

Teacher Preparation through Continuous Professional Development in Zambia

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Purpose of the Study

This study presents research about the Teacher Training Institute (TTI) in Zambia that aims to address the effects of HIV/AIDS on young children and their families through promotion of Early Childhood Learning centers. In Zambia, pre-school education is in a precarious state with overcrowded classrooms, few educational materials with insufficiently prepared teachers who, often, are unable to provide more than mere care-giving for the children. This study questions if there is evidence that the TTI through Continuous Professional Development (CPD) can build the capacity of teachers to implement more comprehensive Learning Centers in preschool programs. Women's Global Connection (WGC) conducted a formative evaluation of the outcomes of the TTI in order to assess its perceived value and its potential as a sustainable model for CPD for preschool teachers in other rural areas. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the journey of professional development undertaken by the teachers in the TTI.

Rationale and Significance

The location of the TTI is in the Mongu District of the Western Province of Zambia. The Western area of Zambia has the highest incidence of poverty in the country as well as the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS creating a larger number of AIDS orphans and vulnerable children. Currently, there is minimal government implementation of pre-school education for children who are under seven years of age. To respond to this tremendous need, the Zambia Ministry of Education has recognized the value of collaboration with committed educators from other countries. The TTI uses a model of leadership development for teachers created by the Center for Creative Leadership. Using this model, this study explores the teachers' capacity to apply their learning in their classrooms as well as in the mentoring of other under-prepared teachers. This study evaluates if the TTI is a viable model of strengthening teachers' capacity to create child-friendly classroom environments and learning activities in regions where teacher training and learning materials are insufficient or unavailable. This study can offer a major step in creating a model of sustainable professional development for teachers in Zambia.

Description of Methodology

This qualitative exploratory study began the evaluation process in the summer of 2008 when the first TTI group of teachers began to gather data on their experience of mentoring. The TTI teachers answered questionnaires within focus groups to document their perceptions of their mentees progress and also began structured observations in their mentees' classrooms. Simultaneously, the U.S. based research team began to analyze the teachers' weekly reports on the WGC interactive website. The data collected from the questionnaires, surveys, observations and blog entries were coded and categorized into themes depicting the development evidenced in the teachers' reporting.

Findings and Conclusions

The findings include evidence that the teachers have attained knowledge related to early childhood education and content as well as evidence of an increase in technology application, mentor relationships, leadership skills and professional development. Participants in this study expressed personal and professional empowerment as classroom teachers and peer mentors.