



Effective education: Conceptualising the meaning of out-of-field teaching practices for teachers, teacher quality and school leaders



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ABSTRACT

Teacher effectiveness and quality teaching receive international attention. This in-depth exploration of the implications of out-of-field teaching for teacher quality has unveiled complex teaching and learning environments. The out-of-field phenomenon defines teachers teaching outside their field of training or education (Ingersoll, 2002). The perspectives of educational directors, principals, teachers and parents across two countries suggest that out-of-field teaching practices are significant to content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. This qualitative investigation reveals information through interviews, observations and document analyses regarding the relations among real-life experiences, out-of-field teaching practices and perceived quality of teachers. The findings focus attention on leadership perceptions, understanding and decisions, school improvement policies and support programmes in relation to out-of-field situations in schools. The paper concludes with recommendations for education policies and further research on teacher quality linked to the out-of-field phenomenon.

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1. Introduction

Teacher quality, effectiveness in the classroom and quality teaching currently receive global attention and are considered complex concepts for discussion. The out-of-field phenomenon describes teachers “assigned to teach subjects for which they have little training or education” (Ingersoll, 1999, p. 26). In this paper, the out-of-field phenomenon is defined as teachers teaching outside their field of qualifications, expertise or specialisation, while this “field” might be a year level or specific subject. Out-of-field teaching is an internationally recognised term and area of concern. Understanding the influence of out-of-field teaching practices on quality education is emphasised in Tucker's (2012) statement that the quality of teachers is the key to high student achievement. This phenomenon involves teachers who teach a subject without having a deep knowledge of the subject matter. In this paper, a deep or sound knowledge is conceptualised as a broad knowledge of content, pedagogies for a specific field, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of students' needs and a broad knowledge of communities and their cultures (Shulman, 1986, 1987). In order to have an insight into the knowledge dilemma of out-of-field teachers the argument is fundamentally rooted in various researchers' (Cochran, DeRuiter, & King, 1993; Marks, 1990; McNamara, 1991;

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Meredith, 1995) efforts to further develop Shulman's knowledge framework. This includes the acknowledgment of different forms of pedagogical content knowledge which depend on the views, understanding and subject knowledge teachers bring to the classroom. Educational leaders apply various strategies to improve teacher quality such as a focus on academic credentials, golden handcuffs, dress codes and extended study.

Dinham and Scott (2000) noted that complexities in the teaching environment are closely connected to quality education, emphasising that "schools and teachers . . . are caught up in this uncertainty . . ." (p. 189), further highlights the demanding aspects of teaching. Teachers and teaching quality are interwoven with components of the professional knowledge base for teaching, a practiced informed theoretical framework first advanced by Shulman (1986) and entails content knowledge (CK), pedagogical knowledge (PK) and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). The purpose of this paper is to investigate and develop an understanding of how the out-of-field phenomenon influences the effectiveness and quality of teachers and how already complex teaching situations escalate because of the gap in knowledge these teachers experience. The paper offers different perspectives of these teaching complexities, which are augmented by a lack of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge in the teaching space.

Shulman (1986) noted that the knowledge teachers have of their subject matter influences successful teaching practices. Accordingly, Shulman defined pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) as an in-depth knowledge of the subject matter and the ability to teach that content successfully. Content knowledge (CK) is the theories, principles and concepts of a specific subject or year level whereas pedagogical knowledge (PK) focuses on teaching principles (Bruner, 1966; Grossman, 1990). Shulman (1986) emphasised that teachers must internalise a deep knowledge of their subject matter and knowledge of curricular development to be successful. This paper acknowledges the interconnectedness of CK, PK and PCK knowledge structures and, consistent with Shulman (1987), focuses on the effect out-of-field teaching has on pedagogical content knowledge, teachers and teaching quality.

Van Driel and Berry (2012) noted that the development of pedagogical content knowledge is more than acquiring instructional strategies and techniques. They further highlighted the need for teachers to have a deep understanding of the manner in which students internalise specific subject matter. In this case, a deep or in-depth understanding is defined as a combined knowledge about students' cognitive, social, physical and emotional development that is needed to create a productive learning experience for students (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Effective management of pedagogical content knowledge is a complex teaching process that Ingvarson and Rowe (2008) look upon as a moral enterprise that intends to enhance student competencies "with respect to the content studied" (p. 7). The essence of pedagogical content knowledge, content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge cannot be separated from discussions of teacher effectiveness, quality and the out-of-field phenomenon. The argument claims that teachers' emotions, life worlds and dispositions cannot be separated from their teaching characteristics, emphasising the need for an in-depth understanding of the influence the out-of-field phenomenon has on effective and quality education. Hare (2002) claimed that teachers have a fundamental influence on the teaching and learning environment because "we teach who we are" (p. 143). The essence of teaching is inseparable from the teacher as "being". Uncertainty regarding content indicates unsure teachers and uncertain teaching.

Ingersoll (2002) highlighted the out-of-field teaching culture and its occurrence, noting that this phenomenon is widespread and a global concern. The rationale for this investigation is to use a transnational perspective to examine the lived experiences linked to this phenomenon in a wide context. International concerns regarding the multi-layered implications of out-of-field teaching practices are developing. During a recent TAS-Collective Symposium in Porto, Portugal (30–31 August 2014), invited members from Germany, Korea, Australia, Ireland, England and South Africa presented papers that reflected a deep concern regarding the implications of out-of-field teaching (sometimes referred to as teaching across specialisations, TAS-Scope and Issue (Bosse, 2014a,b)) for education at all levels. Global research relating to out-of-field teaching practices encompasses countries such as Australia (Australian Education Union, 2009, 2010; Du Plessis, 2013; Hobbs, 2012; McConney & Price, 2009), the US (Ingersoll, 2002), Ireland (Cosgrove, Shiel, Oldham, & Sofroniou, 2004; Ni Riodáin, 2014; Ni Riodáin & Hannigan, 2009), the UK (Crisan & Rodd, 2014; Loveys, 2011), European countries (Bonesrønning, Falch, & Strøm, 2003; Maaranen, Kynäslähti, & Krokfors, 2008) including Norway and Germany (Bosse, 2014a,b; Lünne, 2014; Törner, 2014), Turkey (Kan, Cinkir, Olgun, Eryilmaz, & Cemaloğlu, 2013) and South Africa (Du Plessis, 2005, 2010; Steyn & Du Plessis, 2007) as shown in Table 1.

The McKinsey and Company (2007) stated, "The quality of an education system depends ultimately on the quality of its teachers" (p. 33), and in South Africa, Metcalfe (2008) echoed, "Education systems cannot exceed the quality of its teachers" (p. 93). Bausmith and Barry (2011) urged researchers to explore possibilities to enhance teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. Hattie (2003), Goldhaber and Walch (2014), Reising (1995) and Coughlan (2014) also emphasised that quality teachers are the spill point from which effective education revolves. Awareness of out-of-field teachers' life-world and the influence that out-of-field teaching has on quality teaching is an integral component of targeting teacher quality issues as a whole. This paper reveals how misunderstandings and misconceptions regarding out-of-field teaching practices and related experiences influence leaders' decisions and quality improvement strategies. Causing concern, however, is the taken-for-granted attitude of leaders towards lived experiences surrounding the out-of-field phenomenon and its indications for quality teaching (Du Plessis, 2013).

Lewis (1996) noted that initiatives undertaken in the United States for "teacher quality control" include setting standards for teachers, reinventing teacher preparation, improving teacher recruitment and implementing reward schemes. Goldhaber and Walch (2014) added that the United States applies policies to encourage people with higher academic credentials to join the teaching profession. An Organisation for Economic Cooperation (OECD) (2011) survey in the UK highlighted the "golden

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