

CHAPTER 3

A distant reality: aligning the BEd curriculum at North West University

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Introduction

This chapter reports on the restructuring of the Bachelor of Education (BEd) qualification at North West University (NWU). The interest is in how the curriculum was shaped by dynamics related to new national policies and regulations, complex institutional change at the university and their mediation by academics who shaped the curriculum in particular ways.

In addressing the relationship between broader political processes, institutional dynamics and the shape and content of curriculum, the chapter is divided into three parts. The first part of the chapter provides a brief history and description of how education has come to be positioned in the institutional context at NWU. The focus is on the departments concerned with initial professional education of teachers (IPET) within the faculties.

The second part of the chapter describes the processes of restructuring the BEd curriculum specifically at NWU. The differential positioning of the campuses making up NWU is considered, as is the macro-level policy and regulatory environment. The micro-level interests and groupings of individual academics within the different faculties on the different campuses are also considered. Dynamics at the institutional (or meso-) level are identified as crucial in mediating macro-policy, as is the particular relationship between the institution and the state.

The third part of the chapter focuses on the BEd curriculum that has emerged out of these processes of restructuring and rearticulation. It considers both the intended curriculum as read through institutional documents and the espoused curriculum articulated in interviews with IPET lecturers. The chapter concludes with an integrative discussion that draws tentative connections between the dynamics impacting on the rearticulation processes, especially institutional restructuring and the kind of curriculum that emerges.

The case study addressed the formal or intended curriculum and the espoused curriculum (DoE 2004: 25). The limitation of not being able to ascertain what happens in practice is significant. However, Goodson (1991: 179) says of the intended curriculum that it is a 'supreme example of the invention of tradition'. It is only the intended curriculum that has the chance to be interpreted and survive. In other words, 'clear parameters to practice are socially constructed at the pre-active level' (Goodson 1991: 180). It is these parameters, and how they were constituted, that are of interest here.

Part I: The institutional context

The study follows on from an investigation into institutional restructuring at NWU in 2006 (see Kruss 2008). The institutional context described here includes a brief summary of the 2006 study findings, to set the stage for the discussion of curriculum change that follows.

North West University was formally established on 1 January 2004 through the merger of two very different institutions. One was a former 'homeland' university, the University of Bophuthatswana, or UniBo, which had changed its name in 1996 to the University of the North-West. The other was a former Afrikaans university, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, which included Potchefstroom's satellite campus, Vaal Triangle, in Vanderbijl Park. The process resulted in the creation of North West University, with more than 35 000 students and approximately 4 000 staff members on three campuses: Potchefstroom, Mafikeng and Vaal Triangle.

The education faculties on the three campuses had previously incorporated other institutions. Potchefstroom had incorporated Potchefstroom College of Education in 2001. Mankwe College of Education had been incorporated into the University of the North-West in 2001, and the Sebokeng campus of Vista University was incorporated into the Vaal campus in 2004. From the college incorporations, a substantial number of college staff came into the education faculties. They were concentrated in the departments of undergraduate studies. The 2006 study reported on the tensions that existed between the former college staff and the university faculty staff, related to issues of research, teaching and how teacher education was conceptualised.

The structure of the new university consisted of three campuses that were conceived as 'business units'. On each campus, a campus rector, vice-rector and registrar were appointed. The institutional management, with the approval of the national Department of Education (DoE), was located in Potchefstroom. The two education faculties at Potchefstroom and Mafikeng were retained, and a dean was appointed at each. Education at Vaal formed part of the Faculty of Humanities and was led by a head of department.

There was a strong perception, especially from staff in Mafikeng but also confirmed by several staff in Potchefstroom, that institutional power lay in Potchefstroom. The reason for this, from the Mafikeng perspective, had to do with the fact that Potchefstroom had vastly more resources and personpower. Further, in the period leading up to the merger, the University of the North-West was in a precarious position as a result of poor staffing and student unrest, whereas Potchefstroom was financially and politically stable. What this meant was that when it came to producing new documents containing rules, protocols and procedures for the merger process, Potchefstroom staff were in a better position to produce these. The perception from many in Mafikeng was a 'Potchefication' of their institution, where all directives, decisions and documents appeared to emanate from that campus.

The 2006 study found that although many of the merger processes were complete, the different campuses largely operated on parallel tracks. The geographical distance between the campuses was a significant obstacle: it is 210 kilometres from Potchefstroom to Mafikeng, approximately 70 kilometres from Potchefstroom to the Vaal Triangle campus, and about 350 kilometres from Mafikeng to the Vaal

Triangle campus. The crucial aspects of the merger that were in process and had not yet been completed in 2006 included curriculum alignment, a common system of admissions and fees, examinations and a common information system. In 2007, NWU implemented a single, centralised system for student administration, as well as integrated systems for financial management and human resources. Policies, rules and procedures were aligned across the university. Critically, however, curriculum alignment was still the major outstanding issue.

Seventy-nine percent of undergraduate programmes and 94 per cent of postgraduate programmes were to start alignment in 2008 (Eloff 2007). With an upcoming institutional review from the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC)⁷ initially scheduled for 2008,⁸ there was some urgency on the part of the institution to finalise these processes, and a strong emphasis was placed on curriculum alignment from institutional management. Only the Faculty of Law's curriculum had been aligned, and the Faculty of Educational Sciences was in the process of aligning its programmes.⁹ The BEd programme, the focus of the research reported here, had been formally aligned in 2006 and was being implemented for the first time in 2007. These alignment processes had taken place in the context of substantial change in both the Mafikeng and Potchefstroom faculties since 2006, particularly in relation to the position of IPET. These changes are described below.

Mafikeng Education Faculty and the position of IPET

At Mafikeng, the position of teacher education had been weakened over the preceding three years. A new dean, from Tshwane University of Technology, was appointed in March 2007, shortly before the study was conducted. The number of students entering IPET courses, which included the BEd and the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), had decreased substantially. All staff interviewed cited this as a pressing issue, and for some the insecurity that this brought in relation to retaining their jobs was also raised. Others reported that the small student numbers were 'demotivating'. Table 3.1 shows the declining IPET enrolment over a three-year period. In addition to the 198 IPET students in 2007, there were 1 240 continuing professional teacher development (CPTD) students and 400 postgraduate students. Numerically, IPET was subordinate in the faculty.

Table 3.1 IPET student numbers at Mafikeng campus: 2005–2007

Programme	Enrolment 2005	Enrolment 2006	Enrolment 2007
BEd	231	140	123
PGCE	121	385	75

Source: Education Faculty office, Mafikeng

7 The HEQC is a statutory body created by the Higher Education Act as a subcommittee of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). It takes responsibility for the quality assurance of higher education providers and their programmes by conducting formal reviews of programmes and institutions.

8 This review was, however, delayed to 2009.

9 The Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programme was also being aligned at the time of the research. The National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) and the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) programmes had been completely aligned, and students wrote the same examination papers on the different campuses. The BEd Honours programme was in the process of being aligned. The Master of Education (MEd) programme was aligned across all three campuses, and the MEd-structured master's programme at Potchefstroom had been closed after it did not receive accreditation from the HEQC review in 2006.

The most commonly cited reason for the declining numbers related to the general trends in IPET: the low status of teaching and weak attraction to the profession. The other common explanation for the decline was the loss of Botswana students, who had previously made up a large part of the IPET student body. This was due to Botswana building a new teacher training institution of its own, but some also claimed that the Botswana government was dissatisfied with the quality of training offered at Mafikeng and had thus shifted their students to other institutions within South Africa. The medium of instruction at Mafikeng is English. The vast majority of IPET students are black.

The academic staff displayed a strong commitment to IPET, although the National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) and the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) programmes generated R25–30 million from provincial government funding. A majority of academic staff interviewed expressed concern about the IPET student numbers and job security. Discussions around rationalising specialisms or dealing with the issue of low student numbers were potentially fraught. A senior leader claimed that there was little support for education, the humanities and IPET specifically on the campus. He claimed that although the faculty generated R47 million, the vast majority of this money cross-subsidised the rest of the university. The faculty was given R10 million with which to operate, which was perceived as a demotivating factor for staff. The faculty was described as a 'milk cow' for the university, a descriptor used in the context of a number of other universities in relation to education faculties (Menon & Harley 2007).

Mafikeng was experiencing staff shortages, especially in certain subjects, making some lecturers' loads relatively heavy. At the time of the research there were 13 staff members; 1 was white, 2 were Indian and 10 were black. Two of these staff members had doctorates, 8 had master's degrees and 3 had an honours degree. There were also 7 part-time staff members in the School for Undergraduate Studies. Individual lecturers taught a wide range of courses. For example, one lecturer taught on the ACE programmes; second-, third- and fourth-year BEd agriculture, biology and science method; the NPDE basic English; and the NPDE science and technology course. One of the reasons for these diverse and large workloads was that as students declined, none of the programmes or modules were terminated. Staff shortages also meant that a number of staff taught courses for which they were not qualified.

There had been a number of resignations at Mafikeng. In the perception of a former senior faculty leader who had shifted to a new position outside the faculty, many of these resignations were related to the difficulties of the merger process. A number of the senior members of staff had been absorbed into the institutional management, thus creaming off some of the seniority and strength within the faculty.

With respect to staff location, the Education Faculty at Mafikeng was split between a number of different buildings, shared with staff from population studies, accounting and other commerce subjects. The faculty had no specific buildings to cater for their needs. Limited classroom-structured teaching spaces were available, and there was no staffroom or communal area. Administrative support was reported to be particularly poor, providing little assistance to lecturers. It was reported that education had been excluded from the institution's most recent building plan.

Several interviewees reported internal conflict at Mafikeng. Three lecturers mentioned xenophobia, especially with respect to the Ghanaians and Zambians in the faculty. Some resentment related to new appointments in the new internal structures. There also appeared to be poor information flows within the faculty. Many lecturers interviewed claimed to know little about processes of change, alignment of processes, or policies. One concrete instance of the effect on teaching was provided by a senior lecturer who stated that there was confusion around venues and timetables at the start of the year: 'We only received our timetables in March, so we didn't teach until then.'¹⁰

For most staff at Mafikeng, the same sentiments against 'Potchefification' were expressed as in the previous round of research. There was resentment around staff shortages and workloads, which were spoken of in highly emotive terms during interviews. For example, a history method lecturer not qualified in this subject claimed: 'This is a new course that I have been given. I am not comfortable teaching it. I was not told why I was given this. I objected and said I don't want to, but I was made to do it. There was an agreement that everyone would have to do this.'¹¹ Another senior lecturer claimed: 'They dump courses on you without negotiating first whether you will be comfortable teaching this. Before departments would discuss. From last year they didn't care whether you were capable or not, whether your workload was heavy or not.'¹²

Whether or not these accounts and claims of individuals were accurate was extremely difficult to verify. What was clear, however, was that feelings of marginalisation, fear of job losses, and suspicion and acrimony towards institutional management, as a direct result of the merger, remained prevalent.

Potchefstroom Education Faculty and the position of IPET

The student numbers at Potchefstroom were very different from those at Mafikeng. Table 3.2 shows a dramatic drop in PGCE numbers in 2007, with BEd numbers, although declining, remaining high. CPTD student numbers at Potchefstroom were very high, with an enrolment of approximately 20 000 students at different centres nationally. The IPET student body was overwhelmingly white: in 2007, 90.3 per cent of the IPET students were white. There were approximately 56 members of staff teaching IPET at Potchefstroom, the vast majority of whom were white women. There was one black member of staff, who taught African languages. Seventeen per cent of the staff had doctorates; the rest either had honours or master's degrees or were studying towards attaining them. The vast majority of staff came from either a college, technikon or schooling background. The medium of instruction at Potchefstroom is Afrikaans.

Table 3.2 IPET student numbers at Potchefstroom campus: 2005–2007

Programme	Enrolment 2005	Enrolment 2006	Enrolment 2007
BEd	2 000	2 452	2 049
PGCE	Not available	469	100

Source: Education Faculty office, Potchefstroom

¹⁰ Senior lecturer, Mafikeng, 25 July 2007.

¹¹ Lecturer, Mafikeng, 25 July 2007.

¹² Lecturer, Mafikeng, 25 July 2007.

There had also been internal restructuring within the Potchefstroom faculty. A new dean, a former senior research director at the University of Stellenbosch with extensive experience running programmes to develop researchers, took office in March 2007. She came in after a general restructuring of management in the faculty in 2006, when the university management had significantly reduced the number of management posts in education. One reason given for this was a proliferation of highly paid staff who had relatively small workloads. At institutional level, questions were raised regarding the faculty's extremely low research outputs, the student throughput rate and the level of courses. The overriding question that university management was concerned with was whether the faculty was operating as a university faculty or as a teacher training college.

In the 2006 round of research, the division between college staff and old faculty staff at Potchefstroom was stark. The feeling that the old faculty staff had been 'demoted' and that the college staff felt patronised appeared to have subsided somewhat in 2007, and divisions appeared to have softened. A number of factors could account for this. One was the appointment of a new dean who was able to take a 'non-partisan stance'. There had also been a number of new staff appointments and some retirements, so that fewer people carried historical allegiances and prejudices, holding promise for breaking many of the long-held stereotyped perceptions.

Hence, although both Mafikeng and Potchefstroom campuses had undergone a renewed round of restructuring and change in the previous year, they were once again differently positioned when the processes of curriculum alignment and implementation occurred. This was particularly the case with respect to student and staff numbers but, as we shall see below, was also true in terms of access to support, decision-makers and resources in the institution. Mafikeng was in a particularly precarious position, with declining student numbers and staff shortages, and analysis of the views expressed by staff suggests that there was an atmosphere of distrust and insecurity.

Part II: Processes and drivers of curriculum change

Successive waves of curriculum reform in the South African teacher education arena were outlined in Chapter 1. Here the focus is on the drivers of curriculum change in relation to the BEd degree at NWU, at the institutional or meso-level, particularly in relation to the merger process, and at the micro-level of individual academics and subject groupings. A brief history of curriculum revision at the university is presented, followed by a discussion of curriculum revision in the 2004–2007 period in relation to the merger.

The main argument is that the process of curriculum revision was largely driven by macro-policy and regulation, and mediated at the meso-level by academic development and support (ADS) units. On the one hand, at the micro-level academics were unable to resist the strong bureaucratic push towards an outcomes-based curriculum aligned to the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF). On the other, education pushed for alignment to meet the requirements of an HEQC review which was due in 2008. Two possible reasons for the lack of resistance to a strongly outcomes-based and largely bureaucratically driven aligned curriculum are offered. One concerns the fragmented academic community in education that had resulted from the merger. The other considers the historical linkages between the institutions involved and the state, and where decision-making power lay.

Processes of rearticulation at Mafikeng up to 2006

In the interviews with staff at Mafikeng, there was little evidence of institutional memory regarding past processes of curriculum construction. This was probably related to high staff turnover – most of those who had played a significant role in developing curricula up to the current time had left the faculty. Interviewees for the current study showed remarkably little understanding or knowledge of past processes, or of current broader policy change. Apart from the institutional merger, they were generally disconnected from other policy processes.

Nonetheless, what did emerge from discussions with some of the Mafikeng academics, as well as those on the Potchefstroom campus, was that the emphasis at Mafikeng had historically been more 'theoretical' and 'academic'. Whereas other black universities under apartheid had been run along the lines of the 'Christian National Education' discourse of the state, De Clercq (1991: 59) shows how at UniBo there was some critical reflection and space to innovate and introduce more progressive teaching methods and content. Mafikeng's strength had also traditionally been in the area of curriculum studies, something identified by Potchefstroom staff as lacking in their own institution. It became clear during the course of the research, however, that in the present, much of this critical tradition and strong theoretical approach existed on paper only. The traces of the curriculum from the past were inscribed in the written curriculum, but this was generally in a fragmented and at times incoherent way, and bore little relation to practice.

From 1998 onwards, the Norms and Standards for Educators (NSE) policy document (DoE 2000a) was the key policy change in relation to teacher education. The NSE deploys an outcomes-based approach to teacher education, providing detailed descriptions of what a competent educator should be able to demonstrate, and this was to drive the design of teacher education programmes.

At the time of alignment the Mafikeng curriculum had a vast range of modules, many with content that was specified in detail. Disciplinary boundaries were evident in foundation courses, and the courses were structured according to subject specialisms. There was no reference to the NSE in the 2006 university calendar; rather, aims and objectives were listed. The organising principle of the curriculum was traditional disciplines.

Process of rearticulation at Potchefstroom: 2000–2006

The first major curriculum reform at Potchefstroom was in 2000/01, when the Potchefstroom College was incorporated into the faculty. A new BEd was established to replace all previous college diplomas. This process was driven by the NSE and was to facilitate the implementation of the new curriculum, Curriculum 2005 (C2005). One academic described the process of developing the new BEd as 'panel-beating' the old diplomas into years one to three, and working on equivalence for the fourth-year BEd and the PGCE (a combined course).¹³ Another senior lecturer described how the outcomes were derived in practice: 'The programme was built around people, not outcomes.'¹⁴ By this she meant that there were existing modules that people taught and that were used. Outcomes were added to these existing modules, rather than

¹³ Senior lecturer, Potchefstroom, 30 July 2007.

¹⁴ Senior lecturer, Potchefstroom, 31 July 2007.

outcomes driving the development of new courses, or courses being 'designed down' from outcomes, which was the intention of the NSE policy. At this stage there were no curriculum specialists in the faculty, and former college staff led the process. According to the same academic, many of these modules survived in the new aligned BEd curriculum. Further revisions of the BEd from 2002 until 2005 involved the tweaking of the curriculum to respond to the revision of C2005 and the implementation of the revised school curriculum, the National Curriculum Statement (NCS).

In 2006, the 2005 curriculum was revised in order to take into account the implementation of the NCS at the Further Education and Training (FET) level. Just as this was completed, the alignment process began. So, while the 2007 curriculum was being implemented for year-one BEd students, the 2005 calendar was being used for all other years. The organising principle of the curriculum for Potchefstroom from 2000 had been the seven roles of the NSE, and the school curriculum had also impacted on processes of rearticulation.

To summarise, in the construction of the curriculum in the period from 2000, Mafikeng had retained a degree of independence from the state that it had achieved under apartheid. However, this meant retaining a formal curriculum largely developed in the past, much of which, according to all the interviewees, was not actively taught or did not reflect what occurred in practice. In contrast, Potchefstroom staff were highly responsive to state policy change and regulation, making constant revisions as new higher education policies and school curriculum policies were introduced. The organising principles of their respective courses were very different – at Mafikeng, based on traditional disciplines; and at Potchefstroom, on the outcomes proposed by the NSE.

The merger and the process of aligning the BEd: 2006–2007

With the merger came the pressure to align the curriculum across campuses. In 2006, there was additional pressure for alignment of the BEd curriculum due to the proposed HEQC review of IPET programmes. Special programme committees with representatives from each of the three campuses were set up to align all IPET programmes. Potchefstroom coordinated the BEd alignment. The process began in 2006, and from the start it was strongly driven by the NSE and outcomes-based approach. The first step was a comparison of the different BEd programmes on the three campuses. The next step was to formulate the same programme outcomes and assessment criteria. The programme outcomes of the BEd curriculum on the Vaal and Potchefstroom campuses had already been structured according to the seven roles of educators as stipulated in the NSE, and these campuses had always shared the same curriculum. Vaal was tasked with developing the assessment outcomes for the seven roles, which were taken from the competences in the NSE. Mafikeng's programme at the time contained no explicit references to the NSE and had no competency or assessment standard outcomes. Vaal selected and presented the aligned programme outcomes and assessment criteria to academic staff members of all campuses for approval.

In the 2006 study, mixed reactions to the initial processes of alignment were found. Some lecturers experienced the process of reviewing courses as productive, and the interaction with other campuses as challenging but constructive. Cultural difference was a strong theme expressed in the interviews. The overwhelming sense from both Mafikeng and Potchefstroom in the 2006 study, however, was that the process had been productive and fair, and the outcome up to that point representative of both

their interests. This pertained to the broad structure of the programme, and not to the actual content.

Subsequent to identifying the programme outcomes and assessment criteria, an attempt was made to map existing modules onto these programme outcomes. It was at this point that participation became more uneven. Modules were divided into four types: fundamental, core, experiential and elective. Credit allocations for courses, which determined the weighting of different parts of the course, followed. Credit points across the campuses also had to be aligned, and it was proposed that this should conform to the new HEQF¹⁵ 480 credit-point stipulation. The new structures of the aligned BEd programmes were circulated to all BEd academic staff members of all campuses for comment. These comments were considered by the BEd coordinating committee at Potchefstroom (Van Aswegen 2006).

Once the structures of the aligned BEd programmes had been approved, academic staff members of all three campuses attended a two-day workshop at the Potchefstroom campus. At this workshop, conveners for each module were appointed and the module outcomes for most of the modules were formulated. Most of these conveners were from Potchefstroom. Subject committees also discussed possible learning material and forms of assessment for each module. The conveners wrote up the module outcomes and again circulated them for approval. Module outcomes were developed over a very short period, and Potchefstroom largely drove the development of these outcomes.

Figure 3.1 summarises the process. The policy documents that guided the activities are indicated in brackets, and the ways in which the steps are referred to in the 2007 calendar are shown on the right.

Figure 3.1 Steps in the development of the aligned BEd curriculum at NWU

1. Compare BEd programmes across campuses
2. Develop programme outcomes (NSE) —————> General level exit outcomes
3. Develop assessment outcomes for the programme outcomes (NSE) —————> Specific level outcomes
4. Weight the modules for the programmes (HEQF)
5. Develop module outcomes for the programmes (HEQF) —————> Module outcomes
6. Develop the study guides

Academic development and support and the HEQF

At point 5 in the process represented above, a crucial intervention was made by the university's academic development and support (ADS) body, and the Potchefstroom ADS unit became central in articulating the precise module outcomes in the programmes. ADS was an institution-wide body that was tasked with assisting faculties with curriculum alignment, particularly in relation to national policy. There were three ADS units. The institutional unit was located on the Potchefstroom campus, the Potchefstroom branch was also on the Potchefstroom campus, and

¹⁵ The HEQF document was in draft form (DoE 2004) at the time of the research. Its purpose, however, was to provide a framework for higher education qualifications in line with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

another branch was housed on the Mafikeng campus. The role of the institutional ADS unit was to hold alignment workshops and to produce a manual for curriculum alignment across the university. The main concern was with the creation of an institutional framework for the academic alignment process. The campus units were intended to be involved directly with faculties in writing module outcomes in fulfilment of the requirements of the HEQF. Despite the HEQF document being in draft form at the time, the university had decided to meet the requirements in its alignment processes, possibly to avoid further revisions later.¹⁶ This meant that module outcomes had to have certain level descriptors as specified in the draft HEQF policy document. There are six higher education levels in the HEQF (levels 5 to 10), and the BEd (like all bachelor's degrees) is pegged at level 7. Therefore, in theory, programmes had to be designed so that students would achieve a particular level as described in the level descriptors.

In the draft HEQF document, level descriptors are explained as referring to the generic nature of learning achievements and their complexity. Level descriptors are 'broad qualitative statements against which more specific learning outcomes can be compared and located' (DoE 2004: 12), specifying the knowledge and understanding requirements at different levels on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Their purpose is to give 'a fixed point of reference which enables comparisons with other qualifications and provides a basis for designing, approving and reviewing programmes' (DoE 2004: 14). Examples of the descriptors for 'knowledge base' are given in the draft policy document (Appendix 3):

- Level 5: a fundamental knowledge base.
- Level 6: a solid knowledge base.
- Level 7: well-rounded and systematic knowledge base.
- Level 8: a comprehensive and systematic knowledge base.

Similarly, for 'understanding', the document differentiates levels as follows:

- Level 5: an informed understanding.
- Level 6: a sound understanding.
- Level 7: a coherent and critical understanding.

Definitions are not given of these gradations, so it is not clear what the difference between a 'sound' understanding and a 'coherent' understanding might be; similarly, a 'solid knowledge base' is not explicitly defined in relation to a 'well-rounded knowledge base'. Nevertheless, all BEd module outcomes were rewritten to conform to these requirements. This process was undertaken between Potchefstroom education staff and ADS. In this way, in the alignment of the new BEd curriculum, NWU covered all bureaucratic bases, especially in relation to the NSE and the HEQF.

The final phase in the process of alignment was the development of study guides. It was at this point that the actual content of the modules was specified, and the outcomes realised as a programme of learning. The study guides for the BEd first year had all been completed at the time of research, but those for the other years were yet to be written and finalised. As discussed below, lecturers at Potchefstroom largely wrote these study guides.

¹⁶ Assurance had also been obtained from the DoE that the draft HEQF document was to remain unchanged.

The role of the campuses in the alignment process

A decision was taken to implement the year-one level of the aligned BEd programme on all three campuses in 2007. There were different opinions expressed regarding the alignment process. It was at two points – at the specification of learning outcomes and at study guide development – that the real work on the modules was done, as this was where course content, readings and assessment were specified. In the view of 24 of the 27 interviewees, it was also at these points that Mafikeng was by and large absent from the process and Vaal's decision-making was limited. There were multiple reasons given for Mafikeng's subordinate role, expressed in the interviews with staff on both campuses.

Firstly, it was argued that Potchefstroom had far greater resources and capacity than Mafikeng. While Mafikeng had experienced a loss of both students and staff, at Potchefstroom there was a critical mass of people working in different subject areas. For example, in the subject area of technology, there were three full-time lecturers and a part-time lecturer at Potchefstroom, but only one part-time lecturer at Mafikeng. In computer science, there were six lecturers at Potchefstroom, one at Mafikeng and two at Vaal. At Mafikeng the subject was no longer taught, hence no input was made into the new curriculum. No input was made by Mafikeng into the arts and culture subject area either. In addition, subject content was taught in other faculties at Mafikeng, and lecturers from those faculties were not involved in recirculation processes in the Education Faculty.

Secondly, claims were made by staff at both Mafikeng and Potchefstroom that there was a difference between the campuses in terms of an inclination to be involved in processes. Philosophy was the only course that had been jointly developed by the three campuses. For every other subject, without exception, Potchefstroom lecturers claimed that the Mafikeng staff had made minimal or no input into the study guides. A senior leader at Mafikeng agreed that Mafikeng staff had not participated in the writing of the study guides, and their lack of participation led to a silencing of their voice in the course content. This person stated:

Lecturers say they discuss issues, then the module is different to what they agreed. This happens because the people here don't participate in the writing. So this will happen. If you tell yourself you are inferior you will end up inferior. You must go in and exercise participation. Sometimes Potchefstroom does just take decisions. Even I don't have the time to make submissions, and I have told them to just go ahead. But there have been meetings from beginning to end. We have not been excluded.¹⁷

Several lecturers maintained in interviews that agreements reached in meetings between Mafikeng staff and Potchefstroom staff were not reflected in the writing of the guides, and that in several instances, Potchefstroom staff simply revised their old programme modules for the new study guides. Whether or not these perceptions are valid, they indicate a degree of distrust that could hamper alignment processes.

Thirdly, Mafikeng's lack of involvement was also attributed to negative social relations between the campuses, including inherited racial dynamics and issues

¹⁷ Senior manager, Mafikeng, 24 July 2007.

around language. This was evident in the analysis of interviews. Some Mafikeng staff perceived that in meetings to discuss content, Potchefstroom staff were patronising. For example, one lecturer at Mafikeng was of the perception that 'Potch dominates. They see us as the little black campus.'¹⁸ The perception that Potchefstroom staff held a superior attitude was apparent in the comments of 8 of the 10 staff interviewed at Mafikeng. In turn, a programme leader at Potchefstroom who was very positive about the alignment process displayed such a stance in expressing her opinion about the alignment process: 'We learnt a lot from the other campuses. Mafikeng is not up to standard. It would be very nice if we can help them. If we can take them by the hand and lift them up to our level.'¹⁹

Finally, of the ADS branches, which play a crucial role in curriculum development, only the Potchefstroom campus branch was functional at the time of the research. This impacted on Mafikeng's involvement in decisions on curriculum alignment. One of the specific tasks of the institutional ADS unit was to establish a manual for the 'development of interactive, outcomes-based and programme-based study material at the NWU'.²⁰ There was a varied response from education lecturers to the Potchefstroom ADS unit, which drove the implementation of this institutional policy. Some lecturers found this unit to be obstructive. The 2007 calendar was regarded by a number of staff at both Potchefstroom and Mafikeng to be 'useless' and a 'waste of time' because of its formulation of outcomes. The ADS unit had vetoed several requests to include more content in the calendars. Ownership over the process was clearly an issue, as one lecturer explained: 'We established our outcomes, and using action verbs these were understandable. But they came along and said these are wrong, and used the NQF levels, and based everything on those. Now the outcomes are simply generic.'²¹ There was also lack of clarity in the procedures for developing the outcomes, as well as unrealistic time-frames. The technology lecturer said: 'We didn't have time to write good outcomes. You have the feeling at the end that this is not actually what I want to have here. It's hard to write outcomes without a module. And then once you get there, you realise you want other things in there.'²²

Other lecturers were more positive about the HEQF process, and found that the knowledge definitions were useful in determining levels and as a gauge for comparison. This was particularly useful *across* campuses, when contestation arose over whether a level was set too high or too low. It was also the case that the faculty themselves were under pressure to align and to work within specific time-frames, in response to the upcoming HEQC review. Although this review was ultimately postponed to 2009, at the time of the research it placed pressure on the faculty to derive outcomes for their courses across campuses in a very short time period.

In terms of institutional assistance for curriculum restructuring, it was centrally the Potchefstroom branch of ADS that offered support. Potchefstroom staff took advantage of this support, and participated in the process of drafting the outcomes according to the HEQF level descriptors (although they were distributed for comment to the other campuses). The sentiment at Mafikeng was that the primary location

¹⁸ Lecturer, Mafikeng, 23 July 2007.

¹⁹ Senior lecturer, Potchefstroom, 30 July 2007.

²⁰ ADS staff member, Potchefstroom, 1 August 2007.

²¹ Lecturer, Potchefstroom, 31 July 2007.

²² Lecturer, Potchefstroom, 1 August 2007.

of the curriculum alignment processes on the Potchefstroom campus disadvantaged them both materially and psychologically. In this specific way, the geographical distance between the campuses militated against collaboration.

In summary, the positioning of Mafikeng in relation to deciding what constituted the content of the curriculum was subordinate. Varying reasons for this were given, including different capacity and resources on the two campuses, different inclination and inherited power relations that impacted on the willingness of the parties to participate. At Potchefstroom, a well-resourced, well-staffed and stable department with a critical mass of staff in each of the subject groupings lent the academics a confidence and enthusiasm for their work. They were all positive about the new BEd. At Mafikeng, there was concern around job security. Staff members were explicit about their lack of motivation, as well as about the instability generated by constant change in their faculty, particularly in management. Their knowledge of the new BEd, the processes that had led to its construction and the policies driving its structure was limited. Finally, the fact that ADS at Mafikeng was not functional at the time meant that the process of writing module outcomes took place largely between the Potchefstroom faculty and the Potchefstroom ADS branch.

The outcome was that Mafikeng's more theoretical and discipline-based curriculum, albeit fragmented, was crased in the alignment process. Where there had been collaboration, it had been relatively bureaucratic (e.g. establishing the number of credit points) or at a very general level (e.g. deciding what modules to include).

Implementing the new curriculum

Despite the strong claim that the alignment of the BEd curriculum was complete, three aspects to the alignment remained outstanding:

- Mafikeng and Potchefstroom (with Vaal) still wrote separate exams.
- There were differences in the timing and duration of teaching practice.
- The campuses differed in the model adopted for the teaching of subject knowledge.

These all impacted on the ways in which the campuses implemented the new formal curriculum in 2007. The last point remained the central obstacle to the implementation of the curriculum at Mafikeng. Whereas method and subject content were both taught in the Education Faculty at Potchefstroom (in what was termed an 'integrated model'), at Mafikeng subjects were taught in the other relevant faculties, and the Education Faculty focused on methodology. Consequently the nature of the curriculum implemented on the two campuses remained very different.

In the past, Mafikeng had considered shifting to a model where content courses were taught within the Faculty of Education. However, the proposal was dropped when the financial implications were considered. These included the need for a considerable increase in human resources. Physical resources, such as laboratories and classrooms, would also be needed. In 2006 and 2007, the possibility was raised again, and it was suggested that the Education Faculty enter into conversation with the other faculties. Because the Education Faculty supplied a number of the faculties with (funded) students, it was felt that they would have some leverage in demanding some content congruence with the school knowledge requirements of the students. However, there had been no actual meetings, discussions or proposals, and the number of IPET students had also dropped considerably. Thus, despite having agreed

to the integrated model in the aligned curriculum, there were no clear plans as to how this would be achieved in the near future at Mafikeng.

A number of academics claimed that on the Mafikeng campus, although the courses had changed on a bureaucratic level in terms of their structure and titles, the actual content of the courses had not changed, and lecturers continued to teach much as they had before. This was made possible by the lack of a common exam.

Apart from the different models of delivery, there were a number of other difficulties in implementing a common curriculum. The different student numbers was one issue. Another was the type of students on the different campuses – in terms of their academic level prior to entering teacher education, as well as their language and interests. One senior lecturer at Mafikeng claimed that there was considerable difference in practice: 'Our students come from schools that are very different to Potchefstroom and Vaal. They are very under-prepared. So if I set the paper, Potchefstroom will say that this is not how I prepared my students. The focus is different. So we make it on paper part of what we do, but in practice it is not what takes place.'²³ The type of schools that students would ultimately teach in was also conceived of as different on the Mafikeng and Potchefstroom campuses. It was the opinion of a number of Mafikeng staff that they were focused on training teachers for surrounding schools, which are largely rural and poor. At Potchefstroom, a senior academic said that 'we are still training teachers for Model C schools'²⁴ while acknowledging that this needed to change. The impossibility of common exams was also attributed to the fact that Mafikeng began their academic year much later than Potchefstroom, still registering students in March.

The two campuses still operated on parallel tracks in terms of the implementation of the new aligned curriculum. What the alignment had actually achieved was largely a bureaucratic exercise of aligning course codes, credit allocations, names of courses and lists of (largely generic) outcomes in terms of the NSE and the HEQE. *Bureaucratic compliance* characterised the form of curriculum revision, especially in relation to Mafikeng, where the conditions of possibility for implementing the curriculum were not in place.

Beyond formal processes and requirements, Potchefstroom and Mafikeng had little interaction with each other. However, it must be borne in mind that the research was conducted at a *very early stage* of implementation of the aligned curriculum. Senior managers of the university subsequently explained that the Education Faculty process was viewed as a pilot for the university-wide alignment process, and there was a degree of reflexiveness evident as the processes unfolded.

The drivers of curriculum restructuring

Some of the drivers of curriculum restructuring at NWU are apparent in the discussion above, and some will become clearer in Part III that follows. There are three levels at which the forging of new curricula can be analysed: the macro-, meso- and micro-levels. Bernstein (1996) identifies two 'recontextualising fields' in which knowledge is redescribed and curricula knowledge comes to be defined: the official recontextualising field (ORF) and the pedagogic recontextualising field (PRF). The

²³ Lecturer, Mafikeng, 24 July 2007.

²⁴ Senior lecturer, Potchefstroom, 3 August 2007.

ORF is the bureaucracy, the state and its various agencies (such as the HEQC). The PRF includes all interested educational actors (other than officials) involved in the formulation and reproduction of educational knowledge, including teacher educators, writers of textbooks and academics. Bernstein's interest is in the interplay between these two fields in the selection of educational knowledge for inclusion in the curriculum.

Thinking about the process of curriculum development in these terms draws our attention to a number of issues. The first is that the process of constructing a curriculum involves 'recontextualisation', that is a *selection* of particular knowledge for inclusion, and a translation or redescription of that knowledge for the particular curricular purposes. Second, recontextualising takes place at different levels and may reflect different interests. The state (ORF) may have particular notions and priorities in terms of recontextualising knowledge, and the PRF, in this case the teacher educators, might have a different idea. Or, there might be congruence between the two. The relationship between the ORF (state) and the PRF (teacher educators) is considered here in relation to drivers of curriculum change.

At the macro-level, the key referent in the construction of the new curriculum at NWU was the comprehensive regulatory framework developed in the NSE, the HEQF and the NCS. In this way the ORF explicitly set out what was to be included in the curriculum and in what form. Crucially, the form was outcomes, which were to be specified in a particular language, referring to different knowledge 'types' or levels. The NCS and the knowledge in the school curriculum also potentially drove the constitution of a teacher education curriculum. In addition, the HEQC exerted pressure on the process – in particular, pressure to align within a certain time-frame and along the lines of state-mandated policy.

At the meso- (institutional) level at NWU, the Potchefstroom ADS unit mediated between the ORF and the PRF. It is clear from the preceding section that this unit drove a largely bureaucratised process in mediating between academics at the micro-level and the macro-level policy environment. Its 'academic' project was, however, questionable. In the words of an ADS officer, the focus was on 'career-oriented programmes', which demanded a 'situational analysis of jobs related to the programmes'.²⁵ While this may in part be apposite for a professional qualification such as the BEd, it does not preclude having a strong academic logic and rationale to the programme, grounded in notions of good teaching and with a strong theoretical understanding of what it takes to produce a professional teacher. That these are simply retrievable from the NSE, from job requirements or from specifying modules through descriptors in the HEQF has been forcefully argued to be unlikely (see, for example, Shalem & Slonimsky 1999 and Morrow 2007).

In the case of NWU, although the new BEd indicates a high level of bureaucratic compliance, we saw that it does not translate into the espoused curriculum, and hence it is likely it does not translate into practice. Though the macro-level has shaped and framed a common curriculum, it is yet to be effective in bringing together the disparate ways of doing things on the three NWU campuses.

25 Officer, ADS unit, Potchefstroom campus, 1 August 2007.

The relationship between the ORF and PRF

Bernstein is particularly interested in the relationship between the ORF and the PRF at times of curriculum change. Under apartheid, the participation of the PRF in curriculum construction was severely constrained by the dominance of the ORF, with its rigid, centralised curriculum specification, assessment and inspection systems. Under apartheid, Potchefstroom, like the other Afrikaans universities, had a close relationship to the state, as an implementer of policy and trainer of civil servants (Bunting 2004). It is interesting to note how in the case of NWU and the Potchefstroom campus, the relationship between the ORF and the PRF appears not to have shifted. In the construction of the curriculum, Potchefstroom acts directly in the service of the state, implementing state policy to the letter.

I argue further in Part III how in the recontextualising of knowledge for inclusion in the curriculum, the bureaucratic process distorted the logic of deriving a module for learning. In the specification of outcomes, content knowledge and learning processes were lost and, as I will show later, the academic or conceptual logic of the course cannot be retrieved from its statement in the curriculum.

Academic cultures and resistance

Why did the PRF, or the teacher educators at NWU, not resist the pressure of the ORF as mediated by ADS? Harley and Parker (2006) and Parker and Harley (2006) offer some clues. They suggest that in order to resist a technocratic process of curriculum development, two conditions need to be in place: a culture of scholarship and strong communities of practice. In the case of NWU, it is unlikely that either of these conditions were sufficiently met.

In relation to a culture of scholarship, Harley and Parker (2006: 875) contend that 'apart from offering professional qualifications, teacher educators have to engage in scholarship'. This entails debating, critiquing and, if necessary, engaging in conflict over what is included in a curriculum. Constant change and restructuring at the faculty level was unlikely to produce an atmosphere conducive to scholarship. At Mafikeng, workload and job security were primary concerns, and forums for intellectual sharing and academic engagement were non-existent. There were also no channels for academic discourse across campuses at the time of the research. Further, given the faculties' low research output²⁶ and the predominance of former college and school staff in the schools of undergraduate studies, a research culture was only beginning to be established, and there was still a strong emphasis on practice as opposed to theory or research.

The appointment of the two new deans on the campuses is interesting in this regard. It is clear that Potchefstroom's new dean is determined to build a research culture. The dean at Mafikeng, who came from a school and technikon background, emphasised his commitment to a practice-driven notion of initial teacher education and argued that research should be more directed to applied research within school-sector contexts. The question, then, is whether these new appointments will address differences between the campuses, especially with respect to research capacity and the development of a culture of scholarship around teacher education.

²⁶ In 2005, Potchefstroom had produced five accredited articles in the whole faculty, and Mafikeng none.

The second condition for resistance is dependent on the establishment of strong communities of practice to mediate external regulations:

In order to achieve commensurable interpretations of generic standards, and to translate these generic standards into particular practices within specific fields, there have to be communities of practice with sufficient internal consensus on core interpretations or translations to produce 'enhancing' or 'enlightening' modes of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. (Parker & Harley 2006: 10)

It is clear from the discussion above that these unified orientations towards teacher education and consensus around curriculum were very unlikely to have been developed across the campuses. The relative positioning of the campuses involved in curriculum restructuring, the power they had over resources and decision-making, and the control that they were able and willing to exert determined whose curriculum was privileged in the final version, as well as the form that it took. The time-frames under which campuses had to work, as well as the physical and ideological distance between the campuses, did not contribute to the development of 'communities of practice'. The lack of participation by Mafikeng and the uneven positioning of the campuses prior to alignment meant there was less contestation, debate and critique around a curriculum constructed for vastly different students.

Conclusion

The recurriculation process at NWU led to a particular representation of curriculum which at the formal level was a largely bureaucratic and limited expression of the knowledge content for the training of teachers. In combination, macro- and meso-management and regulatory policies appear to have operated as the central drivers of curriculum change. Academic rationales were less in evidence. The strong pressure for alignment and the differential positioning of campuses in the merger process meant that Potchefstroom academics largely determined the structure and content of the curriculum. The PRF at Potchefstroom was in turn closely aligned to the ORF, and hence implemented policy directives to the letter. It is to the structure and content of the new formal curriculum that we turn in the next part of the chapter.

Part III: The structure, knowledge content and theory of the curriculum

Any curriculum or programme of learning entails a particular selection of knowledge and the structuring of relationships within that knowledge. Three aspects of the aligned BEd curriculum at NWU are considered in this section. Firstly, the form or structure of the curriculum is examined, and the implications of adopting an outcomes-based framework are drawn out. Secondly, the knowledge content of the curriculum is examined – especially in relation to subject content knowledge and education foundational knowledge – as are the selections that are made and the ways in which knowledge is recontextualised in the curriculum. Thirdly, the theoretical underpinnings of the curriculum as expressed by lecturers, as well as the general thrust or idea behind the new curriculum, are analysed. This analysis relies on the intended curriculum, as represented in various documents, especially the university calendars, as well as the espoused curriculum, or what lecturers said

they teach.²⁷ I argue that in the intended curriculum the rationale and logic for the curriculum is bureaucratic, and the academic rationale is difficult to retrieve from the curriculum's formal representation in the NWU 2007 calendar. The structuring of the curriculum in terms of outcomes obscures the knowledge content for the course, making its expression largely generic. In relation to the knowledge content, I show that disciplinary knowledge is further backgrounded by a strong push towards integration. Finally, along with an emphasis on practice (as opposed to theory), official curriculum discourse and the notions of constructivism, integration and outcomes-based education (OBE) are taken up unproblematically and procedurally as the theoretical underpinning of the BEd course. The implications are explored in the conclusion to the chapter.

The structure of the curriculum

The structure or form of the BEd curriculum is considered by looking at the official or intended curriculum as it is represented in the university calendars. The curriculum consists of four different BEd programmes corresponding largely to school phases: BEd Foundation Phase; BEd Intermediate and Senior Phase; BEd Senior and FET Phase; and BEd Technology.²⁸ The curriculum is specified in relation to three sets of outcomes: *general level exit outcomes* for all BEd programmes; *specific level outcomes* for each programme; and *module outcomes* for all the courses making up the programme of learning.

General level exit outcomes

The general level exit outcomes comprise 10 general outcomes that the student will achieve on completing the degree. They are specified at a very broad level of generality, and refer to competences such as problem-solving, seeing the world as 'holistic' and familiarity with the different roles of the educator. In several instances, the outcomes are so broad that it is difficult to imagine how they would be realised in a single programme (for example: 'On completing this degree you will possess knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding all issues relating to education', and 'On completing this degree you will possess knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding organising and managing themselves [sic] as well as their activities'). It was not clear where the general level exit outcomes were derived from, and no one interviewed was able to clarify where they came from or what their precise purpose was, beyond framing in a very general way the intent of the programme.

Specific level outcomes

The second level of outcomes is the specific level outcomes, which are derived from the NSE. The vast majority of these outcomes are paraphrased directly from the NSE document. It is not clear what drives the selection of outcomes. Where

²⁷ The study guides are not included in the analysis here, as only those for the first year of the BEd had been completed. The study guides are intended to be an elaboration of the calendar. However, a cross-check was conducted with the study guides to check that no conclusions drawn here were contradicted by what was presented in the study guides.

²⁸ Potchefstroom also has a form of distance BEd, called a school-based education model. Usually students in their fourth year enter this programme, but it is also open to second- and third-year students. It consists of school-based learning with some contact time. The contract is negotiated between the school, university and student. Although an interesting alternative model of JPET, it is not dealt with in this chapter because of space constraints.

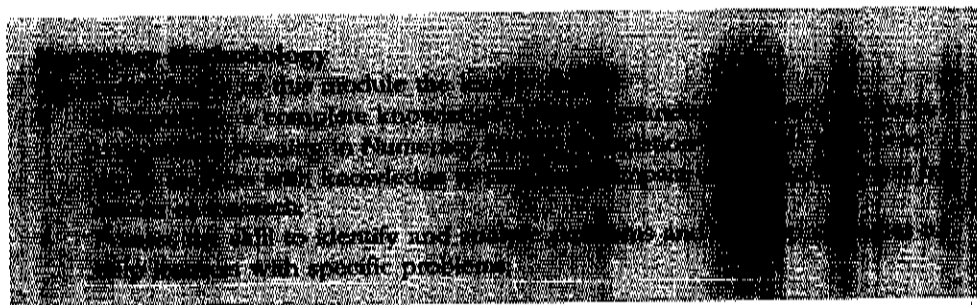
the NSE distinguishes between practical, foundational and reflexive competences,²⁹ most of those selected for the BEd are practical competences. There are very few foundational competences and even fewer reflexive competences included. For each phase-specific programme (BEd Foundation Phase, BEd Intermediate and Senior Phase, and BEd Senior and FET Phase), the same 46 outcomes are listed. Whereas one might expect competences to shift across the different phase specialisations, that is, from Foundation Phase to FET, the outcomes are in fact the same. The fewest in number (4 out of 46) refer to being a subject specialist.

Module outcomes

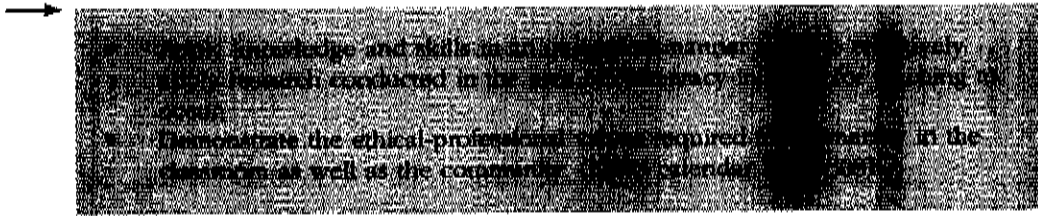
The module outcomes are the final set of outcomes and are listings of learning outcomes for four kinds of modules: fundamental, core, experiential and elective. Fundamental modules offered in the first year include basic and bridging courses for students, including computer literacy, English medium of instruction, life skills, basic mathematics and technology. The fundamental modules also include courses that introduce students to the full range of learning areas. Core modules consist of basic educational courses, which are compulsory for all and not related to specific learning areas. These are the contextual or foundational courses common to most teacher education courses – for example, educational psychology, inclusive education and education management. Experiential learning refers to teaching practice and the preparation courses for teaching practice. These preparatory courses, called 'professional studies', include learning outcomes pertaining to record keeping and assessment, factors influencing learning and theories of cognition. Experiential learning also includes the method courses. Finally, elective modules are subject-based modules, where the content for subjects is taught.

As described above, the module outcomes were formulated to follow the HEQF requirements. The outcomes developed for the modules consist mostly of a four-point set of bullets with a knowledge statement, a skill or ability statement, a competency statement and a value statement. An example of module outcomes is shown in Box 3.1.

Box 3.1 Module outcomes for numeracy methodology



²⁹ In the NSF policy document, 'applied competence' is the overarching term for three interconnected kinds of competence: *Practical competence* is the demonstrated ability, in an authentic context, to consider a range of possibilities for action, make considered decisions about which possibility to follow, and to perform the chosen action. It is grounded in *foundational competence*, where the learner demonstrates an understanding of the knowledge and thinking that underpins the action taken; and is integrated through *reflexive competence*, in which the learner demonstrates an ability to integrate or connect performances and decision-making with understanding, and an ability to adapt to change and unforeseen circumstances and to explain the reasons behind these adaptations.



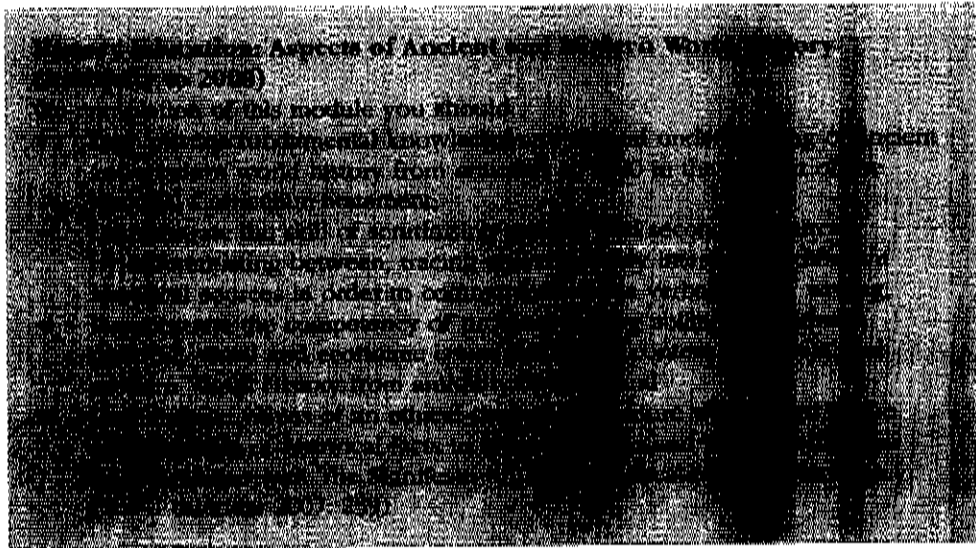
What are the knowledge consequences of structuring the curriculum in this way? Knowledge in the module example above is defined as group work and understanding the environment of learning, divorced from the subject (numeracy). Without content, it is difficult to know what 'the ethical-professional values for numeracy are. Confusion rather than clarity is generated by placing cooperative learning in the same outcome as equipping learners with 'knowledge to handle the impact of the environment by means of research'. This lack of clarity obscures the direction and the purpose of the course: it is difficult to make sense of the sentence, 'Apply knowledge and skills in an integrated manner so as to effectively apply research conducted in the area of Numeracy in order for teaching to occur'. This highly generic statement of learning does not make the logic of the course explicit, and renders the learning guide generic.

What the module outcomes at NWU represent is a common trend in OBE generally, which entails a backgrounding of disciplinary knowledge or subject content, a predominance of generic statements of learning and an absence of clear indications of sequence and progression in the learning of content. The learning module outcomes in the calendar illustrate the dangers of the 'technology of competency-based outcomes statements' (Harley & Parker 2006: 875). Here, what comes to count is the outcome, rather than how that outcome is achieved. In other words, content and method are subordinated to product.

This is not to say that the outcomes are a direct indication of the nature or quality of the actual course taught. It is not possible on the basis of the data gathered to draw any conclusions in this regard. What is in question, however, is the kind of outcomes that have been generated, the logic for learning that they represent and their usefulness in bringing greater specificity and focus to a course, *especially one that is to be offered in different sites*. In policy documents, the rationale for learning outcomes is often presented as a means for making the criteria for evaluation transparent. It is evident that the opposite is achieved in this case.

Another example of module outcomes is shown in Box 3.2.

Box 3.2 Module outcomes for history education

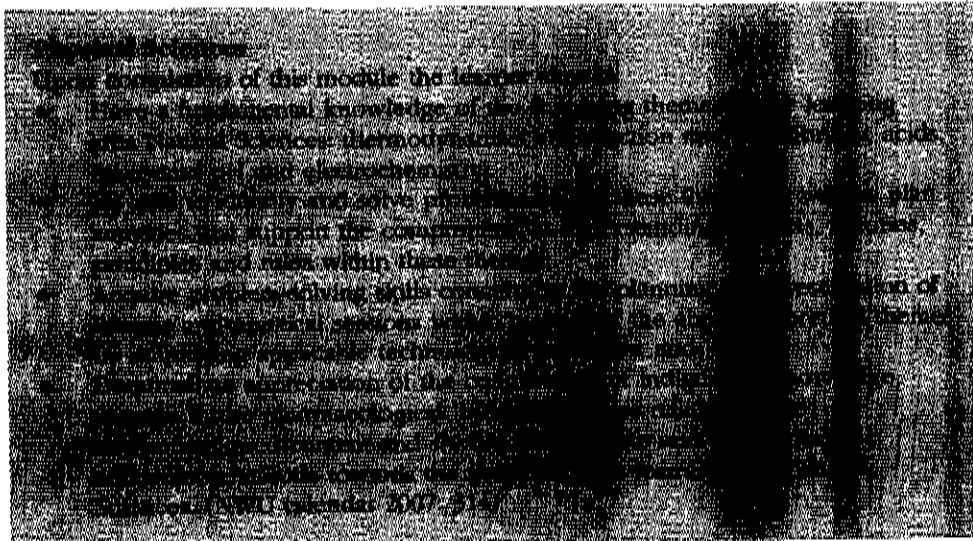


No content is specified in this module outline. It is not clear whether knowledge of any historical events from antiquity to 2000 would suffice, or whether a particular selection would be most appropriate for student teachers to learn. In general, the NWU BEd modules all follow the format of that above, irrespective of the subject matter. As in the numeracy and history examples, what results is a generic listing of competences largely devoid of subject content and with no sense of the conceptual logic of the course. The conceptual logic is also obscured by the absence of topic sequencing or progression. This is particularly important in the more 'vertical' subjects such as physics, where, as Muller (2006: 71) points out, students will not recognise content that is above a level of abstraction that they have already mastered.

As an example, Box 3.3 gives the module outcomes for physical sciences. For the first outcome, before students could learn acids, bases and pH and electrochemistry, they would need to know atoms, valences, the periodic table and chemical equations; yet only atoms are specified in the prior module. This is not to say that competent transmitters would not be able to generate the sequence themselves, but where subject knowledge is weak, this sequence needs to be made as explicit as possible.



Box 3.3 Module outcomes for physical sciences



The physical sciences example also shows the backgrounding of disciplinary knowledge. Minimal specification of the topics is accompanied by a lack of demarcation between separate fundamental topics; in this case, there are three which are run together – thermodynamics and reaction rate; acids, bases and pH; electrochemistry. Disciplinary knowledge is further backgrounded in an attempt to provide a more 'integrated' programme of learning. What is also interesting in this example is how the attempt at integration – both between knowledge and practice and between different types of knowledge – leads to further confusion if what this entails is not precisely spelt out. One is left wondering what 'the contribution of indigenous knowledge systems in the pharmacological, bioethical issues' relating to the chemistry topics presented would be, and what would constitute being able to 'identify and solve problems within these themes as well as plan activities that support the comprehensive understanding of ideas, theories, principles and rules within these themes'. It is also curious that topics such as acids, bases and pH are referred to as 'themes' rather than knowledge. The calendar largely dispenses with knowledge, and moves towards a generic listing of skills and activities that provide a scanty mapping of the sequencing of subjects, their content knowledge and their conceptual progression.

Outcomes and curriculum coherence

What results in the NWU 2007 calendar is a complex document with multiple sets of outcomes. It is not clear how the three levels of outcomes articulate with each other or what their purpose is. In some respects, it seems there are competing frameworks with different requirements that obscure the overall purpose of the programmes. For example, the weighting given to the subject specialist courses in the specific level outcomes does not correspond with the number of modules that attend to the development of subject expertise. It is also unclear what weighting different outcomes have, particularly in relation to the seven roles. Although the intention of the NSE was to provide a holistic conceptualisation of teaching, the result here is an atomistic description of competences. In relation to the HEQF, although the different

types of knowledge alluded to above ('sound', 'coherent', etc.) are used at different levels, it is again not clear what differentiates these different kinds of knowledge.

The alignment between these module outcomes, the NSE and the general exit level outcomes is also not clear. What emerges is an arbitrary selection of competences from the roles in the NSE. Because the competences selected from the NSE are expressed in the same language as the policy document, they remain 'empty', 'generic' competences (Parker & Adler 2005) and are unable to come closer to a specification of what kind of teacher and practice is informing the different programmes. There are several who argue, for different reasons, that the problem lies with the NSE policy itself (Morrow 2007; Parker & Harley 2006; Shalem & Slonimsky 1999). Shalem & Slonimsky (1999) argue in relation to the NSE that the 'internal goods' of a practice cannot be described by giving lists of criteria, no matter how detailed. The outcomes as presented in the NWU 2007 calendar have not escaped the 'homogenising consequences' (Harley & Parker 2006) of outcomes, and what has resulted is an epistemological hollowing out of the BEd curriculum at the level of the intended curriculum.

The following sections extend the discussion of the knowledge content of the curriculum in relation to two types of knowledge central to IPET courses in general: subject knowledge and contextual knowledge.

Knowledge content of the curriculum

The first type of knowledge for teaching considered here is subject content knowledge, which refers to the disciplinary knowledge that teachers need to acquire in order to teach specific subjects, such as science or history. The second type of knowledge is contextual knowledge, referring to the 'theory' of education courses which draw on other disciplines such as history, psychology and sociology, and which is considered important for trainee teachers in locating and understanding their work within a broader social context. I do not directly address a third kind of knowledge essential to the education of teachers, which is 'experiential knowledge'. However, in addressing the other knowledge types, I do refer to method courses and teaching practice which make up this experiential knowledge.

The focus of the discussion is on what knowledge is selected for inclusion in the curriculum. The breadth and depth of teaching is also considered, and the issue of disciplinary emphasis introduced in the previous section is extended.

Subject content knowledge

Modes of delivery of subject content knowledge

The different arrangements for teaching subject content at Potchefstroom and Mafikeng were described above. Potchefstroom followed an 'integrated model', in which the BEd students received all their subject content courses in the Education Faculty and emerged with a BEd degree. At Mafikeng, students were engaged in two majors in appropriate faculties alongside their education courses, so that a science teacher, for example, would after four years qualify with a BEd and a number of credits towards another degree. Subject content was not taught in the Faculty of Education. Lecturers offered method courses for different subjects, but these focused on teaching strategies and procedures, not on content.

Subject content knowledge at Mafikeng

Lecturers at Mafikeng varied considerably in their interpretation of the merits of the different ways in which students acquired subject content knowledge for teaching. In general, former college staff from Mankwe felt that students were not getting sufficient content tailored towards the school curriculum. There was a concern with relevance, or how much of the content students would actually use in their teaching of subjects at school. The problem was particularly acute in the case of mathematics, where several lecturers stated that almost none of the school mathematics topics were covered in the degree courses. In natural science as well, students were not exposed to the practical experiments taught in schools, the apparatus for these practicals being very different from that available in the Science Faculty. There was also the concern among staff that because students emerged with an alternative degree, they ultimately would not pursue teaching.

The model at Mafikeng resulted in a weak emphasis on school curriculum knowledge and the specific knowledge required for teaching. In method courses, there was also no differentiation between school phases. The perception from some staff at Mafikeng was that students received a high level of subject content because they were taught in the faculties, and Potchefstroom was criticised for teaching only to a 'high school level'. Because of the small class sizes at Mafikeng, many of the method courses clustered students from different subjects. For example, one lecturer taught agriculture, biology and physics students together, and lecturers regarded the emphasis in method courses as being on strategies and procedures rather than the content. Senior academic leaders expressed concern over this 'clustering' of subjects. There were no mechanisms to bridge the knowledge in the faculties with the requirements of the school curriculum.

Subject content knowledge at Potchefstroom

The knowledge taught to students at Potchefstroom, on the other hand, was closely tied to the school curriculum. For example, the mathematics that students learned for four years was school mathematics, specifically selected according to what was taught in schools. The major issue in relation to the integrated model was the horizontal articulation of the BEd with disciplines taught in other faculties. It was difficult to establish what equivalence there was between the content level taught at the BEd level and that taught at the level of a disciplinary degree. It was also not always possible for a student at the end of a BEd to register, say, for an honours in geography or English, and definitely not in mathematics. The potential for teachers' disciplinary advancement was thus limited.

A wide range of claims was made regarding the level of subjects, and the claimed level varied substantially across different subjects and phases. Certainly in the lower phases, student pressure meant that subject content was taught at a lower level and was more school oriented. For example, a natural sciences lecturer explained: 'We do the same stuff as the BSc guys but we don't do the whole spectrum. We take the school parts. So we do organic chemistry but not all. Only the stuff that is applicable to school. It is at a slightly higher level though.'³⁰ When asked whether she thought this was sufficient, she responded: 'There is a gap for more inorganic chemistry. We do it in the didactics here, but we must do it in the first three years. It's not in the

³⁰ Lecturer, Potchefstroom, 1 August 2007.

course, but the faculty guys say it must be in... The BEds have done didactics, and they could benefit from more subject stuff.³¹ In technology, on the other hand, one lecturer was clear: 'Students are not getting enough at all. There is no time to go in depth. I have to hope they will go away and get more. They get the basics, but the classes are large [there are 285 in first year] and we can't do pract.'³² Another lecturer was equally direct: 'They need more on subject content. The students are not submerged in their subject. Sometimes I have seen them on TP [teaching practice] and they teach the wrong thing.'³³

Integration

There are three moves towards integration that have impacted on the amount and depth of subject content that is taught:

- integration of subject content knowledge and methodology;
- school phases rather than subject specialisms as the organising device for programme structures;
- a focus on learning areas (integrated clusters of subjects as taught in school).

The first point – the shift towards greater integration between subject knowledge and methodology – is part of a broader move within teacher education away from what is termed 'front-loading' to the integration of subject and method. Whereas in the past the first three years of the BEd focused on content only, and then on 'didactics' in the fourth year, the new BEd integrated experiential learning into years two and three. The move was also evident in the example of the formal presentation of the curriculum shown earlier for physical sciences, where method is prominent in the expression of the subject content outcomes.

The second point – the shift in the organisation of the curriculum programmes to school phases rather than subject specialisms – has an impact on the content that is taught, especially at the lower levels. One of the Foundation Phase lecturers explained: 'Maths has changed, so that there is more focus on Foundation Phase maths. Before we were clustered as a subject, not as a phase, so we learnt much more. The students didn't want to learn all this.'³⁴ A senior lecturer said: 'Students were always asking, "Why do we need to do this?" They didn't buy our responses... They will do more maths than the grade threes, they would reach about a grade nine level.'³⁵ Again, there were varying claims regarding the differences in the exposure students received to disciplinary knowledge in the individual phases.

Finally, in relation to point three – the focus on learning areas – there were debates within Potchefstroom as to whether emphasis should lie on school subjects or on learning areas, especially at the Intermediate and Senior phases. Strong arguments were presented for a focus on learning areas. One related to occupational responsiveness: 'We know teachers have recently got posts because they qualified in or had been exposed to a learning area, such as technology or life orientation,'³⁶ and all students are exposed to all learning areas in their first semester. In both the focus on learning areas and the focus on school subjects, there was a strong emphasis

³¹ Lecturer, Potchefstroom, 1 August 2007.

³² Lecturer, Potchefstroom, 1 August 2007.

³³ Lecturer, Potchefstroom, 31 July 2007.

³⁴ Lecturer, Potchefstroom, 30 July 2007.

³⁵ Senior lecturer, Potchefstroom, 3 August 2007.

³⁶ Lecturer, Potchefstroom, 31 July 2007.

on students' future occupational roles. A senior manager's position on this was also clear: 'We live in an increasingly specialised world. Teachers don't need to construct bridges. They need to specialise in maths knowledge for schools.'³⁷

It was in fact difficult to discern the level to which subjects are taught at Potchefstroom, especially without observing student teachers and testing them on exit from the programme. A senior leader at Potchefstroom acknowledged the need to research the impact of the integrated model, stating that there was no empirical evidence to show its merits or disadvantages. The shifts towards greater integration in learning areas, an emphasis on occupational identities and needs, and more phase-specific training do suggest, however, a significant potential for diminishing disciplinary expertise.

What we see in the case of Potchefstroom is how knowledge is dislocated from its discipline and modified by a process of selection, simplification and refocusing (Bernstein 1990: 184). It is refocused primarily in terms of an emphasis on integration, the particular organisation of the school (in terms of phases) and the occupational requirements of the teacher – in short, the 'demands of practice' (Bernstein 2000). The distance between the students who will teach, say, physics and the discipline of physics is substantial. There is a strong possibility that if student teachers are exposed to knowledge of a low conceptual and disciplinary level, then their teaching of these subjects will be considerably weakened. Although we cannot draw any conclusions regarding this from the data, the nature of the recontextualisation of knowledge in the BEd certainly results in a weakening of the disciplinary base of knowledge.

Summary

What the research indicates is that in the case of Mafikeng, not enough school knowledge is taught, and in the case of Potchefstroom, not enough disciplinary knowledge is taught. There is a clear shift in the BEd curriculum towards integration on a number of levels. There is integration of subjects through teaching learning areas as well as subject specialisms. There is integration achieved by teaching method courses throughout the course of study and, in the case of Mafikeng, by grouping students from different subjects for method courses. Integration and the weakening of disciplinary boundaries is also a feature of the teaching of contextual courses, which is discussed in the next section.

Contextual knowledge

Contextual knowledge is contained in the foundation courses that refer to other disciplines, such as history, sociology and philosophy, in addressing broader issues in education and the context of teaching.

Shifts to the 2007 curriculum

There are 12 foundation courses that are compulsory across the four-year BEd programmes, accounting for almost 20 per cent of the total weighting. The way in which future teachers are expected to understand the broader context of their work through these courses has changed for both Potchefstroom and Mafikeng in the 2007 BEd curriculum.

³⁷ Senior manager, Potchefstroom, 3 August 2007.

At Mafikeng, the approach to foundation courses had historically been very theoretical, and this is evident in their past calendars, as well as in current course outlines and examination papers. Two examples illustrate the point. A question from the examination paper from Mafikeng for the Winter 2007 Basic Introduction to Education course included the following question:

3. A principal question of Axiology is: What is more worthwhile – the desired or the desirable? What theories under axiology answer this question?

The question posed here bears little obvious application or relation to education or teaching, or clear relevance to the education of teachers. Another example comes from the Anthropology for Educators course description in the Mafikeng 2006 calendar, which specified the following learning outcomes:

1. Describe some problems between complexity and heterogeneity of cultural change.
2. Discuss the anthropological principles and theories in the studies of social class influences in learning.
3. Analyse the anthropological misconceptions in western studies of African Education. (Mafikeng calendar 2006: 205)

Again, the linking of this knowledge to teaching and education is not obvious from the official statement of learning. I will show in more detail below how in the 2007 calendar, the course content suggests a strong *professional* training, as opposed to an induction to education as a theorised field of study. This is a shift from Mafikeng's prior curriculum, where several of the modules had, on paper at least, a strong disciplinary and theoretical emphasis, particularly in the elective modules.

The 2007 calendar is also a shift from the previous curriculum at Potchefstroom, which contained a number of modules with a strong moral orientation, usually grounded in a Christian ethic. An example from the Philosophy of Education course for 2005 is given below:

Philosophy of Education: A scientific reflection on reality, on human beings and the relationship of these to educational events, as well as a critical evaluation of the viewpoints of a few life and world views and their implications for education and teaching based on a Christian viewpoint. (Potchefstroom calendar 2005: 154)

Here traces of the Christian National Education discourse that informed the curriculum of the past at Potchefstroom are found. 'Sociopedagogics', a tenet drawn from Fundamental Pedagogics, is also still evident in the 2005 calendar:

Sociopedagogics: After completing the module learners ought to demonstrate knowledge, skills and insight into the question of what Sociopedagogics is, to know and explain concepts and to weave the social role of the family and school into education. Finally the learner must be able to identify current juvenile problems (in the child) and to help the child to pull his/her weight successfully in the community again. (Potchefstroom calendar 2005: 154)

In the terms used, the moral tenor of the language and the privileging of the Christian world-view, the Potchefstroom 2005 calendar is markedly different from its

2007 calendar. In 2007, all terms associated with Fundamental Pedagogics have been removed, a multi-faith approach is adopted and the moral discourse in general shifts to a discourse of professionalism and a focus on knowledge for the workplace.

The 2007 curriculum foundation courses

In the foundation courses for 2007, as with subject content, integrated and applied knowledge is privileged. The following courses are specified in the NWU 2007 calendar:

- Basic Introduction to Education – includes a limited focus on philosophy, and on religious and moral issues.
- Curriculum Development – incorporates understanding curriculum change and OBE; interpretation of the NCS and designing and evaluating learning programmes; and being ‘a dynamic curriculum development agent’.
- Professional Studies (three modules) – incorporates broad overviews of ‘eco-systemic theory’; human development; inclusive education; an understanding of ‘human interaction in educational contexts’; curriculum change theories and OBE; interpretation of the NCS and designing and evaluating learning programmes. The third module focuses on assessment and record keeping, and includes developing a teaching-learning approach and the selection of appropriate learning materials.
- Inclusive Education – implementation of inclusive education policy; understanding barriers to learning.
- Educational Law – exposure to various education policies, the Constitution and the South African Council of Educators.
- Educational Psychology (two modules) – includes eco-systemic theory; human development; inclusive education; human interaction in educational contexts. The second module includes health promotion for teachers and students.
- Education Management – with a focus on classroom management, but also ‘concept and themes of leadership in education’.
- Education Systems – education change; structure of the education system; contemporary debates and controversies.

In general, what we see is a move away from disciplinary and theoretically driven courses to a model that focuses more on practical issues that teachers will confront in their future roles. In other words, the emphasis of the courses is on applied knowledge, and the occupational field and occupational roles of teachers are of central consideration. Very few of the modules are grounded in discipline-based understandings of educational issues. There is no sociology or anthropology, some philosophy and very little history. The course is underpinned mainly by psychological understandings, which again are applied.

This emphasis on psychology and applied skills was apparent in interviews at Potchefstroom as well. The focus of the course was summarised by one of the Foundation Phase lecturers as an ‘emphasis...on child development, computer literacy, and educational psychology’.³⁸ Another lecturer said that the foundation courses were ‘skills-based. They are used to prepare students for the skills they will need in schools.’³⁹ Most of the Mafikeng method lecturers, on the other hand, had

³⁸ Lecturer, Potchefstroom, 30 July 2007.

³⁹ Lecturer, Potchefstroom, 31 July 2007.

very little idea of what the foundation courses consisted of. One foundation lecturer responded to the question of the focus of these courses as being 'how to handle little ones. It doesn't matter which psychologists you want to look at, you must remember the difference between dealing with little ones, and dealing with teenagers.'⁴⁰ Other lecturers at Mafikeng who taught on the foundation courses emphasised their own disciplinary location, arguing that Potchefstroom lacked a theoretical tradition.

Knowledge in the curriculum

For professions that stand at the interface with practice, the recontextualising principle guiding the selection of knowledge from where it is produced and its relocation in the curriculum is the demands of practice (Bernstein 2000). But students, especially those in education, whose primary tool is knowledge, need access to the knowledge of their discipline, or vertical discourse – the 'specialised languages with specialised modes of interrogation and specialised criteria for the production and circulation of texts' (Bernstein 2000: 157).

Both Harley and Wedekind (2003) and Wheelahan (2007) emphasise the importance of retaining an emphasis on disciplinary knowledge, especially in the professions where it is under threat. Wheelahan puts it this way:

Students need to acquire the capacity to integrate knowledge (and underpinning principles) through systems of meaning bounded by the discipline in ways that transcend the particular application of specific products of disciplinary knowledge in specific contexts. Rather than learning the isolated and unconnected contents of disciplinary knowledge, students need to learn the systems of meaning. (Wheelahan 2007: 640)

The curriculum at NWU 'washes out' disciplinary knowledge and does not prioritise the development of teachers' conceptual knowledge or the learning of systems of meaning. These aspects are especially important when considering the general calibre of students who are entering teaching. Adler and Davis (2006) argue in relation to mathematics students:

Typically students entering the BEd programme have not performed particularly well in mathematics in school. If they had, and they were choosing to study further, it is more likely they would have entered the Faculty of Science and sought a Bachelor's of Science. Because of this phenomenon, strong mathematical identities need to be produced and nurtured through the mathematics courses in the BEd. (2006: 282)

We know through empirical research that the depth of teachers' subject content knowledge is of particular concern in the South African schooling system (Taylor & Vinjevd 1999). The shift towards integration and away from disciplinarity runs the risk of exacerbating the problem. At the same time, within current education discourse, strong disciplinary boundaries are regarded as conservative 'markers of elitist territoriality' (Harley & Wedekind 2003). Problem-based and outcomes-based learning within a constructivist approach is privileged. Both the breadth and the depth of subject content knowledge, as presented in the intended and espoused curriculum of the BEd at NWU, *contracts the conceptual chain of subjects* by

⁴⁰ Lecturer, Mafikeng, 25 July 2007.

invoking phase-driven conceptual development, and *reduces the depth of learning* by prioritising integrated learning areas.

To reiterate: this is not necessarily how knowledge is transmitted at the university; it simply illustrates at a theoretical level what the espoused and intended curriculum *suggests* may result from the curricular choices made.

What some of the approaches taken at Mafikeng and Potchefstroom exemplify is a tension between a focus on teaching and practical knowledge for teaching and a focus on disciplinary knowledge. While in past curricula neither Mafikeng nor Potchefstroom appeared to have achieved a balance between these, the 2007 curriculum tends to emphasise the former – practical, applied knowledge, with an emphasis on integration.

Many of the trends identified above – towards integration, based in outcomes-based learning and rooted in a progressive discourse – are also associated with a particular pedagogical theory, that of constructivism. The espoused pedagogical theories across both campuses are considered in the next section.

Pedagogical theory

In order to discern the general theories underlying the BEd, all lecturers were asked what they thought the general thrust of the course was, what approach was privileged and what pedagogical theory underlay their work. Two central approaches emerged: one that emphasised practice, at Potchefstroom; and a constructivist approach, on both campuses.

Practice

There were significant differences between the staff in the two faculties in how they thought about the broad orientation of the BEd. At Potchefstroom, there was a predominance of old college staff and new staff that had come directly from schools. What this meant, and what was articulated, was a strong orientation towards practice. They articulated what Young refers to as 'severe doubts about the idea of disciplined or systematic knowledge that was not located in practice or shown to be directly relevant to practice' (2005a: 9). At Potchefstroom, there was also a strong pressure at the micro-level from students. There was a particular orientation to students from a college perspective: 'We always have an open door, and students make use of it. It is hard then to get on with research.'⁴¹ And another lecturer put it this way: 'To teach is to touch... We still go out of our way to be there for them. To know them.'⁴²

It became clear in the interviews at Mafikeng, on the other hand, that lecturers' ability to evaluate the programme as a whole was limited. They experienced the curriculum as fragmented. Most lecturers interviewed had very little knowledge of what went on in other modules in the programme. There were no forums for discussion. One of the lecturers articulated this fragmentation herself: 'The problem is that there is no focus. They [the students] get dumped with bits and pieces of everything. Students who did my course last semester, I feel sorry for them. I didn't do a good job.'⁴³

⁴¹ Lecturer, Potchefstroom, 31 July 2007.

⁴² Lecturer, Potchefstroom, 31 July 2007.

⁴³ Lecturer, Mafikeng, 25 July 2007.

At Mafikeng there is no common room for staff, and according to several of the lecturers, no discussion of academic issues and ideas. In response to the question of what the emphasis or thrust of the BEd programme was, most of the lecturers at Mafikeng said that they focused on procedures in their teaching, and this was partly explained in terms of content courses being taught in other faculties.

Constructivism

Both at Potchefstroom and Mafikeng, the dominant theoretical approach cited by respondents to the question of the pedagogical theory underlying their curriculum was constructivism. This was the case for 23 of the 27 interviewees. The pervasiveness of the theory, as well as the uniformity of responses, was striking. The question arose as to why this was the case. It was of particular interest given that what was meant by constructivism varied, and several respondents, though citing it, were then unable to articulate what it meant. Most lecturers conflated it with OBE, and for others it meant particular classroom strategies such as group work. For example, one of the lecturers defined it thus: 'We try to get students to come prepared. We want them to develop research skills to do more on their own. Now we want them to participate more, so we use group work. In the past they were *tabula rasa*, just spoon-feed and swallow.'⁴⁴

What led to this predominance of a single pedagogical theory? A number of hypotheses were generated through discussion with various staff members on the two campuses. In the case of Potchefstroom, one theory offered was that once Christian National Education (CNE) as a dominant ideology, and its attendant philosophy of Fundamental Pedagogics, had been discredited, there was a 'theoretical vacuum' in the faculty. People did not locate themselves within a particular research paradigm and did not identify with a body of theory. Constructivism filled this gap. It is also possible that the theory found fertile ground in that it was understood to underpin the new OBE curriculum, the official discourse of the new state. As a legitimating strategy for the former white Afrikaans university, it had political appeal.

At Mafikeng, it was less clear where the dominance of constructivism came from. It could have been a similar phenomenon to that of Potchefstroom – a theoretical vacuum. However, Mafikeng's history was different: at one point it had a strong academic culture, particularly around curriculum. One of its former deans, Professor Maqsood, was mentioned as an education psychologist who had actively promoted ideas based in constructivist understandings. In the Mafikeng 2006 calendar, the work of particular theorists such as Ausubel, Piaget, Bruner and, to a lesser extent, Vygotsky, is constantly cited as content for courses. Because the list of theorists was relatively consistent across courses, a number of academics were asked where the theoretical emphasis originated and how it came to be shared across the faculty. It emerged that it was in fact not deployed by many academics and was not shared in the sense that it informed their work. As one academic put it: 'People are not using these theories. They are not going deep. They are using it to support what they are doing, to give a theory, but they are not actually using it.'⁴⁵ Another lecturer who had the list of theorists in his course outline responded to the question of teaching these as follows: 'I don't teach theory in my course, I focus on strategies. Theory is taught

⁴⁴ Lecturer, Potchefstroom, 30 July 2007.

⁴⁵ Professor, Potchefstroom, 30 July 2007.

over there.⁴⁶ 'Over there' referred to the foundation courses, notably educational psychology. When asked where the theory came from, he replied that he did not know.

A senior leader likewise stated that what he perceived in the faculty was traditional, behaviourist training, totally disconnected from his understanding of OBE. 'There is nothing of this constructivist stuff in concrete application...It is still too behaviourist, too cognitivist. They need to read Freire.'⁴⁷ Although these theories appear to be no longer in use, they persist in the codified form of the curriculum, if not in practice. The history of the curriculum in the institution remained inscribed in official documents, although this was erased by the HEQF processes for 2007, as we saw earlier. There were moves on the part of senior academic leaders to bring more school-based and school-oriented people into the faculty, to move away from what some perceived as the narrow and superficial theoretical approach of the school.

What we find at NWU is a conflation of constructivism with OBE and various tenets of progressivism (such as group work and learner-centredness). The uptake of these ideas is in most cases uncritical and procedural. That is, the understandings of constructivism, OBE and progressivism are disconnected from their theoretical base and from the sustained critique of the ideas from before 2000 (see especially Allais 2007; Harley & Wedekind 2003; Morrow 2001; Muller 2000; Shalem, Allais & Steinberg 2004; and Taylor & Vinjevold 1999). At NWU, it is taken on faith that constructivism is a good thing. There currently exist, however, robust arguments based on empirical evidence that show how these understandings of curriculum and pedagogy are problematic. Muller and Taylor (1995) and Muller (2000, 2002) have generated a sustained critique of forms of constructivism and progressivism, arguing that the lower the socio-economic status of the recipients of these forms of learning, the less likely the particular theories of learning are to achieve goals of social equity (Taylor 2000). The supposed 'freedom' entailed in under-stipulated curricula and 'learner-centred' or 'self-guided' education applies only to those teachers that have 'a well-articulated mental script of what should be covered, and if the pupils come from homes where they have been well prepared to respond to such putative freedom, in other words, only in schools by and for the middle class' (Muller 2000: 14).

Further, a pedagogy constituted by a mix of traditional and progressive elements is becoming accepted within the educational sphere as the preferred pedagogy (Brodie 2004; Muller & Gamble 2007; Reeves 2005). A strongly specified curriculum with an emphasis on clearly selected and sequenced disciplinary knowledge is also widely advocated (Chisholm et al. 2000; Morrow 2007; Muller 2002). What all this research suggests is a move away from strong forms of integration, constructivism and the generic and under-stipulated representation of knowledge in the curriculum. The BED curriculum at NWU appears to be moving in the opposite direction.

Conclusion

Mafikeng and Potchefstroom are geographically separated by some 200 kilometres. The social, linguistic and cultural distance between the institutions is also great.

⁴⁶ Lecturer, Mafikeng, 26 July 2007.

⁴⁷ Senior manager, Mafikeng, 23 July 2007.

Despite the process of curriculum alignment described here, it is far from clear how Mafikeng will manage to implement the integrated BEd it has accepted in principle. Potchefstroom, through inherited advantage that was entrenched in the merger processes, was able to shore up advantage and decision-making power in order to create a curriculum that, at a structural level at least, responded to its needs. The two campuses persist in operating along parallel tracks and are likely to do so well into the future.

The second part of the chapter described how processes at the meso-level – in particular the merger – impacted on the way in which the curriculum was constructed. Firstly, Mafikeng was subordinately positioned in the merger process, and made minimal input into the curriculum. Although involved in the development of programme outcomes, Mafikeng's participation was minimal in the development of module outcomes and study guides for the majority of subjects. The extent to which the new curriculum meets Mafikeng's needs or reflects its interests is therefore questionable. The current strategy appears to be to ignore the new curriculum and continue doing what has been done in the past. Secondly, the Potchefstroom ADS unit led a highly bureaucratic process in mediating macro-level policy in the alignment of the curriculum. It was this branch of ADS that largely determined how propositions in the ORF (the state) were recontextualised in the PRF at the level of the institution.

In the third part of the chapter, the actual BEd curriculum was considered, both in its intended form (as read through the university calendars) as well as its espoused form, discerned from interviews with 27 academics across the campuses. The curriculum was analysed in terms of its structure and the outcomes-based form, and in terms of its knowledge content and theoretical underpinnings. Outcomes and integration were the central organising principles of the curriculum. There was a weak disciplinary base to courses, and weak potential for the specialising of students' disciplinary and subject identities.

The privileged pedagogical theory underlying the work of almost all academics across the different campuses was constructivism. What was meant by constructivism in interviews was often a selection of various features of OBE – such as self-directed learning and group work. In this procedural privileging of various tenets of progressivism, constructivism and outcomes-based education, academics across campuses demonstrated a disconnection from critical debates around these issues.

What then has been produced at NWU? An integrated curriculum with weak specification at the intended level, which promotes constructivist pedagogy in the espoused curriculum. The problem with this curriculum is that it *might* just suffice for the majority of students at Potchefstroom, who will ultimately teach in former model-C schools (although it is hoped that this will change in time). But student teachers destined for rural, predominantly poor schools are unlikely to experience positive learning with constructivism and its set of associated concepts (such as learner-centredness) in the classrooms they will enter. It is very likely that the new BEd curriculum that Mafikeng especially has agreed to will not advantage its students, or the pupils that these students will go on to teach.

