

IMPLEMENTING A NEW CURRICULUM WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO HOME ECONOMICS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN BINDURA DISTRICT IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

Home economics is a relatively new subject in Zimbabwe, having been introduced in the late 1990s. Before then, most schools offered subjects like Carpentry for boys and Domestic Science for girls. These subjects were taught by specialist teachers and as such, did not involve ordinary classroom practitioners. Home Economics seeks to develop in the youths an appreciation of their role in the solution of their own problems, and in the maintenance and upgrading of their living environment. Home Economics is aimed at promoting understanding of basic concepts of nutrition, hygiene, clothing, consumerism and family life. Pupils in the end learn to cook, do craftwork, launder their clothes, clean the home environment, improve sanitation levels in the school and community, plan their time and use it efficiently, budget their income, behave in acceptable ways, conserve resources and be good consumers. Important as Home Economics may appear to be particularly in the eyes of the policy makers, its introduction meant that teachers taking junior classes found themselves teaching as many as eleven different subjects in a single day. This may lead to an indifferent attitude among some teachers towards the new subject and hence that the subject does not receive the attention and importance it deserves. The introduction of Home Economics in the primary system in Zimbabwe represents a change. Its successful implementation will take time and move through a series of phases. It requires changing teachers' attitudes and feelings. It also requires that teachers' capacities be built in order to improve their mastery of the new content and teaching strategies. In the Zimbabwean context, the school principal / head is at the centre of the implementation of all new curricula at school level. In view of the above, this study sought to establish the support provided by school heads to teachers as they implement the Home Economics curriculum. The study employed the descriptive survey method. The study was conducted in Bindura District in Mashonaland Central Province in Zimbabwe. Random sampling was used to come up with a sample of 59 headmasters / mistresses from a total of 120 heads in the district, and 82 teachers from a total of 2 000 teachers in the district. Data were collected by means of semi-structured questionnaire. The main findings revealed that principals had no clear vision of the new curriculum. There is little effort put by principals towards the provision of resources, supervision of teachers is inadequate, there is no provision of technical assistance to teachers on the new curriculum. Heads, however, do make attempts to remove blockages which may inhibit the progress of

implementation of the new curriculum. Based on the analysts of data, conclusions and recommendations were made.

Key Terms

Support, implementation, curriculum, teachers, home economics, heads/principals. primary schools

Introduction

According to the Home Economics Syllabus (1994) "...Home Economics seeks to develop in the youths an appreciation of their role in the solution of their own problems, and in the maintenance and upgrading of their living environment". The teaching of this subject is closely linked to life problems and situations in the pupils' homes and communities. According to the then Secretary for Education, Sibanda (1994) "...the country was experiencing a high-level of dropouts from the primary school. Hence, there was a need to train pupils at an early age in skills for decision-making, self-reliance, design and resourcefulness". To emphasise the necessity of the subject, the then Minister of Education 2007 declared that "...teachers are called upon to give the subject its rightful place in the primary school system that realizes the important role it plays in the lives of the pupils. Home Economics is aimed at promoting understanding of basic concepts of nutrition, hygiene, clothing, consumerism, and family life. Pupils in the end learn to cook, do craftwork, launder their clothes, clean the home environment, improve sanitation levels in the school and community, plan their time and use it efficiently, budget their income, behave in acceptable ways, conserve resources and be good consumers.

It is against this background that Home Economics must be taught to all primary school pupils in Zimbabwe. Important as Home Economics may appear to be, particularly in the eyes of the policymakers, its introduction meant that teachers taking junior classes found themselves teaching as many as eleven different subjects in a single day. This may lead to an indifferent attitude among some teachers towards the new subject and hence that the subject does not receive the attention and importance it deserves. The syllabus of this subject demands that teachers improvise adequate teaching / learning aids. However, there are teachers who are either under qualified or who were trained before Home Economics was introduced at teacher training colleges. Home Economics is a practical subject and requires adequate materials. Heads should take the responsibility of ensuring that these are available to their teachers. The subject requires sewing machines, stoves, needles, pins, first aid kits, food stuffs like spices, soups, icing sugar, baking powder, kitchen equipment and utensils, as well as special rooms for effectively teaching the subject. Home Economics is not an examination subject at the end of the primary school. As a result, heads may have a tendency to concentrate their support of teachers on examination subjects like Mathematics, English, Ndebele / Shona and General Paper. Lack of principal support and materials may force teachers to end up teaching the theoretical aspects of the subject which may not be adequate to achieve the goals of the curriculum.

The effective teaching of Home Economics calls for maximum support of teachers by principals or heads of schools as they attempt to implement the new subject. The head is key to the effective implementation of a new curriculum and is closely linked to the amount of support teachers receive. This support comes in various forms like providing information about the new curriculum, development of teachers' individual skills, building relationships, provision of materials, and negotiating financial support from education authorities.

The introduction of Home Economics in the primary system in Zimbabwe represents a change. Its successful implementation will take time and move through a series of phases. It requires changing teachers' attitudes and feelings. It also requires that teachers' capacities be built in order to improve their mastery of the new content and teaching strategies. In the Zimbabwean context, the head to make sure that teachers get all the necessary support for them to understand, successfully interpret and teach a new curriculum. The head as the change leader at school level should be able to translate the reasons for introducing Home Economics curriculum into simple and specific terms and practices that make sense to teachers. The head should also consider the concerns of teachers during the implementation of the new subject and ensure that these are taken care of. Change brings insecurity and teachers need encouragement and motivation to commit themselves to a curriculum. In view of the above, it is necessary to investigate the support provided by heads to teachers implementing the Home Economics curriculum in Zimbabwean primary schools.

1.1 Statement of the problem

The study sought to investigate the extent of support which principals provide teachers in the implementation of the Home Economics curriculum in the primary schools.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The study's aim was to expose amount of support which Zimbabwean principals provide to teachers as they implement the Home Economics curriculum in the primary schools.

2. Research Questions

The study was guided by the following sub-questions:

1. What is the nature of the support which teachers need from heads when implementing a new curriculum?
2. To what extent and how effectively are heads providing support to teachers implementing the new Home Economics curriculum in Zimbabwe?

2.1 Significance of the study

The importance of the study stemmed from the fact that it attempted to identify and establish the extent of support which principals provide to teachers during the implementation of the Home Economics curriculum in primary schools. The head is a key player in curriculum implementation and the measure in which he/she provides appropriate and sufficient support will

largely determine the success with which the programme is put into place. It was also hoped that the findings would help heads of schools ensure that a harmonious environment pervades the school in order to nurture the internal creativity of teachers as they implement the new curriculum. The study also sought to expose the various challenges that heads of schools experienced during the implementation of a new curriculum so that policymakers and planners could devise strategies and mitigatory measures to reduce the impact of these challenges.

2.2 Limitations of the study

In view of the small size of the sample and sub-samples used, the findings of the study would have limited generalisability. The other limitation relates to the descriptive method that was employed in this study. This method lacks predictive power. The research may discover and describe “what is” but is unable to predict “what would be”. The respondents may give false responses thereby affecting the validity of the findings.

2.3 Delimitations of the study

The study was concerned with the support provided by primary school heads to teachers implementing the Home Economics curriculum in one district in Mashonaland Central Province which is Bindura District. Out of a population of 120 heads in the district the study sought information from 59 heads and 82 teachers from a population of 2 000 teachers. The main focus of the study was to investigate the support provided by primary school principals to teachers implementing the Home Economics curriculum in Zimbabwe. Support provided by parents, Education Officers and the Provincial Director’s Office were not the concern of this study. Support provided by the heads of schools on other subjects is also outside the parameters of this study.

3. Literature Review

The head plays a very significant role with regards to teacher support during the implementation of a new curriculum at school level. Hord (2004) observes that “...the head is not only able to initiate innovation oneself, but his / her support is needed by an individual or group of teachers who are attempting to implement a new programme”. McLaughlin (2008) is of the opinion that the head’s support is the raw energy of implementation. It comes in various forms like information, individual skills, relationships, group myths and values, materials or fiscal support, communicating, training, monitoring and evaluation.

Fullan (1998) refers to the head as a key figure and sees him / her as needing to have an understanding and knowledge of curriculum developments in order to make appropriate choices and also to be sensitive to the tensions that inevitably arise in the process of innovation so that he/she provides teachers with support without dominance. Taylor (1987) in a study of a gifted education programme in South Africa, found that the head is a key player in curriculum implementation and the measure in which he/she provides appropriate and sufficient support will largely determine the success with which the programme is put into place. Van der Vegt and Knip (1998) found that support relates to the heads’ capacity to mobilize resources and expertise for renewal work; ingredients for getting into the goal region. They distinguish between four

steering functions and three sub-functions. The steering functions are direction / concept clarification, direction pressure, latitude definition, and assistance / support. Direction / concept clarification deals with the extent to which the school leadership;

- a) Invests in providing teachers with a clear vision or image of what will be achieved by implementation; and
- b) Invests in grounding the image in professional knowledge and skills of teachers.

Van der Vegt and Knip (1998) refer to direction pressure as the operational mastery of implementation together with pressure to achieve. It is concerned with bringing about conditions in a school under which teachers know that implementation work is taken seriously, and that deadlines are for real. Latitude definition is specifying the range of acceptable paths to the goal region. How much flexibility do teachers have to shape the tasks they have to do? It implies that the school has to deal with the important issue of defining the competence of teachers with regard to renewal tasks. The fourth steering function, assistance / support, refers to the heads' capacity to mobilize resources and expertise for renewal work. Lortie (2005) distinguish between three sub-functions of assistance / support namely;

- a) Delivering technical assistance, such as information, skills, materials and grounding it in existing professional knowledge and skills;
- b) Providing social-emotional support, such as encouragement, confidence, cohesion and
- c) Using operational power to remove blockages which would inhibit the progress of implementation, such as outdated procedure and administrative practices.

Loucks (2003) emphasise the supportive role of the head during the implementation of a new programme when he posits that principals should provide continual interventions to assist the teachers to use the programme. Hall (2004) noted that the successful implementation requires a combination of pressure and support. Pressure alone may be sufficient if implementation of the policy does not require resources or normative change. However, in isolation pressure cannot change attitudes, values, and practices that have become routinised. No support alone can bring about significant change because of the demands and tasks already required of people in the system that is attempting implementation of a new practice. Hord (2004) states that pressure can be very positive. However, if pressure is provided without support, alienation results in non-implementation of a new curriculum. Conversely, if support exists without pressure, the result is wasted resources.

Lupahla (1997) in a survey study of problems faced by teachers implementing Home Economics in the Nkosikazi are of Zimbabwe, found that 80% of the teachers felt that supervision by their principals of the subject was inadequate. He found that what was meant to be supervision in terms of guidance of Home Economics teachers (aimed at improving teacher performance and, through this, pupil performance) often turned out to be mere inspection of teachers with teachers not receiving the necessary guidance and substantive support (Lupahla, 1997). In another study, Dube (2004) found that heads in Zimbabwe spend very little time or no time at all helping under qualified teachers with the teaching of Home Economics. Jolibongo (2004) also discovered that Zimbabwean heads rarely observed teachers conducting Home Economics lessons. A baseline survey to investigate how the new Home Economics curriculum was communicated by heads to

their teachers conducted by Nyagura (1999) in Zimbabwe found that teachers were not consulted but simply ordered to implement the curriculum by their heads, who themselves were in turn following instructions from higher authorities.

Successful implementation a new curriculum in a school is a complex and difficult task. The head of school is a key player in this action and the measure in which he/she provides appropriate and sufficient support will largely determine the success with which a new curriculum is put into practice. This study sought to investigate the support provided by primary school principals to teachers implementing the Home Economics curriculum in Zimbabwe.

4. Research Methodology

The study used the quantitative methodology and made use of a survey research design. According to Leedy (1993), the descriptive survey method looks with the intense accuracy at the phenomenon of the moment and then describes precisely what the researcher sees. The questionnaire was the major instrument for collecting data. As Anderson (2000) observes, the semi-structured questionnaire increases reliability as an instrument of gathering data because of its greater impersonality. It also contained open-ended and closed-ended questions that enabled us to gather data from the studied area's heads and teachers' perceptions of the support provided by heads to teachers in implementing a new curriculum with specific reference to Home Economics in primary schools in Zimbabwe.

The population consisted of 120 heads of schools and over 2000 teachers from Bindura District in Mashonaland Central Province of Zimbabwe. The sample consisted of 59 heads of which 49 were male and 10 female as well as 82 teachers consisting of 38 male and 44 female. The inquiry explored the support provided to teachers by heads of schools as they attempt to implement the new Home Economics curriculum. Miles et al. (2006) emphasise the role of support and assistance to implementers. Implementers need change as they move from introduction and early use of new practices to becoming experienced and expert. Taylor (1987) states that recognizing and praising positive implementation efforts is good psychology and an impactful tactic that implicitly provides pressure and support. Celebrating progress is done publicly and privately, in large and small ways. Moreover, as Stiegel and Hall (2004) argue that leaders may press for more complete implementation if individuals are not putting all parts of a policy into place. They can support this effort by helping to develop lesson plans that focus on the policy and by demonstrating how lessons might proceed or arrange for staff to be assisted by peers, getting help from fellow implementers.

4.1 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered by mean of a questionnaire which was largely made up of close-ended questions and a few open-ended questions. All respondents were given the questionnaires by the researcher at their schools. The researcher also personally collected the questionnaires in order to increase on the rate of return of the instruments. Non-returns according to Phillips and Pugh (2004) introduce a bias in as much as they are likely to differ from respondents in many ways thereby, adversely affecting reliability and validity of the findings. Data collected from the

questionnaires produced descriptive statistics around the variables under study. These statistics were computed and inferential implications from them deduced and recorded.

5. Findings and Discussion

The study set out to investigate the support provided by primary school principals to teachers implementing the Home Economics curriculum in Zimbabwean primary schools. This section is presented in two parts, namely, presentation of data and discussion. Data presentation is in two parts: characteristics of respondents and data on support provided by heads to teachers.

6. Presentation of Data

6.1 Characteristics of the Respondents

The sample consisted of 59 school heads and 82 teachers.

Table 1: Composition of sample by sex

Categories of Respondents	Male %	Female %	Total %
Heads (n=59)	83	17	100
Teachers (n=82)	46	54	100

The majority of heads in Table 1, that is, 83 percent of the school heads in the sample were male. The situation is quite the opposite on the teachers' composition. More female teachers (54 percent) than male teachers (46 percent) were in the sample although the variance is not as big as with heads.

Table 2: Composition of sample by teaching experience

Categories of Respondents	1-2 years %	3-5 years %	6-10 years %	+ 10 years %	Total
Heads (n=59)	0	2	32	66	100
Teachers (n=82)	53	25	13	9	100

None of the heads in Table 2 had less than two (2) years teaching experience. The majority of teachers had little experience of teaching and thus may need more assistance regarding curriculum implementation issues.

Table 3: Experience as head

Categories of Respondents	1-5 years %	6-10 years %	+ 10 years %	Total
Heads (n=59)	47	47	6	100

In Table 3, 94 percent of the school heads had a teaching experience of less than ten (10) years. Home Economics was introduced as a curriculum to be taught by all teachers in Zimbabwe in 1994. Before then, it was taught by female specialist teachers as Domestic Science. This then

means that the majority of school heads were not trained to teach the subject during their teacher training at colleges. In a way, this could compromise the quality of support they provided to teachers in implementing Home Economics as new curriculum.

6.2 Data on Head's Support

Data about the head's support is reported.

Table 4: Communication of a clear vision about Home Economics

Item	To a great extent %		To a moderate extent %		Not at all %	
	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59
Head has a clear vision	34	47	64	53	2	0
Head communicates his/her vision	35	20	56	80	9	0
Head emphasizes value and relevance of H/E	41	81	50	17	9	2
Average %	37	49	57	50	7	1

Data indicates that 53% of the heads responded to a “moderate extent” when asked whether they had a clear vision of Home Economics. 64% of the teachers responded to a moderate extent to the same question. 81% of the heads said they adequately emphasized the value of Home Economics and only 41% of the teachers concurred with their heads. On average, the majority of teachers and heads (teachers: 64%; heads: 51%) indicated that heads communicated a clear vision to a moderate extent only or not at all.

Table 5: Mobilization of resources

Item	To a great extent %		To a moderate extent %		Not at all %	
	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59
Head allocates adequate resources for H.E	21	27	60	66	19	7
Head gives priority to HE materials when making school orders	15	32	58	24	27	44
Head organizes resource personnel to address teachers on HE	10	3	36	21	54	76
Average %	15	21	51	37	33	42

The data suggest that very little effort is exerted by heads to allocate resources for the Home Economics curriculum. 66% of the heads said they provided resources to a moderate extent, 7% indicated that they did not provide resources. The majority of teachers (60%) indicated that heads provided resources to a moderate extent. Both teachers indicated that heads did not give priority to Home Economics when making school orders (heads: 68%; teachers: 85%). There was also concurrence between teachers and heads that the heads did not organise for resource personnel to address teachers on how best to teach Home Economics (teachers: 90%; heads: 97%). This form of support was provided least satisfactorily.

Table 6: Delivery of professional and technical assistance

Item	To a great extent %		To a moderate extent %		Not at all %	
	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59
Head organises discussion sessions to clarify knowledge and skills required for	24	39	44	54	32	7

HE						
Head conducts demonstration lessons	16	12	39	53	45	35
Head provides samples of schemes of HE	18	12	52	83	30	5
Heads created a HE Committee	21	10	29	46	50	44
Average %	20	18	41	59	39	23

Overall, the support on this parameter appears to be meager. On average (teachers: 80%, heads: 82%), indicated that delivery of professional and technical assistance was provided to a moderate extent or not at all by the head.

Table 7: Supervision of teachers by heads

Item	To a great extent %		To a moderate extent %		Not at all %	
	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59
Head delegated responsibility of continuous monitoring of HE to a senior member of staff	16	3	38	29	46	68
Head observes teachers teaching HE	39	15	45	83	16	2
There are demonstrations by qualified teachers for the unqualified on how to teach HE	26	13	45	53	29	34
Average %	27	10	43	55	30	35

The overall picture on this parameter shows clearly that there is inadequate support from heads to teachers teaching this curriculum. The majority of teachers and heads indicated that supervision of teachers by heads on this curriculum was very inadequate. On average, 74% of

the teachers and 87% of heads indicated that supervision of teachers was done to a moderate extent or not done at all.

Table 8: Setting up in-service and continuing workshops

Item	To a great extent %		To a moderate extent %		Not at all %	
	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59
Head establishes continuous in-service courses and sessions on HE	13	3	44	51	43	46
Head establishes development sessions for HE teachers	28	10	44	90	28	0
Head encourages teachers to attend cluster and district Home Economics workshops	32	10	35	53	33	37
Average %	24	8	41	65	35	28

The total picture that emerges from data on this parameter is that heads do not set up in-service and continuing workshops for Home Economics. The majority of teachers and heads (teachers: 76%; heads: 93%) indicated that heads set up in-service and continuing workshops to a moderate extent or not at all. This is a very disturbing phenomenon because without in-service and continuing workshops, there can be no improvement in classroom instruction on the new curriculum.

Table 9: Removal of blockages inhibiting implementation

Item	To a great extent %		To a moderate extent %		Not at all %	
	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59	Teachers n=82	Heads n=59
Head attends to logistical and time scheduling problems on HE	16	34	61	59	23	7
Head allocates sufficient time to HE	43	83	45	15	12	2
Head allows teachers to interact about the planning and teaching of HE	46	19	40	79	14	2
Head allows teachers to be flexible in time-tabling their lessons	38	37	43	54	19	9
Average %	36	43	47	52	17	5

Generally, removal of blockages inhibiting implementation is not adequately provided although heads do make attempts to allocate sufficient time to Home Economics. On average, both teachers and heads (teachers: 64%; heads: 57%) concur that heads remove blockages to a “moderate extent” or “not at all”.

7. Discussion

Data indicate that heads in Bindura district do not have a clear vision of the new Home Economics curriculum. Heads do not communicate the vision about the new curriculum to teachers. This has serious implications for the successful implementation of the curriculum as Rutherford (1985) observes “...possession of a clear vision is one of the major characteristics that mark those heads who have the most positive influence on bringing about change in a school”. Teachers should be clear about the rationale of a curriculum. Smith (2002) states that heads are expected to initiate a vision through the introduction of research findings, new ideas and possibilities or by providing a beginning picture, then challenging teachers to generate input and share in shaping and clarifying the vision.

Mobilization of resources for teaching and learning Home Economics in Zimbabwean primary schools is not a priority for most heads as the study revealed. There is very little effort by heads towards the provision of resources for the curriculum. As Van de Vegt and Knip (1998) posit, heads must have the capacity to mobilize resources and expertise for renewal work, ingredients for successful implementation Jolibongo (2004) states that principals should remember that Home Economics is mainly a practical subject, pupils should in the end learn to cook, do craft work and launder their clothes. All these require adequate learning / teaching materials.

Data also reveal that delivery of professional and technical assistance is mostly negative. Heads did not organize discussion sessions to clarify knowledge and skills required to implement Home Economics. They did not conduct demonstration lessons, nor provide samples of schemes for the curriculum. Murphy (2002) says that for successful implementation of a new curriculum to take place, technical assistance such as provision of information, skills and materials must be delivered to teachers.

Supervision of teachers implementing the Home Economics curriculum is inadequate with respect to observation of teachers and assigning qualified teachers to demonstrate for the under qualified teachers. Heads did not delegate senior members of staff to continually monitor the implementation of the curriculum. Murphy (2002) emphasizes the importance of supervision by heads regularly and frequently to check on the implementers to solicit needs and inquire how things are going. This action is two-fold; implementers feel valued and cared for, and a clear signal is given that the change is of high priority and deserves attention. Miles (1998) corroborates Murphy's observation when he says that effective leaders visit classrooms to discover what is happening in classrooms. They collect data through formal observations and instruments and use that data to help teachers with the new program.

8. Conclusions

Home Economics is a relatively new subject in the primary school system in Zimbabwe. It is the duty of the head to make sure that teachers get all the necessary support for them to understand, successfully interpret and teach a new curriculum.

- Heads do not communicate the vision about Home Economics to teachers. Teachers should be clear about the rationale of the curriculum.
- It is also apparent that heads do not provide resources for use by teachers as they implement the subject. Heads do not give priority to Home Economics materials when making school orders and they do not organize for resource personnel to address teachers on the new curriculum.
- Heads did not provide adequate technical assistance to teachers. They did not organize discussion sessions to clarify knowledge and skills required by teachers as they teach the subject.
- Supervision of teachers implementing the Home Economics curriculum is very inadequate with respect to observation of lessons and assigning qualified teachers to demonstrate for the under qualified teachers.

- Heads did not remove blockages which may inhibit the progress of implementation of the new curriculum. Teachers were not allowed time to interact during planning and teaching of Home Economics. Teachers were also not allowed a degree of flexibility in time tabling for the curriculum.

9. Recommendations

In view of the foregoing findings and conclusions, the current research puts forth the following recommendations:

- Heads should communicate the vision of the new Home Economics curriculum to teachers and to engage teachers in the actual refinement of the vision of the curriculum.
- Heads should give priority to provision of learning and teaching materials for Home Economics if the curriculum is to be effectively implemented.
- Teachers should be assisted practically in solving problems they experience in the teaching of Home Economics. Heads should provide adequate professional and technical support to the teachers.
- Heads should supervise the teaching of Home Economics adequately. There should be more lesson observations on this subject and more experienced teachers should demonstrate for the less experienced on how best to teach the subject.
- There should be continuous staff development courses or sessions for the teachers on Home Economics at school level. Teachers need to be equipped with skills in this subject in order to effectively teach it.
- Heads should remove blockages which inhibit the progress of implementation of the new curriculum. Teachers should be allowed time to interact during planning and teaching of Home Economics. Sufficient time should be allocated to the subject and principals are encouraged to allow teachers on a degree of flexibility in time-tabling their lessons.
- The Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture through the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) should hold workshops for heads and teachers to guide them on how best to implement this curriculum at school level.

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