Item 2 stated: 'I was anxious to teach in COVID-19.' Thirty-six per cent (36%) of respondents strongly agreed with this statement, while 36% of respondents agreed with the statement. In total, 72% of the respondents felt anxious about teaching during the pandemic. Only 12% of respondents indicated that they did not experience much anxiety about teaching during this period. Item 8 stated: 'I felt isolated from colleagues during COVID-19.' Of the respondents, 38.5% strongly agreed with the statement, while 30.8% of respondents agreed with the statement. In total, 69.3% of the respondents acknowledged feeling isolated from colleagues during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Approach to online and blended learning before and during the pandemic

This theme focused on teachers' confidence and preparation when making the transition from traditional face-to-face teaching and the conventional learning context to online and blended learning. It also included facets of levels of training (e.g. the extent to which one was prepared for online learning approaches). Item 1 stated: 'I was well prepared to move to online learning.' Eight per cent (8%) of respondents least agreed with the statement, and 52% of respondents did not agree that they were well prepared for online teaching and learning. Teachers responded that they felt rushed into using virtual learning and teaching platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, and that they needed more training to use these platforms effectively.

3. Pedagogy of online teaching and learning

Assessing learners' projects and work during the COVID-19 pandemic had to be done online. Many online teaching platforms have built-in methods of assessment, or allow for assessing in a more traditional way by marking learners' work but using online tools. Item 4 stated: 'My assessments were effective and valid for online learning.' Of the participants, 46.2% least agreed with this statement, while 15.4% of participants did not agree.

Using new technology for the purpose of online and blended teaching and learning required confidence on the part of teachers. Item 5 stated: 'I was able to use new technology effectively for online teaching.' Only 38.5% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement; 7.7% disagreed with the statement, while 19.2% least agreed with the statement. This finding indicates that teachers are not so confident in effectively using new learning and teaching platforms online. This might create opportunities for further training and for exploring non-traditional ways of training.

Item 9 stated: 'I spent more time on preparation for online learning.' In response, 76.9% of participants strongly agreed that they spent more time on preparation for online learning compared with more traditional face-to-face teaching, while 15.4% of participants agreed with this statement.

4. Support systems for teachers

Support for teachers encompasses emotional support, work-related support, cognitive support and promotion of general well-being. To understand how teachers perceived support from their school management team, a statement dealt with levels of support. Item 6 stated: 'I was supported by school management.' Of the participants, 23.1% strongly agreed with the statement, while 57.7% agreed with it. Only 7.7% of participants did not agree with this statement at all. It may be

of concern why these respondents felt that they did not get adequate emotional and work-related support from school managers during the pandemic.

5. Teachers' personal teaching preferences

Item 10 stated: 'I felt more comfortable teaching face to face than online.' A total of 65.4% of respondents strongly agreed that they were more comfortable teaching face to face in the classroom than teaching online, whereas 34.6% mostly agreed with this statement. This result indicates that all teachers agreed that they were more comfortable teaching face to face. However, this does not mean that teachers did not actively engage with learners online. Item 7 stated: 'I was actively engaged online with learners.' Of the participants, 34.6% mostly agreed and 34.6% strongly agreed with this statement. However, 26.9% did not agree that they had actively engaged with learners during the pandemic, and 3.8% least agreed.

6. Preparedness and readiness to move to online teaching

In Themes 6 to 8, we present a description of the qualitative analysis of teachers' reflections on their level of readiness and preparedness to move from face-to-face learning to online and blended learning. In this analysis, we also show how teachers suggest ways in which CPTD could have more adequately prepared them for the shift to online teaching and learning.

Teachers commented:

We were thrown in at the deep end. We hardly had enough time to learn how to work [Microsoft] Teams. (Participant 20)

Our school trained us in the use of multiple online platforms (Seesaw, Teams, Zoom) and encouraged us to practise with different tasks and apps. I also used a 'buddy system' to try things out with colleagues. (Participant 24)

I suggest [that] better technology and equipment was needed, e.g. cameras and projectors. (Participant 12)

I would suggest competency training for teachers in all areas, [as well as] competency and skills training for learners in order to utilise ICT devices for academic purposes, [e.g.] how to use platforms to submit, download, print, etc. Teach time management skills, independent-learning skills, communication skills via chat/email/video, etc. [There should also be] training for parents [in] how they need to support their child, [in] how to use platforms to help children, [the] IT equipment required at home ... (i.e. printers, tablet, Wi-Fi, etc.), [in] how to communicate with teachers,

[and in] how to assist their child with time management and other soft organisational skills. (Participant 12)

I felt [as if] it took me longer to prepare for a lesson online than face to face. I had to spend [far] more time [on] my lesson planning. [As] I was uncertain of the online learning. I had to write all my lessons out in more detail than I would have done [for face-to-face] teaching. I also had to make sure that the learners had the work before the lesson, and that took a lot of time. (Participant 6)

After the first shock, I started looking for [all] possible help. I dedicated lots of hours [to] this mission and if, [I] didn't succeed with one colleague, I begged another one for help. (Participant 7)

My co-worker and I worked every night in preparation for the next day. We worked Saturday and Sunday making sure everything was ready for the children. We pre-recorded many of our lessons and set many creative tasks for the children. (Participant 15)

I had to basically learn everything from scratch. I would sit and practise before my lessons so I would know what to do, which was very scary and stressful at the beginning. Once I got the hang of it, I didn't mind it. (Participant 18)

Teachers reflected that they were initially shocked to move so quickly from traditional face-to-face learning to virtual teaching and learning strategies. The above comments also indicate that some teachers decided to use their peers as mentors and thereby learn from them.

7. The need for appropriate CPTD during the pandemic

Under this theme, teachers expressed their views on their experiences of CPTD during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also made suggestions regarding methods to improve CPTD during such pandemic.

Teachers commented:

I [think] that we needed more one-on-one training. In a group it was very confusing and rushed. (Participant 4)

If we had [had] a Zoom licence to start with, it would have been much easier. There was far too much pressure from the top and I felt that they didn't take into consideration the age group that I teach. (Participant 15)

My mentor was taken away from me to help someone else full-time. Training was offered but never materialised. I reached out to various colleagues

but, finally, I had to figure it out for myself or ask family members. [I'm] very disappointed [about the lack of support]. (Participant 25)

Convincing teachers of the benefits and [of] training non-stop, [i]f possible, in small groups of the same-level teachers. (Participant 7)

Online teaching happened so quickly; we had very little [time] to prepare and very little training. More time to prepare and train would have assisted us. (Participant 18)

[I needed] better training from school [onwards]. (Participant 17)

Prior knowledge about the technology [is] needed. (Participant 12)

[What was needed was] more time to plan and training [in the use of] technological tools for interactive teaching and learning. (Participant 18)

8. Teacher experiences of blended and online learning and teaching

Under this theme, teachers reflected on using online and blended teaching and learning methods during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Teachers commented:

I believe this would be highly effective, as learners need to be more competent and independent [in] working online and in class, and [in] acquiring soft skills and competency on ICT devices. The benefits [of] developing skills for careers one day are [considerable]. It would allow for blending different learning styles (auditory, visual, tactile, etc.), and ensure teachers do not become complacent/boring in [their use of] teaching methodologies, and [it would] inspire teachers to continuously re-create resources and assessments. Diversity in learning is needed in today's times. (Participant 12)

Very challenging and unsettling for the kids. (Participant 11)

I prefer teaching in the classroom. You have a lot more interaction and can see where a child is struggling. Children [have more confidence] in class to ask questions and to ask for help. (Participant 4)

I believe there is a place for both; however, the entire class would [either] need to be face to face or online. A mix does not work. (Participant 21)

It's tricky to give dedicated attention to both online students and students in the classroom. [Also,] children online miss out on peer interaction. (Participant 25)

I am not for blended learning, just because I feel that seeing the learners face to face makes it so much easier to engage and connect with your class [compared with] online. I would rather stick to classroom learning. Learners will then spend less time on the screen and more time [on] their books and [in] the field doing physical activities. (Participant 22)

I [am strongly in favour of] blended learning because it gives children different learning options. It gives them an opportunity to do what they love. We are working with ... Generation Z (Gen Z, iGen or Centennials). They are exposed to technological devices, so why can't we use that to our advantage. Why can't we take what they love and use it to teach them? 'If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow' – John Dewey. (Participant 3)

Discussion

The results indicate that, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit South African schools, teachers and learners had a very limited time frame to move from face-to-face learning to a safer mode of learning. COVID-19 brought challenges in education to the forefront, especially in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector specifically related to online teaching (Kangong 2020). Online learning contributed to sustaining a continuous process of learning during the highest level of lockdown. Later, when the rate of transmission of the virus declined and lockdown restrictions eased, schools could move to a blended learning mode so as to continue the teaching and learning process. Some schools adopted a complete, online learning structure, whilst others used radio and television programmes to continue the teaching and learning process. At some schools in South Africa, cell phones were also used to communicate and send work to learners and their parents. However, this provisioning was very uneven and an examination of learning and teaching using the social justice lens indicates considerable disparity in the opportunities for teachers and learners.

In the present investigation, many teachers commented on the feelings of fear, anxiety and high levels of stress experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. A factor contributing to the high levels of stress during this time was learning how to use technology and online learning platforms like Teams and Zoom within a limited time frame. The results indicate that there was a digital divide, in that many teachers stated that they could not use digital teaching modes and platforms proficiently. They noted that more training would assist them in using these. Not only did they have to learn how to use these online learning platforms and their associated technology effectively, but also how to prepare their learners for using this pedagogy. Often, this was accompanied by uncertainty and feeling unprepared to teach online. Other teachers, however, responded that online learning and teaching were opportunities for personal and professional growth and for gaining new knowledge and skills. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) indicate that the needs and the contributions of teachers may affect the professional

capital of education systems. The conceptual framework of professional capital refers to sharing knowledge and skills with peers. It is clear from the results that teachers asked their peers to help with training and gaining skills to use online teaching platforms. This resulted in upskilling teachers and in them becoming more confident in using these platforms. This also links with social capital, as the community of teachers were upskilled and the transfer of knowledge and skills uplifted the community of teachers and learners.

Teachers also indicated that appropriate CPTD was essential in preparing them to move from traditional classroom teaching to online teaching. Most participants in this study participated in CPTD before the nationwide lockdown but noted that, presently, training that was individualised was more relevant than the group approach to CPTD adopted in the past. Teachers called on their colleagues during the lockdown to help with using technology and online learning platforms. Others used the Internet and online videos to train themselves. They considered these as some of the most effective ways that CPTD occurred during the pandemic.

Reframing CPTD

In the light of the literature reviewed and the analysis of the data, it is clear that a CPTD model is needed that not only caters for successful teacher preparation for varied modes of teaching, but also does so in a socially just manner that benefits all teachers equally. It is clear from the results that digitally disadvantaged teachers face challenges in accessing digital modes of teaching and in using these modes proficiently. This is exacerbated by their lack of access to the internet and computer hardware. Thus, our contribution in this chapter includes a CPTD model that is reframed so that it is socially just for teachers in that it better accommodates them with regard to online and blended learning strategies. This holds true for post-pandemic CPTD opportunities too. We present a modified or revised model (Figure 2) of the original, which includes aspects of social justice in the planning of CPTD activities, delivering socially just CPTD, and ensuring teacher well-being.

We believe that, through an application of this model, especially in times of crisis, school managers can ensure social justice practices by providing teachers with the following:

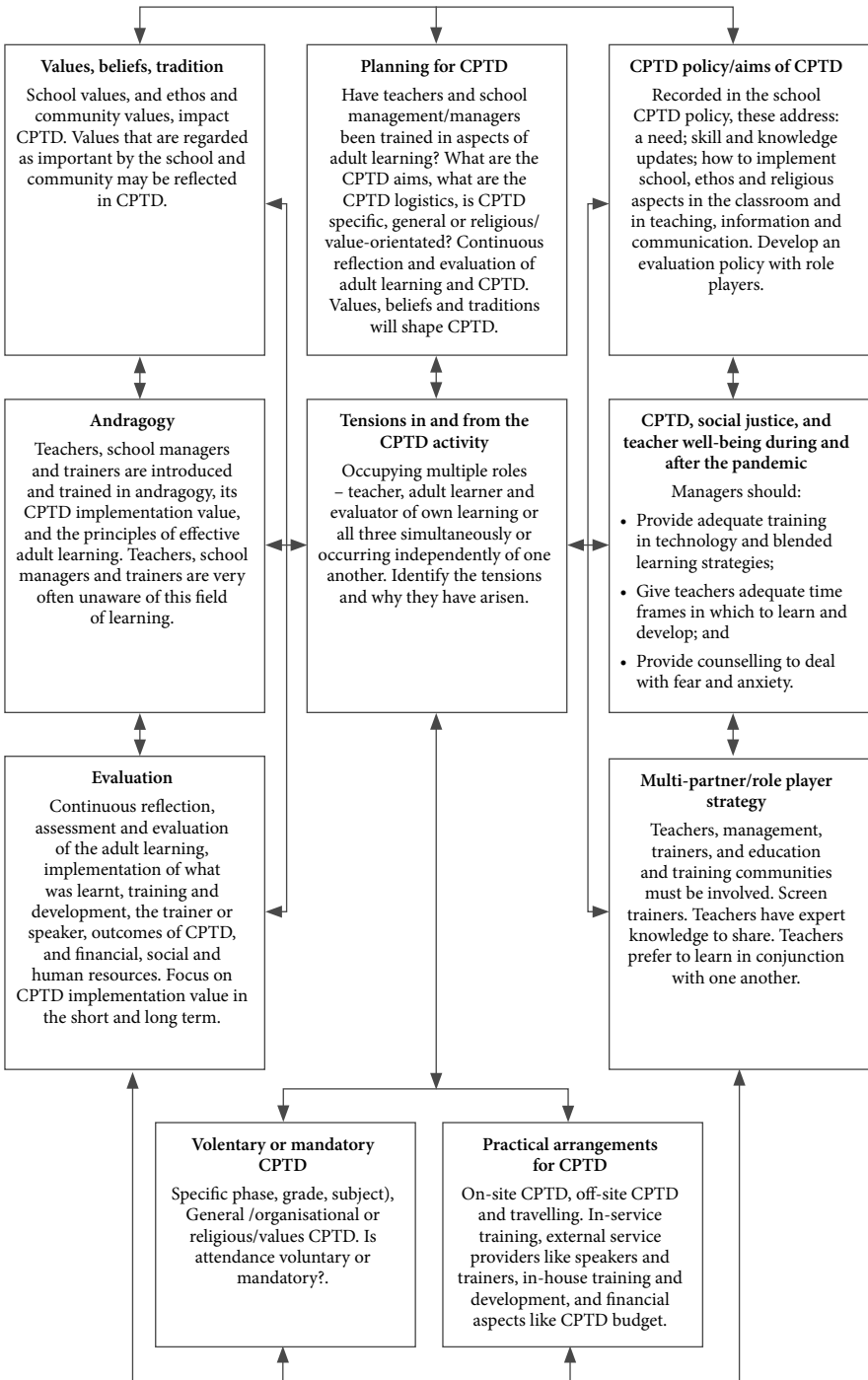
- Up-to-date CPTD in using technology, digital teaching modes/platforms, and blended learning strategies (This includes ensuring that teachers have reliable access to the Internet and suitable computer hardware and software.);
- Reasonable time frames for them to learn and develop, as well as round-the-clock tech support; and
- Counselling to deal with fear, isolation and anxiety.

Figure 2 (on page 163) highlights aspects that make CPTD and adult learning more effective. Implementers of this model need to consider ten steps when planning for socially just CPTD:

- Step 1: Planning for CPTD.
- Step 2: Establishing CPTD aims and policy.
- Step 3: Ensuring that CPTD is socially just and focuses on teacher well-being.
- Step 4: Developing multi-partner/role player strategy for CPTD.
- Step 5: Practical arrangements.
- Step 6: Voluntary or mandatory CPTD.
- Step 7: Evaluation.
- Step 8: Andragogy.
- Step 9: Values, beliefs and traditions of individuals and the organisation.
- Step 10: Tensions in CPTD.

A reframing of the original model includes methods that allow CPTD to be more socially just for all teachers. This means, firstly, that adequate training in online and blended learning strategies is crucial during times of change. Teachers should be provided with reliable access in order to feel comfortable when using different technologies and online learning platforms. Secondly, teachers must be given a reasonable time to learn and develop so that they can use technology effectively to facilitate teaching and learning. This kind of support can reduce feelings of being overwhelmed, fearful and isolated. Thirdly, teachers must have access to counselling to deal with fear, isolation and anxiety. Teachers have had to deal with the fear of COVID-19, with feelings of despair, and with fears for their own personal health and safety. COVID-19 has left many teachers feeling isolated – even though their laptop screens have been full of faces of other teachers during online training sessions. It is important to create a feeling of belonging and connectedness in times of isolation (AISNSW 2021). Teachers have had to adjust to online and blended learning strategies to continue teaching their learners, whilst also learning how to use digital platforms to teach and assess learners. Providing teachers with access to skills and up-to-date technology to develop their digital competency, as well as with psychological counselling to deal with feelings of isolation and high levels of anxiety, will prepare them to deal with technical and pedagogical change and to navigate emotional stress during educational crises in the future. Teachers' well-being should be a priority in times of stability but even more so in times of volatility. Finally, teachers have reimagined their vision and expectations of CPTD during the pandemic. It appears that the creation of digital, professional learning communities is a viable possibility for the future. Roberts and Pruitt (2003) argue that the basis of the success of these learning communities lies in the fact that, because teaching is constantly evolving, teachers re-examine their pedagogies to satisfy the needs of their learners. Teachers who continually develop and learn in their communities may contribute to effective schooling and education (Twining, Raffaghelli, Albion et al. 2013).

Figure 2: Revised model to enhance planning and implementation of CPTD



Source: Adapted from Van der Merwe-Muller, 2018

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has exacerbated the fact that many teachers and learners are prejudiced due to a lack of adequate access to technology in order to enable successful online learning. However, this pandemic has, in many ways, also been a catalyst for change in all sectors of society, including the way in which teaching and learning occur. In keeping with Winston Churchill's popularised Machiavellian saying, 'Never let a good crisis go to waste', the present investigation provided us with an opportunity to reflect on how education is able to address the impact of economic, social and cultural barriers in times of crisis.

The intention of this small-scale study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of online and blended learning during COVID-19. The results indicate that teachers felt overwhelmed when moving from the traditional classroom to online learning forums. Such results furthermore show how anxious they felt about their ability to present successful lessons during the pandemic. We were also able to understand the underlying teaching and learning problems that have come to the fore due to COVID-19, such as lack of access to technology, inadequate CPTD to prepare teachers for online teaching and learning, and uneven support to cope in times of crises. McBride (2020: 1) states: 'Throughout history, significant events have routinely played a part in human interaction, even in training and development.' For Huang, Liu, Tlili et al. (2020), too, educational information construction needs active promotion, and both education providers and government need to conduct online teacher training to better equip teachers to help learners. As a solution, we offer a CPTD model that aims at being socially just in its application, especially in times of crisis.

Teachers and learners will continue to seek out innovative ways to navigate the disruptions caused to their learning trajectories in times of crisis. The national lockdown in South Africa forced schools to make rapid changes in the way teachers taught and learners learnt. The pandemic highlighted the severe inequality in some sectors of society, and, as a result, compelled us to take serious note of them and to action appropriate measures to alleviate these inequalities. For teachers, it meant refocusing their role to include educating learners for a future world of work. Innovation in teaching and education should be a priority for all teachers and schools. When teachers rely on outdated techniques, we need to question if adequate teaching and learning for future work are occurring. The pandemic has forced us into acknowledging that newer pedagogies are achievable, especially when adequate training takes place before and during times of fast-paced changes.

School managers and policymakers (UN 2020) must prioritise support mechanisms for teacher training and development. To make the transition from face-to-face learning to online and blended learning more effective, school managers must actively create conditions of equitable provision of, and access to, CPTD in order for social justice to occur. This can be achieved by providing all

teachers with adequate and differentiated CPTD programmes and by utilising a training model as suggested in this chapter. Moreover, teachers as adult learners can generate useful ideas and topics for CPTD and can inform and improve their practice by recommending effective and socially just CPTD activities (Dasoo & Van der Merwe-Muller 2020). As Williams (1983) proposes, in times of challenge, adult learners should turn to learning in order to understand what is going on, to adapt to it, and, more importantly, to shape change. Further studies may include investigations into the long-term adaptation of online and blended learning and teaching models post-pandemic.

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