Working in the rain: pressures and priorities for teacher education curriculum design in South Africa: a case study of the University of Durban-Westville

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Abstract

This case study of the transformation of teacher education in post-apartheid South Africa is a reflection on the pressures and priorities that characterise curriculum design and development in a society undergoing rapid change. It focuses on the varied sources behind the process of curriculum transformation, indicating how an historically disadvantaged institution chose to redesign its model of teacher professional development to reflect a more progressive interpretation of the process of becoming a teacher. The influences impacting on the design of the teacher education curriculum emanate both from within the institution itself and from the wider external environment of changing educational policy which signalled a departure from apartheid traditions. This paper suggests that the process of transformation is characteristically messy, contradictory and complex. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Teacher education; Curriculum; South Africa; Teacher development; Becoming a teacher

1. Introduction

This case study reflects the curriculum design choices that the University of Durban-Westville Faculty of Education made during the changing times of post-apartheid South Africa. The rapidly changing environment of a society under transformation yields various choices for curriculum designers. Some of these choices reflected competing paradigms for the preferred model of teacher education curriculum which were developed in relation to the specific context the institution found itself in. This context was one which had embedded within it both internal levers on the transformation process as well as external influences impacting on the choices being made. The internal levers of change are identified in this paper as the forces of influence which brought about a greater recognition of the changing characteristics of students attracted to the university during the transition from a mono-racial to a diversified education system. The changing conceptual approaches among staff as a consequence of exposure to critical educational theories about education in general, and teacher education in particular, also act as internal levers. The external forces of influence derive from the broad transformation agenda, established through the promulgation of innovative educational policy at both school and university curriculum levels.

The day-to-day management of the process of
curriculum transformation was destabilising and
challenging for the university teaching staff, who
found themselves having to deal with several new
imperatives in their curriculum design and deliv-
er. This process can be likened to a group of
enthusiasts working in the rain. They are aware of
the thunder, lightning and rain which surround
them. Nevertheless they remain fixed and focussed
on the task to be accomplished, hardly aware as
new winds add to the fury of the growing storm.
The storm will pass and they will raise their heads
to see the rain-soaked earth. There will be a
brighter day. And their work too will have been
accomplished.

This paper reports on the process of curriculum
development and the conflicting realities which
confronted teacher education institutions during
the process of working in the rain of transform-
ation, six years after a new democratic political
order was established in the country.

2. Collecting the data

This paper reports on a subset of data gleaned
for the research from a larger project reflecting on
teacher education provision in South Africa. This
research project is itself a subset of a larger inter-
national comparative study called the Multi-Site
Teacher Education Research project (MUSTER)¹,
which focuses on teacher education reform in
developing world countries. The South African
MUSTER research project consists of 22 sub-stud-
ies gathering data from institutional contexts in the
Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal prov-
inces, offering a plethora of models of teacher pro-
fessional development. The national comparative
perspective is as pertinent as the international
search for better designs of teacher education cur-
rricula that are relevant, contextually appropriate
and cost-effective.

The UDW research project used various sources
of data for the case study presented, including a
review of several documents produced during the
process of curriculum design over a 3-year period
(1998–2000): the changing university calendar rec-
ording the formally registered curriculum of the
institution; the curriculum documents submitted
during the faculty review process; and the official
submission for registration of the new curriculum
in 2000 presented to the South African Qualifi-
cations Authority (SAQA). Data was also gathered
through the analysis of student administrative rec-
ords during the period 1991–2000 and a survey
questionnaire was administered to final year stu-
dents. Interviews with first year entry students and
newly qualified graduates were also conducted.
The author was involved in co-ordinating the cur-
rriculum development process throughout the per-
iod, and the data (verbal and written) generated
through the numerous meetings with lecturing staff
constitute an important source for this paper. This
insider perspective has its potential limitations and
advantages, both of which will be acknowledged
in the detailed description and evaluation of the
curriculum innovation process.

3. The institutional context: University of
Durban-Westville (UDW)

The University of Durban-Westville was histori-
cally established in 1961 to serve the apartheid
philosophy of separate development for the ‘Indi-
an’ population group. As part of the resistance to
apartheid education the institution progressively
challenged this racialised organisation of the
higher education environment, and by the early
1990s expressed a mission to serve the mar-
ginalised and under-represented groups.

3.1. The students

By the year 2000 the university student com-
munity consisted of approximately 60% ‘African’
students (previously prevented from attending) and
53% women students (previously under-rep-

¹ The MUSTER (Multi-Site Teacher Education Research)
Project is a research project funded by DFID. It is based on
collaboration between educational research institutes in Ghana,
Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago and the
University of Sussex Institute of Education. There were four
main strands to the research: the costs of teacher education, the
college context, curriculum issues, and the process of becoming
a teacher.
resented in the institution). The survey data of final year teacher education students is given in the profile presented below:

- The majority of students were working class and lower middle class students, who had gained their secondary and primary schooling in former ‘African’ or ‘Indian’ apartheid schools.
- 32% of the cohort reported their domicile as being rural; 30% peri-urban and 37% urban. 30% of the urban students are domiciled in the greater Durban Metropolitan area where the university is situated.
- 17.9% of the students’ parents have a post-secondary qualification suggesting that 82.1% of the cohort represent the first generation of post-secondary education students within their families.
- 32.3% indicated that their parents are professionals or skilled workers. 67.7% indicated that their parents have relatively low paid jobs.
- 62% of the cohort indicated that they have family members who are teachers.
- 61% of the group experienced their primary schooling in rural areas, 31% in peri-urban areas and 8% in urban areas.
- 46% completed their schooling career within the normal 12 years of formal education. 16% took an additional year to complete; 10% took an additional two years to complete and 18% took three or more additional years.
- 17.8% repeated their matriculation school-leaving examinations once, 22.4% twice and 4.6% three times.
- 55.6% are students who entered the teacher education programmes immediately after leaving secondary school. 17.1% indicated that they had taught in a school prior to coming to university either in secondary schools (25%), primary schools (70.8%), or in an adult education setting (4.2%).
- 41.4% of the cohort did not study mathematics at secondary school matriculation level, and 36.8% did not pursue science (these are compulsory teaching subjects within the teacher education primary school curriculum).
- The students who read for English, science and mathematics at matriculation school level achieved grades which cluster in the bottom range, indicating a weak competence in these subjects.
- 96.4% and 93.4% of the African students reported that they were proficient to teach using English and isiZulu respectively as languages of teaching and learning. 100% and 12.2% of the Indian students reported competence in teaching using these provincially dominant languages of English and isiZulu respectively.
- The following changing patterns of student enrolment for different fields occurred over a nine year period (Table 1).
- The final Pre-service (PRESET) student cohort for 1999 reflected the following distribution across race and gender (Table 2).
- The racialised and gendered pattern is not consistent across all subject specialisations. For example, a survey of the cohort of Special Method English students in 1997 reflects the following distribution (Table 3).

### Table 1
Specialist fields within the Teacher Education Secondary School Curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Arts</th>
<th>Commerce</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>219(90.5%)</td>
<td>7(2.9%)</td>
<td>16(6.6%)</td>
<td>242(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>184(84.8%)</td>
<td>16(7.4%)</td>
<td>17(7.8%)</td>
<td>217(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>132(73.3%)</td>
<td>19(10.6%)</td>
<td>29(16.1%)</td>
<td>180(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>112(70.5%)</td>
<td>8(5.2%)</td>
<td>33(21.6%)</td>
<td>153(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>91(70.5%)</td>
<td>11(8.5%)</td>
<td>27(20.9%)</td>
<td>129(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>88(83.8%)</td>
<td>11(10.5%)</td>
<td>6(5.7%)</td>
<td>105(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>95(89.6%)</td>
<td>6(5.7%)</td>
<td>5(4.7%)</td>
<td>106(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>54(75%)</td>
<td>6(8.3%)</td>
<td>12(16.7%)</td>
<td>72(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>46(66.7%)</td>
<td>2(33.3%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>6(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average%</td>
<td>(70.5%)</td>
<td>(10.3%)</td>
<td>(11.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2
Final year PRESET students (1999): Race and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Total N=152</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60(39.7%)</td>
<td>28(18.5%)</td>
<td>88(58.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50(33.1%)</td>
<td>13(8.6%)</td>
<td>63(41.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>110(72.8%)</td>
<td>41(27.2%)</td>
<td>151(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3
Final year PRESET students (1997): race, gender and subject specialisation: English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Total N=152</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10(12.2%)</td>
<td>47(57.3%)</td>
<td>57(69.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17(20.7%)</td>
<td>8(9.8%)</td>
<td>25(30.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27(32.9%)</td>
<td>55(67.1%)</td>
<td>82(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2. Student diversity and the teacher education curriculum

The above profile of the students is presented at length in order to reflect on an often-overlooked dimension influencing the design of teacher education curriculum. These students emerge from particular backgrounds of teaching and learning inherited from their homes, families, communities and primary and secondary schooling. Teacher education curricula are usually designed without an acknowledgement of these personal profiles of students, and frequently tend to engage with student teachers as if they are a homogeneous group (Samuel and Stephens, 2000).

In the process of redesigning their curriculum, teacher education curriculum designers became aware of the spectrum of diversity that exists within the student body. As has been characteristic of a racialised South African society, this diversity is often understood only in racial terms and falsely assumes homogeneity among groups of African and Indian students. The above description of the students reflects the diversity of geographic, linguistic and class perspectives between and across the racial divide. It alerts curriculum designers to the need to focus on the uniqueness of individuals within the cohort, if they are to be able to gauge the curriculum interventions in relation to the biographical profile of each student, and have a maximum impact on their development as professional teachers.

This profile also starkly highlights the weak subject-based competence of many of the potential teachers. There are many students who have not acquired a high competence at matriculation level in the subject in which they will serve as future teachers. Unless the teacher education curriculum can offer qualitative improvements in this poor entry competence in particular subjects, it is likely that future graduates will perpetuate a cycle of poor teaching and learning in school subjects like mathematics, science and English.

The student teachers who are first generation university learners are also presented with the additional challenge of not having adequate role models within their immediate home environment to assist them with the transition to post-secondary teaching and learning. They are thus faced with the added responsibility of learning to cope with university-type education. There seems to be a large source of potential role models of educators in their families. However, these resources are only as adequate as the model of teaching and learning that they can offer.

Whilst the opening up of the university to the previously excluded African race group is usually applauded in aggregate figures of enrolment within the institution, it is interesting to note that the bulk of the students are not clustered in fields and subjects that are in demand within the workplace of schools. Generally there are not enough student teachers doing science, and African students are under-represented in subjects like English. The profile of the students also reflects a teaching profession that is increasingly gendered towards females in the Arts and Humanities. This hardly represents progress towards the goals of race and gender equity.

The above description of the students presents a serious challenge for curriculum designers to transform the profile of the students in the following ways: the teacher education sector needs to focus on incentives to attract better prepared students into the teaching profession; it needs to design curricula that address the background experiences of the students in terms of their geographic, cultural, gendered and class heritages; it needs to address seriously the process by which it can encourage under-represented students into enrolling for under-subscribed specialist areas like mathematics, sciences and languages. Equity and redress are as much a part of the teacher education arena as they are within the school curriculum. These are the transformative challenges facing the teacher education sector.
The following issues need to be addressed when developing student teachers professionally. The school contexts in which the student teachers do their teaching practice are often chosen to suit the administrative convenience of the teacher education institution in providing the kind of support required for supervision of students during this practical component of the course. However, as is indicated by the above description of the profile of the students, the school contexts within which student teachers are placed for teaching practice may be a foreign environment to most of them (socially, culturally, geographically, and racially). A number of challenging questions for teacher educators and the design of the teacher education curriculum therefore arise:

- Does this mean that teacher education curricula need to actively support students in engaging with this foreignness?
- Should student teachers be placed at teaching practice schools which deliberately challenge their own geographic, cultural, gender and/or cultural heritages?
- What does this mean pragmatically in terms of costs for transporting students between these different sites?
- How should teacher education institutions deal with the resistance from “boxed-in” groups of schools and students teachers who obstruct any challenge to their established world views?
- What role does the teacher education institution have in consciously challenging the kinds of heritages of teaching and learning that are being disseminated in the schools?
- What right do teacher education curriculum designers have to destabilise the cultural ethos (however flawed) of schools that have become comfortable with their ethos?

4. The UDW pre-service teacher education (PRESET) programme

As indicated in the above discussion, the changing profile of the student body within the institution at UDW provided an opportunity for the Faculty of Education to re-examine the kind of teacher education curriculum that it had on offer. As curriculum developers, the teacher educators began to survey the specific heritages that students brought with them to the teacher education courses. The new curriculum needed to address specifically the interaction between students of different cultural, religious, linguistic, class and racial diversities within the teacher education and school curriculum. The old curriculum certainly perpetuated hierarchies of opportunity and privilege for certain groups of individuals. The curriculum design of the teacher education programme was often also irrelevant to the kind of students who were engaging with the programme. Curriculum designers began to review the possible alternative conceptions of how teachers can be prepared to reconstruct the education system. A hard reflection on how they themselves as teacher educators had been implicated in the perpetuation of oppressive pedagogy was necessary. A review of the old curriculum was needed.

4.1. The old curriculum: the Bachelor of Pedagogic (B.Paed) degree

The former curriculum was what Zeichner (1983) refers to as a ‘front-loaded curriculum’. The degree was co-offered by the Faculty of Education and other feeder faculties of Commerce, Arts and Science. The bulk of the core curriculum involved students registering in undergraduate courses within the feeder faculties. In these faculties the emphasis was on developing subject-based knowledge. The lecturers in these courses focussed exclusively on developing the propositional knowledge base of particular subjects like botany, accounting or English literary studies. This was seen as providing the ‘codified knowledge’ (Eraut, 1996) of the subjects that teachers would teach in the future. Student teachers were engaged in deepening their understanding of subject content without any direct linking to the means by which they would engage in the pedagogical processes of teaching, learning and assessment when working with learners in a school environment. Student teachers often saw little connection between the in-depth academic level of the subject they were studying and the subject as it was dealt with in
the school curriculum. After all, the lecturers were themselves not directly training them to become teachers of the subjects they taught in their lecture halls.

The responsibility for teaching students how to teach the content was the task of the lecturers of the Faculty of Education, and very little contact between the two lecturer groups ever occurred. Students spent approximately two-thirds of their lecture contact time outside the Faculty of Education. Students only really engaged with the Faculty of Education in their final year of study, where the emphasis shifted towards providing them with the methodology courses to prepare them for the practical component of teaching practice in their final year.

Courses within the Faculty of Education in the old B.Paed curriculum were directed towards an abstract theoretical analysis of the psychological, philosophical and sociological understanding of education. A course called ‘Foundations of Education’ included these three dimensions, as well as a focus on a historical overview of education in South Africa, the management and administration of education, and a course in didactics. This last course over time evolved beyond merely an enunciation of the apartheid philosophy of ‘Fundamental Pedagogics’. The new course included an analysis of curriculum policy development for school education. It came to provide a challenge to the Fundamental Pedagogic interpretations of learning as being the process of enculturing children to the adult world in a moralistic enactment of principles of Christian national education, the goals of the former apartheid state. The course ‘Curriculum Studies’ came to include an analysis of the resistance to Fundamental Pedagogics, an analysis of the political and historic nature of designing curricula, and an analysis of the options and preferences of a more transformatory agenda of emerging educational policy.

Resistance to the B.Paed curriculum developed as a consequence of the growing dissatisfaction of the newer and younger members of staff who came to serve the university community during the crumbling of the apartheid ideology. The resistance to the B.Paed teacher education curriculum also emerged on philosophical and ideological grounds, drawing from critical education studies. Staff members were increasingly exposed to literature from the resistance movement to apartheid education, as well as direct exposure to conferences and literature from educationalists challenging the dominant ‘Applied Theorist’ notions of teacher education (e.g. Michael Apple, Henry Giroux, Paulo Freire). The Sociology of Education division increasingly focused on issues around social justice and education; the Psychology of Education division introduced debates around the social construction of knowledge.

Nevertheless, the overall teacher education curriculum model perpetuated a (perhaps unconscious) adherence to the view that student teachers needed to be presented with the broad subject-based knowledge and educational theoretical conceptions first, before trying out these conceptions in the ‘real world of teaching and learning’. There was even resistance from some of the faculty staff to becoming involved in the practical components of teaching practice because they saw this as the domain of the ‘Methods lecturers’. This resistance from lecturers is evidence of their belief that one developed professionally by learning the theory first, and applying it in practice later.

The emerging resistance to this separation between theory and practice was fuelled by lecturers who were beginning to engage with the literature of inter-disciplinary studies, teacher education curriculum design (Johnson, 1996), post-modernist teacher education studies (Hargreaves, 1999), and curriculum policy analysis (Jansen and Christie, 1999). Increasingly, it became evident that the boundaries between the different ‘Specialists’ (either educational theoreticians or subject method lecturers) was artificial and was being used to protect structural positions of headships and professorships within the institution, rather than promoting the qualitative professional development of student teachers.

The first indications signalling the end of the old curriculum were the discussions around the design of the foundational course at Education I level (first year entry). Together with the Academic Support Unit within the faculty, the course was restructured along the lines of thematic clusters, which forced the integration of previously separated ‘educational
around the kinds of engagement that supervising faculty practice philosophy that was more resonant with the environment, was a formulation of a teaching practice that emerged, as a consequence of this changing became well read within the faculty. What itself. Educationalists like Carr and Kemmis (1986) enactment a reformation/ transformation of the system understanding the education system and seeking to came to believe more in the intersection between a popular research orientation as staff members widely within the faculty. Action Research became Donald Schon (1987) also began to be read more work of theorists like John Elliot (1991, 1993) and of front-loading with theoretical constructions. The show evidence of challenges to the overall model – period of years (the late 1980s–1990s) began to The faculty began to document of the Faculty of Education, signi cant studies on these ideals (Keogh, 1998; Samuel, 1997, 1998; Pillay, 1998). The use of Action Research within these ideals became the of critical reflective practice’ emerged as the preferred of the Faculty of Education. This model posits the view that teacher professional development is an ongoing process of reflective engagement with one’s actions as a teacher/educator. Through generating awareness of the teacher’s role and identity in the classroom, the model seeks to celebrate the value of both theory and practice. Integrating these two dimensions in a dialectical relationship allows the student teacher himself or herself to chart a way forward in their own trajectory of professional development. The role of the supervising lecturer and the mentor teachers is to offer support and expertise they have gained both theoretically and practically from their years of experiences. The student teacher is encouraged to develop a collegial relationship with other novice student teachers in order to form a team approach to professional development.

Whilst these ideals became the of the Faculty of Education, significant studies emerged to reflect on the dif culties of enacting these ideals (Keogh, 1998; Samuel, 1997, 1998; Pillay, 1998). The use of Action Research within the teaching practice component of the curriculum also came under review in these studies. The strong adherence to rituals and routines within both the teacher education institution and the school system

The course content of the B.Paed degree over a period of years (the late 1980s–1990s) began to show evidence of challenges to the overall model of front-loading with theoretical constructions. The work of theorists like John Elliot (1991, 1993) and Donald Schon (1987) also began to be read more widely within the faculty. Action Research became a popular research orientation as staff members came to believe more in the intersection between understanding the education system and seeking to enact a reformation/ transformation of the system itself. Educationalists like Carr and Kemmis (1986) became well read within the faculty. What emerged, as a consequence of this changing environment, was a formulation of a teaching practice philosophy that was more resonant with the faculty’s developing views about teacher education.

The faculty began to document of engagement that supervising lecturers would be involved with during their school visits. Previously, the student teachers were visited by lecturers who were the sole judge of the effectiveness of the student. The supervisor would visit a student teacher in a ‘crit. lesson’, and award the student a grade based on their performance during the lesson. This system led to an emphasis on the outwardly demonstrable pupil learning which student teachers aimed to display when supervisors visited their classrooms. Management of classroom discipline and record-keeping became emphasised. This world-view of competent teachers was usually in harmony with what the mentor teachers believed good teaching was about (Samuel, 1997). The mentor teachers usually conceived of their role as being to induct student teachers into the semblances of good professional conduct. This sometimes led to the mentor teachers training student teachers in ‘window dressing’ for the university supervisor’s ‘crit. lessons’.

A model of ‘critical reflective practice’ emerged as the preferred of position of the Faculty of Education. This model posits the view that teacher professional development is an ongoing process of reflective engagement with one’s actions as a teacher/educator. Through generating awareness of the teacher’s role and identity in the classroom, the model seeks to celebrate the value of both theory and practice. Integrating these two dimensions in a dialectical relationship allows the student teacher himself or herself to chart a way forward in their own trajectory of professional development. The role of the supervising lecturer and the mentor teachers is to offer support and expertise they have gained both theoretically and practically from their years of experiences. The student teacher is encouraged to develop a collegial relationship with other novice student teachers in order to form a team approach to professional development.

Whilst these ideals became the official policy of the Faculty of Education, significant studies emerged to reflect on the difficulties of enacting these ideals (Keogh, 1998; Samuel, 1997, 1998; Pillay, 1998). The use of Action Research within the teaching practice component of the curriculum also came under review in these studies. The strong adherence to rituals and routines within both the teacher education institution and the school system
were seen as obstructions to incorporating a new paradigm. The on-campus course needed to develop more consciously the skills of reflective practice. Student teachers, unaccustomed to the process of conscious written reflection, found it difficult to engage with this kind of transformed emphasis on written rather than oral reflection. Mentor teachers felt that they too were under scrutiny during the student teachers’ teaching practice and tended to avoid the university lecturers during their visits. A more successful relationship with schools emerged out of prolonged engagement with teachers and learners over time. Creative methods needed to be developed to ensure a healthy partnership between the teacher education institution and the schools.

4.3. Mathematics and science education

Another significant source of influence for teacher education curriculum innovation emerged from the science and later the mathematics teacher educators within the faculty. It became evident that there was a need to break the cycle of under-prepared science and mathematics students entering into the university system. These two divisions chose to design an innovative programme which simultaneously attempted to develop the students’ content knowledge of the disciplines of science and mathematics, as well as to demonstrate alternative pedagogic approaches to the teaching and learning of these subjects. Students with low achievements in secondary school mathematics and science were enrolled into this programme. The use of extensive face-to-face lectures, tutorials, field trips, and Action Research projects became characteristic of this course. Whilst the science education course seemed to have more success in developing student teachers’ competences and interest in science education, the mathematics education course still suffers from a low pass rate within the teacher education programme. The level of under-preparedness of the students in secondary school mathematics is offered as one of the reasons (Paras, 2000). This model of integrating both the content and the methodology into a single course has become the hallmark of the curriculum design of the new teacher education programme.

The above process of transformation of the curriculum for teacher education took place over several years and should not be seen as a smooth process. Resistance was felt by various competitors who defended their paradigmatic view of how good professional teachers could be developed. The period of transformation was characterised by vigorous debates about the merits and demerits of different approaches to teacher development. Feelings of resistance were palpable in the daily interactions between staff members. All these processes may be regarded as internal levers of change forcing the faculty to embrace a more progressive, qualitatively different teacher education curriculum.

5. Teacher education curriculum policy

The above description of the levers of change impacting on the design of the teacher education curriculum at UDW may give the impression that the curriculum innovations emanated solely from the university staff members themselves. Such are the dangers of the insider perspective, which perhaps over-emphasises the roles charted by colleagues. The university teacher education curriculum, which is described in more detail in Section six below, may also be said to have arisen as a consequence of the external levers of education policy which were developed as regulative mechanisms for both schools and higher education institutions.

Paradoxically, the UDW Faculty of Education staff, who were themselves involved in the consultative process of formulation of teacher education policies, did not engage in a flurry of curriculum design work following the release of the Norms and Standards for Accreditation of Teacher Education Curriculum (COTEP, 1995), nor did they do so when the Revised Norms and Standards for Educators emerged two years later (COTEP, 1997). Unlike other providers of teacher education, the UDW staff, perhaps erroneously or arrogantly, believed that the internal innovations that had been introduced in their curriculum over the number of years prior to the release of these policy frameworks were directly in harmony with the intentions of the teacher education policy designers.
However, in 1999 all higher education institutions were expected to register their curriculum with the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) by June 1999. This registration of programmes with SAQA involved providers having to declare in detail the curriculum intentions, inputs and outcomes that their courses expected. This was seen as a process of establishing a means of regulating the qualifications being offered at different institutions in relation to a nationally agreed framework of qualifications for education and training.

University providers were initially resistant to the requirement to ‘reduce their curriculum to specified outcomes’ and saw the SAQA registration legislation as a means of curtailing their autonomy as curriculum innovators. The SAQA consultants brought in to give guidance to staff involved in curriculum development encouraged the curriculum designers (lecturers) to interpret their role as a means of providing greater access to, and mobility within, the education and training system. The development of a market-related university curriculum within the context of dwindling student enrolment was suggested as an appropriate strategy. It was proposed that the design of university curricula should take into consideration the future employment prospects of graduates. The new education and training system of the post-apartheid system was, it was argued, only possible if the standards and outcomes of the educators and their programmes were subject to public scrutiny. This was seen as developing accountability to the public for the use of taxpayer resources to fund the subsidised higher education system. The establishment of the National Qualification Framework (NQF) was seen as part of the apparatus to regulate the plethora of qualifications and courses on offer by the previously fragmented education and training system.

It was within this context of registration of teacher education curricula that the UDW Faculty introduced the Bachelor of General Education and Training degree (BAGET). In line with the nationally agreed nomenclature, this course came to be referred to as the Bachelor of Education (undergraduate course). The designers of this programme interpreted this opportunity of registering their qualification as a formalising of the innovations that they had cumulatively developed during the resistance to the old B.Paed curriculum. The new ‘BAGET’ curriculum therefore represents the cumulative design changes made to the interdisciplinary ‘Educational Foundations’ course: the paradigmatic shifts in emphasis of the teaching practice, the greater focus on the dialectic between educational theory and practice, as well as a focus on the future employability of the graduates of a PRESET course within the new education and training system of the country.

The curriculum policy documents of the Department of Education were not the source documents which influenced the curriculum designers. The curriculum designers were aware of the changes signalled by such policy documents, which heralded an adherence to the philosophy of an outcomes–based education system. The designers were also aware that these changes towards an outcomes–based education system were symptomatic of the Department of Education’s preference for the entire system of education and training in the country to be based on this philosophy.

Another factor was that the changes in the phases of schooling included broadly two levels in pre-tertiary schooling: a 10-year compulsory General Education and Training (GET) band and a further three years devoted to a Further Education and Training (FET) band. The GET band is further divided into three phases: Foundational, Intermediate and Senior; this reflects a blurring of the demarcation between what was traditionally regarded as primary and secondary schooling.

The UDW staff, in recognising their lack of expertise in addressing ‘junior primary’ pedagogy, chose to focus on only the intermediate and senior phases of the GET band in their new curriculum. This effectively focussed on the preparation of educators for Grades 4–9. The University Postgraduate Certificate in Education (UPGCE) was developed to prepare teachers for the FET band. This paper reflects only on the introduction of the new ‘BAGET’ degree.

The changes to the school curriculum were introduced by the controversial ‘Curriculum 2005’ policy, which officially signalled the preference for an education system based on the principles of outcomes-based education (OBE) (DOE, 1997). Much
of the post-apartheid discourse around education has centered around the readiness or not of the teaching force to enact this curriculum innovation. Many of the papers predicted that the school curriculum policy was too complex and bureaucratic in its suggested regulatory framework (See Jansen and Christie, 1999 for a strong argument suggesting that OBE would fail in schools). The choice of the curriculum innovation was seen as providing adherence to globally accepted views about what an education system was expected to deliver, whilst the policy failed to recognise the poor infrastructure that existed in both human and physical resources to enact this sophisticated policy in many of South Africa’s schools.

One of the important features of the new Curriculum 2005 was the amalgamation of previously separated subjects. Eight new learning areas within the GET band were originally promulgated, leading to the merging of previously separated subjects. For example, the former geography school curriculum was disaggregated between the natural sciences learning area and the human and social studies learning area of the curriculum. It was suggested that history should no longer be a stand-alone subject, but instead be incorporated within the learning area of human and social studies. The question therefore arises: how did the teacher education curriculum at UDW respond to these innovations within the school curriculum and teacher education curriculum policy?

6. The new Bachelor of Education and Training (BAGET) PRESET degree

The discussion above reflects the following sources of impetus for the design of a new teacher education programme:

- The changing student population and their specific inherited biographical experiences of teaching and learning as a consequence of apartheid schooling;
- The under-preparedness of students in specific subject disciplines;
- The development of a teacher education model based on a dialectical relationship between theory and practice challenging the ‘front loading’ design of curriculum;
- A model of teaching practice based on developing student teachers as critical reflective practitioners;
- The changing ideology of the staff members drawing on literature from critical educational studies;
- The design imperatives of the SAQA registration process;
- The national norms and standards for accreditation of teacher education curricula as per Department of Education regulation, including a refocusing on an outcomes-based approach to higher education;
- The changing school curriculum (Curriculum 2005), introducing the shift in focus from subjects to integrated, interdisciplinary learning areas using an OBE approach;
- The need for university curriculum designers’ recognition of the future employability of their graduates in learning sites other than formal schooling;
- The development of a curriculum for teacher education which provides articulation and mobility of students within the National Qualifications Framework.

The design of the Bachelor of General Education and Training emerged as a consequence of synthesising all of these sources of influence. The degree consists of three broad types of modules which resonate with the SAQA design imperatives:

- Foundational modules, which provide the baseline of competences which students can build upon to develop the exit level outcomes of the whole degree;
- Core modules, which are regarded as essential to the particular employment tasks and responsibilities of the graduating teacher;
- Elective modules, which provide for individual choices to promote interdisciplinarity within the degree structure.

The ‘Foundational’ modules in the B.Ed degree are a combination of university–wide baseline modules and in-house School of Educational Stud-

ies modules. The university-wide modules aim to develop students’ academic literacy through an exposure to a range of academic knowledge pursuits within the university. These modules also include the development of English language competence to cope with the medium of teaching and learning within UDW. Together with the Life Skills modules (School of Educational Studies), the foundational modules attempt to develop those who are largely first-generation university students so that they are able to make the transition from secondary to tertiary education. Other ‘foundational’ modules are Educational Technology, which prepares students to become computer literate; and Community Service and Workplace Education, which exposes students to the view that one’s own education is related to the role of providing service within community settings. These modules introduce students to a range of educational and training sites in which they could utilise a qualification in education. These include places of shelter, media broadcasting units, social welfare homes, etc. This hopefully introduces students to future employment prospects outside formal schooling.

The ‘Core’ modules of the B.Ed reflect a strong emphasis on the specific learning areas where there is an undersupply of teachers within the educational and training system, namely languages, mathematics and science. These three modules are spread across three years, integrating both the academic content of languages, mathematics and science and the methodology of teaching and learning this content. The introduction of the Language Education course in the B.Ed degree attempts to address the concerns around multilingual teaching and learning in increasingly linguistically diverse settings within the changing school and training environment. The modules are directed towards all students developing at least basic communicative competence in both the dominant languages, English and isiZulu, for classroom communication.

The remaining ‘Core’ modules consist of thematic clusters around the issues of diversity, social justice and education, drawing on the literature from critical educational studies.

Exposure to the ‘real world of teaching and learning’ in practical contexts is incorporated throughout the degree from second year level. Practical Internship I and II provide students with early practical experience in order to promote the dialectical relationship between the theoretical debates held within the lecture halls, and the practical world of classroom settings and learning sites. These learning sites are broadened beyond formal schooling to include vocational training centres and workplace education environments. The entire fourth year of study is devoted to placements within learning environments in the Practical Internship III module. A diversity of learning/teaching settings is envisaged for the student teachers.

The ‘Elective’ components of the course attempt to introduce briefly the other learning areas within the intermediate and senior phases of the general education and training band of the school curriculum. The introduction of Integrated Arts Education, Economics and Entrepreneurial Education, and Social Sciences Education modules as options offers the student teacher the opportunity to experience the full range of learning areas that are part of the school curriculum.

The curriculum design of the BAGET degree represents a culmination of the changing internal and external factors affecting teacher education programmes at UDW. It represents a curriculum that also reflects the imperatives of the changing teacher education policy being promulgated. For example, it (perhaps inadvertently) provides the regulatory framework which suggests that teacher education curricula should enable student teachers to develop “academic, practical and reflexive competences” (DOE, 1997). The course design reflects a conscious attempt to develop educators who are able to work in a variety of different teaching and learning sites, in order to increase their employability; it attempts to develop educators who are able to develop critical reflection about and in their action; it attempts to provide students with the

2 During the restructuring process at UDW (2000), the Faculty of Education merged with the former Faculty of Arts to become the new Faculty of Humanities. The School of Educational Studies is now one of the seven schools in the new Faculty of Humanities.
basic disciplinary skills in the content and methodology of the subjects they will teach.

7. Lessons learnt about designing teacher education curricula

Whilst the design of this teacher education curriculum may profess to have responded to the internal and external environment of the university system, questions need to be asked about how relevant and appropriate these curriculum choices have been for the school contexts and learning sites within which the graduating educators may practise. The curriculum choices are never ideologically or culturally neutral.

For example, teacher education curriculum designers are faced with making choices which may often be interpreted as being at odds with inherited understandings of the roles and identities that teachers have assimilated as a consequence of being inducted into the patterns of teaching and learning which prevailed during apartheid schooling. These ‘inherited’ roles and identities may also, it could be argued, have their roots in deep cultural ideologies and beliefs, which could be seen as conflicting with the professed policy intentions of the new legislation concerning teacher education and school curricula. Teacher education policy and school curriculum policy have been significantly reconfigured to reflect more globally acceptable understandings of education and training. However, the key question is: in whose interests are these teacher-preferred roles and identities being propagated?

Curriculum designers need also to make choices within the context of training/educating school leavers. Under apartheid, school leavers were intentionally under-prepared in terms of the breadth and depth of the subject–based knowledge needed as a baseline from which to launch into teaching as a career. It is evident that students need to develop strong competences in specific subjects. However, the policy for the school curriculum is aimed at promoting interdisciplinary approaches. These student teachers have not yet grasped the elementary foundations of the disciplines they would need to enable them to engage in interdisciplinary dialogue with each other. The university environment is itself grappling with the task of bringing previously balkanised departments into interdisciplinary dialogue. How will the university curriculum respond to the call for the promotion of strong subject-based knowledge? Will under-prepared student teachers benefit from engaging with the interdisciplinary content of undergraduate courses?

The design of the curriculum for the BAGET degree was devised prior to major policies concerning the rationalisation and redeployment of teachers. In an attempt to promote equity and redress, the Department of Education attempted to distribute the number of qualified teachers evenly across the disparate educational settings of apartheid education. Despite agreement with the national teacher unions about this policy, there has been widespread resistance to it. The media became the battleground between the Department of Education and the teaching force, who objected to the redeployment of ‘excess’ teachers. Teachers resisted being moved out of their schools into what were perceived to be under-resourced and difficult schools. This fuelled widespread negative perceptions about being a teacher.

As a consequence of the embattled status of teachers within the system, school leavers have voted with their feet to choose careers other than teaching. Nationally, across South Africa, there has been a significant drop in enrolment at Faculties of Education. This is despite the proposed incorporation of former colleges of education into the higher education university system. The national department’s preoccupation with rationalising the teaching force arises out of its attempt to redirect expenditure from personnel costs to infrastructure costs, in order to develop better-resourced schools. The chosen emphasis of the national and provincial departments is on retraining the existing teachers within the schools. Putting resources into the professional development of existing teachers, so that they have the skills required for the new school curriculum, has become the prime focus of the education bureaucracy.

The effect of all of this has been that fewer students are entering the profession of teaching at undergraduate pre-service level. It has reinforced the public perception that teaching is a job where
one is likely to be redeployed or removed. A climate of inadequacy and anxiety exists amongst those teachers who are unable to make the transition to the dictates of the new educational policy (e.g. outcomes-based education, and/or reflective practice). This also promotes the view that teaching is not a lucrative career.

The upshot of this for UDW has been that there has been a massive decline in the enrolment for undergraduate pre-service teacher education. A comparison between the enrolments for four qualifications over a nine-year period gives a clear picture of the trend (Table 4).

A massive drop in numbers at the pre-service level is noted. The new B.Ed (‘BAGET’) degree was introduced in 1999. Despite it being an innovative curriculum, the Faculty would need to consider whether it is financially viable to offer this course in the coming year 2001, if enrolments are so low. The institution will need to decide whether it is prepared to sustain the loss, and cross-subsidise the B.Ed pre-service course from the income generated from the continuing teacher education and research degrees of the faculty.

These are the challenges facing the design and execution of the teacher education curricula in post-apartheid South Africa. The university teacher educators may be poised as ideologically and educationally appropriate deliverers of an alternative teacher education programme, concordant with the expressed intentions of the national teacher education and school curriculum policies. The capacity exists within the university institutions to deliver quality pre-service teacher education. But the climate of embattlement within the school situation promotes scepticism amongst school leavers about entering teaching as career.

It is evident that there are several forces exerting pressure on the teacher education curriculum development process, and they do not necessarily all push or pull in the same direction. The UDW Faculty was simultaneously attempting to address the inadequacies of their old curriculum, challenging the routinised practice of teacher development that had become internalised by some of the staff, to respond to the imperatives of a changing educational policy environment for teacher education and the school level, and to engage with the repercussions of negative perceptions of becoming a teacher, which were fuelled by the media in response to national policy on rationalisation and redeployment of teachers.

The apartheid sun has scorched the earth of its water. The policy clouds have gathered and all looks gloomy. Thunder. Lightning. The road ahead seems temporarily clear. The light drizzle on hot earth increases its tempo to a rhythmic beat. The winds scatter all which is not firmly rooted. The buffeted trees watch those who scurry to find shelter. And then the downpour…with all the fury and potential of rebirth. There will be sunshine, surely? It is our time as teacher educators and curriculum designers to work in the rain.

References

Committee of Teacher Education Policy (COTEP), 1995.

Table 4
Student enrolment across PRESET and Continuing Teacher Education levels qualification

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National Norms and Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Curricula, Department of Education, Pretoria.


