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Introduction

Papers published in the Paradigms emerge as a result of classroom based and academic development research in particular focused areas the institution. For example, multilingualism, the evaluation of National Benchmarking Tests, a comprehensive approach to living and learning in tertiary institutions settings, journalism education in South Africa and the discourse of African Renaissance are all key focus areas at CPUT. All papers in this edition have been presented at local, national and international forums.

The purpose is to share knowledge and expertise that authors possess to contribute to higher education scholarly debate. The authors regard this publication as a platform to share their research work with the larger community and perhaps engage with those interested in issues discussed in these papers. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and not the editors of Paradigms.

It has often been difficult to obtain quality papers from staff across the institution, and to support staff in developing their first drafts into nearly publishable journal articles. In some instances we have not been able to do this as well as we would have liked, but we still believe that staff have benefitted from writing mentoring, feedback and ultimately seeing their work in print. A further difficulty has been the preponderance of Fundani staff as authors in the journal. As from January 2011 staff who are recipients of the CPUT Research and Innovation Fund for Teaching and Learning (RIFTAL) will be required to submit an article to Paradigms. Other articles from interested staff are also welcome.

Please follow the notes to contributors below.
Notes to Contributors

Paradigms is an internal Cape Peninsula Journal that focuses on learning and teaching issues in the context of higher education. There is a particular interest in higher education research. The areas of research may include any facet of teaching, learning and assessment in the institution that are of interest to the educational community. [For empirical papers it is a requirement that there should be a clear conceptual framework to give focus to the paper]. Articles submitted should at least do one of the following:

• Probe new strategies and ways of thinking that inform teaching, learning and assessment in Higher Education and the implications of the changes for practice in the departments.
• Demonstrate ways of interpreting and reading practice in order that it may inform improved ways of reconstructing practice.
• Deal with appreciation and disclosure of good practice through critical reflection on research project(s) in which new strategies were being implemented.
• Highlight critical debates around policy in Higher Education

Contributions should be not more than 4000 words and include no layout except for paragraphing and headings. There must be subheadings and an abstract of 300 words. Contributions should be clearly and concisely written. The referencing should follow the American Psychological Association (APA) style available in the internet. Any queries on submitting a paper for publication in the journal contact the following person: Denise February (Februaryd@cput) with the subject line clearly stating ‘Paradigms’.

Editors: Somi Deyi, James Garraway, Cathy Hutchings and Rejoice Nsibande.
Academic Development Practitioners’ Approaches to Student Mentoring at University Residences

Najwa Norodine-Fataar

Abstract

This article focuses on academic development (AD) practitioners’ approaches to student mentoring at the residences of a South African university that has instituted mentoring as part of its student support strategy. The article is based on semi-structured interviews with relevant AD practitioners who are responsible for student mentoring in the residences. I draw on the work of Tinto (1975) and Keeling et al (2004) to analyse the functional tensions that exist in the way in which student mentor programmes are conceptualised. My analysis shows that student mentoring has a dual focus, namely academic and psychosocial. I will argue that the AD practitioners conceptualise student mentoring at university residences within this duality. I suggest that mentoring should be conceptualised as an interconnection between the academic and the psychosocial aspects of student learning.

Key words: mentoring approaches, AD practitioners, academic mentoring, psychosocial mentoring
Introduction

Higher education has undergone major restructuring with the advent of the new democratic dispensation in 1994. The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was established in 1996 to look at ways in which the higher education system could contribute to South Africa’s agenda for economic and social reconstruction. Universities responded by growing their student numbers. Much of the instituted teaching and learning infrastructure, such as centres of higher education and development and academic development (AD) centres, facilitates the educational development of both staff and students. In the light of such developments, peer mentoring, which is the focus of this article, has been used as a strategy for supporting student learning. Peer mentoring is defined by Bligh as a voluntary relationship, typically between two individuals, in which: the mentor is usually an experienced, highly regarded, empathetic individual, often working in the same organization, or field, as the mentee; the mentor, by listening and talking with the mentee in private and in confidence guides the mentee in the development of his or her own ideas, learning, and personal and professional development. (Bligh 1999, 2)

Johnson (2007) specifically defines peer mentoring as an alternative to the traditional hierarchical form of mentoring, in terms of which a single mentor is involved in a long, enduring relationship with a mentee. Mentoring is used in subject-specific areas, such as in medicine, nursing and teacher education, as a means of assisting students academically and socially with their higher education learning and development. Studies by Spady (1970), Tinto (1975) and Bean (1982) suggest that those students who are optimally engaged both academically and socially in their institutions will most likely succeed. Recent research into mentoring in higher education (Johnson, 2007; Terrion and
Leonard, 2007; Girves and Gwathmey, 2005; Tang and Choi, 2005; McLean, 2004; Mee-Lee and Bush, 2003; Angelique, et al., 2002) indicates that mentor programmes are an effective means of ensuring the success and retention of students in higher education.

The focus of this article is on AD practitioners' approaches to student mentoring at residences. Such approaches are taken as referring to how such practitioners understand, interpret, think about, and engage with peer mentoring at residences. My analysis shows that AD practitioners follow traditional student development approaches that focus on cognitive structural approaches and psychosocial approaches. According to Keeling et al., “cognitive structural development addresses the evolution of increasingly complex ways of thinking about information, organizing information, using information to justify arguments and ultimately learning to organize data, within particular contexts, to make defensible, but tentative decisions so that reasonable actions can take place” (2004, 11). AD practitioners tend to approach mentoring from a psychosocial theoretical perspective, which focuses on the processes by which “students think about who they are and how their own sense of self interfaces with the issues life places in their path” (Keeling et al. 2004, 11). Such practitioners therefore conceptualise student mentoring from a dual theoretical angle, namely from both a cognitive and a psychosocial angle. The aim of the article is to open up the debate about the approaches to student mentoring and to discuss the possibilities, challenges and limitations of student mentor programmes more generally.

As a recently appointed employee of an Academic Development Unit at a university of technology, I write this article from an insider’s perspective in order to explore how AD practitioners conceptualise, understand and position mentoring within the field of AD. Mentor programmes have become the
focus of attention for many AD practitioners. Morphet (in Volbrecht 2003, 113) suggests that “AD in South Africa consists of three different types of discourse: a support discourse, a policy discourse and a black ‘capacity’ discourse”. I contend that mentoring falls within the realm of support discourse, and that it forms part of the learning support programmes which are offered by universities. According to Volbrecht (2003, 113), “support discourse is not confined to the support of 'underprepared' students, but also refers to ‘support’ as the dominant mode of discourse involving relationships between AD and 'mainstream' staff, as well as between AD practitioners themselves”. An investigation into AD practitioners’ approaches to mentoring should provide important clues about how the phenomenon of mentoring is understood in the field of AD.

**Methodology**

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the relevant selected AD practitioners, who are based at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology’s (CPUT's) Fundani Centre. I interviewed four members of staff who were directly involved in setting up the mentoring programmes in the university's residences. Relevant material was gleaned from the minutes of meetings, reports of AD practitioners, and mentor training programme manuals for incorporation into the analysis. According to McMillan and Schumacher, “categories and patterns emerge from the data rather than being imposed prior to collection” (1997, 507). The data were inductively analysed to gain insights into, and understanding of, AD practitioner approaches to residence-based mentoring. Patton defines qualitative methodologies as means by which to “seek direct access to the lived experience of the human actor as he or she understands and deals with ongoing events” (1991, 391). This study wants to highlight AD practitioners views about student mentoring by providing clarity about the meaning and explanations of the approaches to student mentoring.
Context of study

A mentorship programme was established in 2006 at the Fundani Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) at CPUT. Peer mentoring was identified by CPUT’s Student Learning Unit as being the most appropriate form of mentoring for those students living in residences or off campus. Peer mentoring was regarded as particularly crucial in times of the transition from high school to University. Mentorship programmes are mainly organised in university residences. The interviewees emphasised the point that residences should be “centres of learning”, “sites of learning”, “an inclusive space” and “living learning residences”. Reports showed that the student learning unit concerned procured a commitment from the residence managers and the Residence Academic Committees (RACs) to liaise with, and to collaborate in terms of the mentoring programme. The Fundani Centre (2008,) report on mentoring states that the purpose of the mentor programme is “to help first year and international students to adapt to university life and to create support to help them cope with their new environment” (2008:12).

AD practitioners are responsible for the design and training of students as peer mentors. Whereas some training programmes emphasise academic issues, such as how to conduct research, other training programmes emphasise referral structures and the development of such interpersonal skills as listening and communication. In addition to taking the initiative to advertise, collaborate and liaise with resident managers, AD practitioners play a key role in matching mentors with mentees. The Fundani report of 2008 suggests that 46% of first-year students were assisted by means of the mentor programme. In terms of the programme, mentors are paired up with mentees and meet on a weekly basis. According to Angelique et al. (2002), unlike traditional mentoring, peer mentoring involves matching mentors who provide learning and psychosocial support with
mentees who are more or less the same age and who are roughly equal in experience. Mentors meet on a regular basis at residences or on campus. The mentoring meetings take place on a face-to-face basis. Some of the challenges that mentors face are those of maintaining contact, including keeping appointments, with their mentees.

**Academic and social integration**

Tinto's (1975) theory of academic and social integration is relevant for this study, as it relates to how students are integrated into higher education, focusing on the notion of cognitive and psychosocial support, which is a key component of mentoring. Tinto's (1975) model claims that integration into the educational environment helps to establish a feeling of commitment to the educational institution concerned. Central to the theory of academic and social integration, according to Jacobi (1991) is the concept of integration within the educational environment. According to Tinto (1975), the perceptions of students in terms of their integration into the academic and social systems of the university is important, as such integration determines how they interact with the higher education environment. Jacobi (1991) points out that, for Tinto, the concept of integration is mainly about students' attitudes and feelings about their educational experiences. Keeling et al (2004) moreover provide an argument for the integration of learning and student development within the campus environment:

Learning reconsidered is an argument for the integrated use of all of higher education resources in the education and preparation of the whole student. It is also an introduction to new ways of understanding and supporting learning and development as intertwined, inseparable elements of the student experience. It advocates for
transformation education – a holistic process of learning that places the student at the centre of the learning experience. (2004:3)

Keeling et al. (2004) focus on how the knowledge and skills which students acquire in the classroom and within the university environment contribute to learning. According to Keeling et al.) the notion of learning should be reconsidered: “Learning reconsidered defines learning as a comprehensive, holistic, transformative activity that integrates academic learning and student development processes that have often been considered separate and even independent of each other” (2004:2). They advocate the notion of transformative learning outcomes and emphasise that learning in the classroom, as well as such out-of-classroom activities as interacting with peers and participating in sports teams and residence-based programmes, should take the form of an integrated learning process in higher education institutions. They call for the formation of partnerships between the different faculties and Student Affairs in designing learning programmes and for the coherent integration of learning and student development within the structures of higher education institutions (Keeling et al. 2004).

Both arguments shed light on the complex issues which AD practitioners have to navigate in such institutions. My research indicates that some AD practitioners tend to claim that mentoring is a form of academic learning, as well as ‘taking care of other aspects outside of the classroom’. It is clear that mentoring is regarded as serving the dual function of acquiring academic knowledge on the one hand and playing a psychosocial role on the other.
The mediation between academic and social support

Jacobi’s (1991) critical review of literature on mentoring, in which she draws attention to the theoretical approaches espoused by Astin (1977), Tinto (1975), Cobb (1976) and Chickering (1969), provides crucial perspectives on theoretical approaches to mentoring. These approaches are adopted in most studies of mentoring in higher education, emphasising students’ involvement in their own learning, their academic and social integration, their receipt of social support, and their cognitive and social development as predictors of academic success (Jacobi, 1991). However, Jacobi (1991, 522) points out that the “different theoretical approaches shift the focus of investigations and emphasize different aspects of the mentoring relationship”. Her research, furthermore, emphasises “the lack of theoretical or conceptual base to explain proposed links between mentoring and academic success”.

Loots’ (2009) study of the facilitation of student involvement and retention in higher education by means of a peer mentor programme considers peer mentoring to improve the academic performance of students. In focusing on the role of mentoring, she identifies three issues that can be relevant to the academic performance of students. She indicates that “enjoying support from significant others, feelings of being academically unprepared and feelings of isolation” are aspects which can be addressed to improve academic success.

McLean’s (2004) study on peer mentoring at the Nelson R. Mandela School of Medicine shows that such mentoring provides personal development support for the mentor as well as support for the mentee. Her study shows that age and curricula are important considerations in a peer mentor programme. She suggests that, when students share the same experiences and types of learning, they are able to provide
reliable advice to one another. McLean (2004) recognises the pivotal role that the provision of psychosocial support and the personal development of both mentor and mentee play in the attainment of academic success. Her research nonetheless focuses on how mentees were able to benefit academically when their mentors were exposed to a different curriculum than that to which they themselves were exposed.

Crisp and Cruz's (2009) recent studies on mentoring Hispanic undergraduate students focuses on four aspects of the mentoring process: (1) psychological and emotional support; (2) support for setting goals and choosing a career path; (3) academic subject knowledge support aimed at advancing a student’s knowledge relevant to their chosen field; and (4) specification of a role model. They deem these four aspects as essential to the mentoring concept, regarding the acquisition of academic subject matter as “providing students with someone who supports their academic success inside the classroom” (539).

Terrion and Leonard (2007) provide taxonomy of peer mentor characteristics and identify two broad models of mentoring, based on Kram’s (1985) work. Kram (1985) divides mentoring into career-related and psychosocial mentoring. Terrion and Leonard’s (2007) research reveals that the psychosocial function is the predominant feature in peer mentoring. Benjamin (2007, 7) finds that living in a residence has a positive impact on students' academic growth in four areas: (1) students who live in specially structured experiences, such as living learning centres, seem to achieve better results than those who do not; (2) the rate of student persistence to graduation is improved; (3) students experience increased intellectual development; and students experience increased cognitive development. Her research explains the implications of academic mentoring in residences and reveals enhanced academic achievement for the students concerned, and also
indicates the importance of the emotional well-being of students in the residence environment.

The literature on peer mentoring highlighted above points to the complex theoretical frameworks that student mentorship programmes have to mediate. This research which focuses on how AD practitioners understand, interpret, and engage with peer mentoring programmes show that AD practitioners have to mediate between cognitive structural and psychosocial theories when they conceptualise mentoring. They regard the psychosocial function and the academic function of mentoring as two distinct features of student mentoring.

The academic – social binary in residence-based mentoring

A key finding of my research is that AD practitioners’ perspectives on peer mentoring in the residences support the notion that such mentoring should be focused on academic subject knowledge. They explained that effective mentoring would ensure that the students learn how the subject matter applies to their own lives, and encourage development of their reflective skills. My interviewees also emphasised the psychosocial aspect of mentoring. They pointed out the supportive role of Fundani and that without the intervention from Fundani students who stay in residence would otherwise receive very little support or no support. The interviewees also suggested that mentoring essentially is concerned with social support, and stated the view that students in residences are, on average, very young, so they tended to be open to manipulation. AD practitioners also regarded social issues such as hunger, lack of financial resources, loneliness, depression and isolation as impacting on students' academic success. The interviewees believed that residence-based mentoring could be used to ensure that students continue to learn and that they develop independent learning and collaborative learning.
habits. The AD practitioners whom I interviewed emphasized “taking care of other aspects outside of the classroom”. Keeling et al. (2004) also argue that out-of-classroom learning can play a crucial role in student development. AD practitioners said that

The peer mentoring can bring to the fore other issues that are not taken care of in the classrooms. You know, there are students who are depressed in class and who don’t want to talk about that in class because when they address those issues in class, nobody cares.

The interviewees stated that mentors play a supportive role and they could also act as a referral agent to other support structures on campus.

Miller (in Crisp & Cruz 2009,) suggests that the focus of mentoring should be on employing tutoring skills and on subject learning, rather than on life learning. McLean (2004) also found that, when students share a similar curriculum, knowledge of the subject matter improves. Goldner and Mayseless (2008, 421) further suggests that “a mentoring relationship construed as teaching may serve as a very successful way enhance academic functioning as it offers a constructive and effective learning experience”. Page, Loots and Du Toit (2005, 20) claims that “mentoring, without tutoring as a primary focus, is inappropriate at institutions of higher learning.

On the other hand, Crisp and Cruz (2009) suggest that psychological and emotional support is an essential aspect of mentoring. Loots’ (2009) study also points to those psychosocial issues that require attention, referring to how students feel in their academic environment, which can, in turn, affect how they perform. Eshbaugh (2008, 25) provides a useful definition of social support by stating that “social support includes someone to talk to, feeling a sense of belongingness, and being provided emotional comfort”. This shows that the academic and social
binary evident student mentoring programmes provide AD practitioners with two distinct ways of approaching mentoring.

The training programme prepared by the AD practitioners emphasised the competencies of mentors. The manual described mentors as being required to “provide emotional support to mentees, refer students to relevant support departments, set a good example for students to see and emulate and model values that offer the student the best chances for success and happiness” (Training Materials 2007). The training programme included instruction in interpersonal skills, diversity, cultural awareness and personal development. The follow-up training programme focused on learning as part of its outcomes for the training, stressing the need to “know how a young adult student learns, how to build trust, and various mentoring methods and styles (Training Materials 2009). The subtitle of a later manual stated that the focus of the training is on “the methodology and development for students' academic mentoring” (Training Materials 2009). Both the academic learning and psychosocial aspects of mentoring could be seen as conceptually distinct, though of equal importance, in the student mentoring programme.

The AD practitioners involved in the current study recognised the prominent role that residences play in the academic socialisation of students. Their commitment to promoting such a role led to them stressing the importance of learning as being the crucial component in the mentoring relationship. Benjamin’s (2007, 10) research suggests that learning in the residence should become “an extension or enhancement of the classroom learning”. Riker and DeCoster (1971, 92) alert us to the need to unite the educational role of residences with the realities of the “student’s life and the social systems of the college”. Mentoring can, therefore, play a vital role in the development of learning within residences.
While the interviewed AD practitioners were committed to the above mentioned academic support emphasis within student mentorship programmes, they simultaneously highlighted those social factors which impacted on students who live in residences. According to the interviewees, excessive drinking and clubbing at the residences were the type of activities that dominated residence life. They also described the residences as “stark and cold places” and “very similar to the Cape Flats areas in the communities”. Regarding educational leadership within residences, AD practitioners pointed out that the levels of such leadership vary. They raised the point that residences did not all have leaders who prioritise education. The AD practitioners identified one leader who was instrumental in the mentor programme, and who was very passionate about education and learning in the residences. They suggested that there was a “need for an academic language in residences”. These views resonate with Palmer, Broido and Campbell (2008, 89) who suggest that “it appears that housing was perceived primarily as a service unit and that its functions were largely divorced from the academic mission of the institution, or at least divorced from the academic curriculum”.

Benjamin (2004, 13) concurs that “residence halls have lacked educational planning, strong internal direction, and a set of educational objectives connected to the goals of undergraduate education”. Kuh et al. (2005) proposes that effective residence conditions should have:

(a) human-scale environments housing small groups of students; (b) faculty offices in residences that foster faculty student interactions; (c) themed living environments that, while not necessarily related to an academic discipline or major, include a course or other academic component shared by the residents; (d) academic and personal support for students and (e) deliberate efforts to make educational programs (including first year
student programs) an integral part of the residential experience.

Kuh’s suggestions points to the range of challenges that residence life presents for both the students and the AD practitioners. Residence managers, AD practitioners and students have to navigate their way through complex issues in order to establish a student mentoring programme.

Although functional tensions can be seen to exist in the training programmes and in the way in which AD practitioners discuss mentoring, the practitioners concluded that mentoring should be conceptualised from the perspective of a socio-academic process. They refer to mentoring as being “holistic with a strong academic component” and the “social dimension married to academic dimension”. AD practitioners distinguished between mentoring and tutoring. They viewed “mentoring as an extension of tutoring”. They believed that mentors should focus on academic and social factors. They therefore, emphasise both the academic and social dimensions of mentoring, considering it to be a dual process.

Although research into student mentoring, according to McLean (2004) and Crisp and Cruz (2009), emphasise the importance of assisting students with academic subjects, Eshbaugh’s (2008,) research shows the significance of social support in preventing loneliness in residences. Goldner and Mayseless (2008,) make a crucial point that conceptual approaches to mentoring largely depend on the envisaged role of the mentor.

One of the interviewed AD practitioners viewed the role of the mentor as similar to her culture in terms of the respect for older brother and older sister. She compared the respect of the older brother and older sister to that of the mentor relationship. They also spoke about the roles of the mentor as a form of academic
mentoring and how reporting to a mentor can influence first year students positively. AD practitioners’ also viewed the role of a mentor as one who focuses on internationalization and providing an inclusive space for all. The role of providing a supportive relationship to assist students who are lonely and stressed was further underscored. Goldner and Maysel (2008, 423) makes a useful point about the notion of “mentor flexibility" and suggests that “the uniqueness of the mentoring relationship is rooted in the mentor’s capacity to move freely in and out of these roles without embodying any of them”.

It is clear from my interviews that the AD practitioners opted for a dual approach to mentoring. Through my interviews and data gathered from the training manuals and minutes, it shows that the dual focus often results in a bias towards the academic approach to mentoring and less of an emphasis on psychosocial aspects, or vice versa. A student mentoring approach in higher education should include both the academic focus as well as the psychosocial focus in a uniformed manner. AD practitioners emphasize the dual focus of student mentoring; the academic focus on the one hand or the psychosocial focus on the other. I argue that AD practitioners conceptualise mentoring as a conduit by means of which to address the academic subject matter and the social support needed to influence learning. They claim that mentoring is about providing socio-academic support but the dual approach to the mentoring is not consistently articulated in the programme.

In light of this, a tension seems to exist in the way in which mentorship programmes are defined by different AD practitioners, who tend to stress either the academic or the psychosocial function of mentoring, with implications for both mentor training programmes and mentoring practice. A clearly defined mentorship programme should provide first-year students with coherent academic support. Jacobi’s (1991)
review of the mentoring literature in higher education, management, organisations and developmental psychology shows that there is no uniformity in the way in which the concept of mentoring is defined in higher education. The lack of uniformity contributes to the dual focus which is evident in mentorship programmes.

The dual focus discussed above is present in the design of the mentorship programme at CPUT, with its primary expression being the distinctive emphasis on each dimension without meaningful conceptual integration of the psychosocial and academic dimensions of mentoring. In other words, learning support and psychosocial support are seen as separate and distinct from each other. Keeling et al. (2004, 15) criticises this view in their call for careful conceptual “interconnectedness of student learning within higher education”. Their research brings into focus conceptualisations of learning that can be applied to mentorship programmes at universities. As this current article focuses only on the conceptualisations of mentoring at one university, more research needs to be conducted into the mentoring processes, and how the integration of academic and social aspects of mentoring occurs in practice.

Research shows that psychological and emotional support is central to mentoring. Such support involves cultivating listening skills, providing a supportive relationship, in terms of which there is mutual understanding, and linking the student with the mentor (Crisp & Cruz 2009, 538). Riker and Decoster (1971, 72) remind us that “to teach the subject matter and ignore the realities of student life and the social systems of the college is hopelessly naïve”. AD practitioners strongly expressed the view that there is a link between social issues and the impact of such issues on how students learn. I contend that mentoring cannot only address students’ social problems without addressing how students learn and acquire knowledge in higher education institutions. According to Goldner and Mayseless (2005, 423)
“mentors who are involved in an array of activities providing emotional support, guidance or teaching, and sponsorship or advocacy offered the most beneficial mentoring”. While Goldner and Mayseless’s (2005) research focuses on youth mentoring in the community, this study focus on student mentoring in higher education, which should deal with issues of how students learn in the higher education environment and the effect of social support in influencing learning.

The dual focus of student mentoring programmes highlighted above suggests that we need a successful interconnectedness when constructing mentoring programmes. This will bring into focus the potential benefits to be gained from combining academic learning and student development. The focus of a mentorship, whether it be on the academic subject matter or on the psychosocial aspects of the mentorship, often tend to veer in the direction which is determined by the subjective interest of the practitioner concerned. While such a focus has its merits, I would argue that, as AD practitioners, we need an unbiased and logical programme which aligns the academic and the psychosocial features of mentoring with a greater emphasis on how to learn and become academically socialized in a higher education environment. Simultaneously, student mentoring programmes should allow for pliability in the mentoring relationship and acknowledge the varied roles that mentors can play. I concur with Goldner and Mayseless (2008, 425) who recommends that during training “the uniqueness of the flexibility of the mentor’s role and the importance to transverse the various positions in order to promote the protégés functioning should be highlighted”. However, within a higher education environment, the process of learning and the significance of social support should be given prominence in student mentoring programme. I suggest that greater conceptual coherence between the different faculties and the student support structures at higher education institutions would
be one way in which to address the duality which is present within the conceptualisation of mentoring.

Mentoring is a vehicle for connecting and engaging with the academic and psychosocial aspects of learning. A student mentorship programme that is based on integrating the learning and student development within higher education institutions should address the needs of students holistically. Keeling et al. (2004) suggest that “learning and development and identity formation can no longer be considered as separate from each other, but rather that they are interactive and shape each other as they evolve”.

Conclusion

The above discussion demonstrates the duality implicit in the conceptualisation of student mentoring at one university. I show that functional tensions exist in the way in which student mentor programmes are conceptualised. My analysis shows that student mentoring has a dual focus, namely academic and social and that AD practitioners' conceptualised student mentoring as a socio-academic process. Furthermore, I argue that student mentoring programmes in higher education should be approached in a consistent fashion.

I propose three interrelated processes within university environments in order to address student support strategies via student mentoring programmes. (1) The organizational environment in higher education should focus on broader policy issues connecting Faculties and student support structures on campuses. (2) Within faculties greater emphasizes should be placed on the integrating the curriculum with the students support structures. (3) Mentorship programmes should focus on aligning the academic and the psychosocial features of their programmes and should emphasize the variable role of student mentors. The process of learning and how students are
socialized into learning should be highlighted as a distinguishing feature of student mentoring programmes in higher education. While the mentorship process can be seen as a vehicle for addressing and connecting the academic learning and student development, the successful mediation of academic learning and student development represents a challenge for mentoring programmes at higher education institutions.

References


Fostering Learning in Mechanical Engineering: Conceptualisation in Mother Tongue

Somikazi Deyi

Abstract

This paper hopes to display the effectiveness of use of mother tongue in conceptualizing Mechanics 1 at CPUT. Language and conceptualization are deeply interrelated in that once the language of a learner is fully developed for knowledge processing it enables the learner to access concepts in areas of learning with understanding. For learners to have a full grasp of concepts they need a language. When students learn in a language in which they are familiar, they are able to develop higher order concepts and are better able to achieve academic success. Mlama and Materu (1978) regard language as a means to articulate relevant account of learning processes. This displays the dependency of concepts on language for conceptualization Stroud (2002:46) on the relatedness of language and conceptualization, contends that when students cannot respond in cognitively adequate ways on classroom tasks, much communication is lost if they have limited linguistic resources to account for processes involved in their learning.

Debates amongst academics on the dependency of language on concepts falls generally into two positions. One position views concepts as being learnt independently from language. Scholars such as (Nuyt: 1997) regard concept knowledge as a
separate entity from linguistic knowledge. The other position views conceptualization as a process which requires language to articulate acquisition, storage and transmission of knowledge in their view is not concepts. In support of the second view, Stubbs (1980:34) contends that there are particular relationships between mathematics and written language. His argument purports the significance of language in making sense of concepts even though mathematics has a particularized vocabulary. Based on current research and theory, it seems difficult to provide strategies to assess and measure the effectiveness of using multilingualism as a tool for teaching and learning. Conceptually, use of multilingualism seems to benefit students, however measuring the benefit seems problematic. In an earlier paper (Deyi, 2007), I pointed out that a multilingual approach has cognitive advantages in encouraging use of mother tongue for conceptualization.

Introduction

The role of the language of instruction in promoting effective teaching and learning is an issue that has occupied many scholars all over the world for many years (Orr 1987a, 1997b). This issue has been a concern mostly in countries where immigrant children are in the minority in countries such as the United States, Canada (Krashen, 1981) and South Africa (Alexander, 1989; Young, 2002; DoE, 2002; Setati, 2005 Madiba, 2008). It is in these countries where research has been widely conducted, that a number of legislations have been passed and amended throughout the years. Despite such developments, debates on use of languages still rage on.

In South Africa, where democracy is still in its infancy, we have not yet resolved the question of which language to use for instruction. As debates continue, the problems associated with the use of English as the sole medium of instruction still engulf our education system. This happens despite the political will of the
democratic government that has, since its inception, promulgated multilingual policies that give learners the right to be educated through their home languages. It is these concerns that have prompted the discussion in this paper. I discuss the significance of promoting multilingual classrooms in Higher Education and share work-in-progress on the use of multilingualism as an approach to teaching and learning. The overall aim of the paper is to engage higher education practitioners in a constructive and collaborative discussion on the issue of bi-/multilingualism in higher education.

Multilingualism in South African Higher Education (HE) Institutions

There are many significant reasons for promotion of multilingualism in South African classrooms. These include using the home language of the learner to create an enabling environment to make sense of concepts. Such an approach at the initial stage of the workshop was considered necessary due to the fact that students when entering Higher Education are not adequately prepared to cope with academic demands and the language of teaching and learning seems to be a barrier.

Political arguments

Since 1994, the democratic government of South Africa has promulgated a number of multilingual policies that give recognition to and require the development of indigenous African languages for use in high status domains. Multilingual policies that give learners and students the entitlement to be educated in their home language are: the South African Constitution of 1996, Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 and Language Policy for Higher Education Institutions (LPHE) of 2002. Both the latter policies advocate for use of African
languages in teaching. However, in more than thirteen years of democracy, very little progress has been made towards the implementation of multilingual policies, especially in higher education institutions (HEI). The LPHE commits to the long-term development of indigenous African languages for use as languages of learning and teaching (LOLT) in HEI, thus giving the impression that the use of mother tongue (MT) can be implemented in the long-term. This trivializes the pressing academic issues that continue to face students who are not coping with being taught in a second language. Having said that, the policy could also be understood to mean that HEIs need to take their time and investigate this matter thoroughly before embarking on full implementation.

In acknowledgement of the fact that the language of instruction for the majority of the citizens of this country constitutes a barrier to access and success in higher education, the LPHE then requires that all higher education institutions participate in facilitating and promoting the goal of the National Language Policy. The multilingual approach in facilitating teaching and learning has the backing of the policies discussed but there is also an academic argument to it.

**Academic issues**

Of the small percentage of learners who manage to sit for the Grade 12 examinations, the results are not pleasing. According to a report in the *Rapport* newspaper on research undertaken by the South African Institute of Race Relations, only 8% (84 741) of the 1 057 935 learners who started Grade 10 in 2004 passed the final Grade 12 examination in 2006 well enough to obtain entrance to university. Unfortunately, only 4.8% passed mathematics and 5.6% passed science on the higher grade. In response, the Department of Education (DoE) argued that learners’ limited proficiency in English, and the general language of teaching and learning (LOTL) in South Africa’s
government schools, may be an important contributing factor in these performance levels, and that learners may achieve higher levels of success if they had access to a language they knew well in the examinations and in the teaching and learning process (Webb, 2007). It was however not for the first time that the DoE had identified LOLT as the major cause of the appalling state of education in the country.

The above-mentioned conditions prevalent in the schooling system also impact negatively on HEI. As a result of Grade 12 learners' poor performance in their examinations, the majority of black school-leavers in South Africa who venture into HEI do not qualify for direct entry, except through Extended Curriculum or bridging programmes (ECPs). This is particularly so in fields such as medicine, engineering and technology where very good higher grade results in mathematics, science and English are the major entrance requirement. However, not many learners even attempt mathematical subjects at higher grade level in school, as pointed out above. At the same time, the ECPs help boost the enrolment figures in HEI which would otherwise be half empty or closed down, due to poor Grade 12 results. Not surprisingly, the programmes mainly attract black African students who are mainly from disadvantaged educational backgrounds wanting to pursue scarce skills. It is, however, noted that the ECP have, throughout the years, failed to achieve what they were meant to redress, partly due to the fact that English remains the sole medium of instruction in South African HEIs. When black African students with poor matriculation results begin higher education through ECP, they further face hurdles in acquiring the basic understanding required in their fields of study. Students have to grapple with scientific concepts, general academic vocabulary and its corresponding expressions that are often foreign to them.

It appears that English poses a problem for use at an abstract, symbolic level of thought, particularly in working class
communities and in rural areas (Webb 2002a & 2002b). It is this problem associated with the abstract nature of scientific and general academic terminology that it is necessary to consider the use of multilingualism as an approach to teaching and learning in HE.

The importance of a good foundation in acquiring meaningful knowledge in a scientific subject is confirmed by a study conducted at the University of Durban-Westville on using isiZulu to teach chemistry to isiZulu-speaking students. In the study, Shembe (2002: 06) points out that “the hierarchical nature of chemistry is such that the understanding of certain key concepts is fundamental to the proper acquisition of subsequent knowledge”. Shembe further argues that if this understanding does not occur effectively, students “memorise certain points from the text-book long enough to regurgitate them during tests and exam time.” Shembe concludes by saying that such “learning” is not effective and inevitably “leads to a high percentage of African students who either drop out in the first year or fail”. The same could be said to be true to what has been happening in most foundation programmes, as pointed out above. It is for these reasons that it is necessary for English lecturers to consider teaching academic, content and English vocabulary through bi-/multilingualism. This is suggested in consideration of research that asserts that language is best developed within a content-based curriculum (Short, 1993; Snow, Met and Genesee, 1989).

**Research evidence**

In pursuing this argument, the thinking is encouraged by Cummins’ (2000) assertion that one of the most strongly established findings of educational research, conducted in many countries around the world, is that well-implemented bi-multilingual programmes can promote literacy and subject matter knowledge in mother tongue without any negative
effects on development in the second language. In the country’s situation this translates into using mother tongue to facilitate the understanding of academic concepts with the hope that it would not interfere with the acquisition of the other tongue (English). The idea seems plausible since it is backed by a body of research, conducted mostly in countries such as United States of America, Canada and a few in South Africa, testifying to the positive effects of bilingual education on foreign language achievement and educational development (Baker, 2000; Cummins, 1979, 2000; Hoffman, 2001; Ramirez, 1992; Sanz, 2000; Sherwood Smith, 1992; and Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Shembe, 2002). Research suggests that bilingual learners may develop flexibility in their thinking as a result of processing information through two different languages. For example, Sherwood Smith (1992: 21) refers to metalinguistic skills and to superior abilities of bilinguals with a notion that in the process of acquiring and using different languages they may have the opportunity to reflect consciously upon the ways in which languages differ. In this regard, I am particularly intrigued by one of the fundamental assumptions underlying the efficiency of dual language instruction that skills and knowledge learned in L1 transfer to L2 (Goldman, et al., 1984; Malakoff, in Keshavarz and Astaneh, 2002). This suggests that if students understand and know how to do something in their mother tongue they should be able to transfer this knowledge to English using the relevant taught terminology. This could mean producing biliterate citizens who could be better placed to share knowledge gained to the benefit of their communities.

**Background to the study**

The research investigates the possibility of using mother tongue to enhance learning in Mechanics 1. Use of mother tongue in explaining concepts in the classroom poses many questions and many problems. Dealing with a richness of diversity amongst our students, requires an approach that would create an enabling
environment for use of students’ languages without negating the language of learning and teaching. It is this rich diversity that we are working on so that students see their languages as resources to draw on for effective learning. Using mother tongue for conceptualization creates an opportunity to develop the additional language (Winberg; 2006). Using this diversity “as training” on one hand, and education on the other hand, is critical to ensure that use of mother tongue creates a platform for language development for learners. This is done using mother tongue by means of thinking the concept through in mother tongue, translating it to mother tongue and then doing back translation (from mother tongue to English). Students’ everyday use of language when carefully guided brings about change in the classroom (Vygotsky 1962).

The research process

The intervention started by giving students a questionnaire before the intervention. The rationale behind the questionnaire was to ascertain their thoughts on the language of learning and teaching and their ability to engage with the academic language of learning. The questionnaire informed us that students prefer to be taught in English because they expect to improve their English at university; using mother tongue to enhance their learning would be taking them back to high school and primary school, something they never heard of, before and English is the language of the economy, class, status and for one to prove that they have been to varsity they have to speak English well (Deyi et al 2007).

At the time, students seemed unclear about the difference between English for communication and English for academic performance, which the questionnaire focused on. It became evident that language issues pertaining to teaching and learning were not something they were really thinking about. Given the disparities between high school where students are
not taught to think critically, and university education, where this is expected, this is not surprising. The questionnaire exercise is followed by observing and identifying concepts that pose difficulty to students in performing more successfully in their studies. Observations informed us that students needed to be aware of the data involved in any task given to them. They also needed to understand the fundamental basics of mechanics principles, rules and laws of application. It was also important for them to see the link from one unit to the next (implicit versus explicit) and understanding the jargon of the discipline.

Method of intervention

To gain successful results it became significant to team teach with the subject lecturer. As teaching (Mechanics 1 subject) continued, concepts were written down in the home language and in the last thirty minutes of the lecture, thus starting a language discussion. The process also involved planning together and thinking about including a language exercise on each unit. Students are given an opportunity to explain the concepts in the available languages in the classroom, each focusing on their mother tongue. While students explain the concepts in their mother tongue, greater internalization (of concepts learnt) occurs. In cases where other students do not understand, those who speak the same language with them explain the process. This gives them an opportunity to learn from one another and speak in the language they are familiar with. This leads to deep learning, critical thinking and conceptualizing the discipline in depth.

It was interesting and difficult to point out students’ difficulty as students were taught through active participation to ensure that they have access to subject taught. Scaffolding every step of calculation was thoroughly explained, eliciting knowledge from the learners making sure that they are part of the learning process, probing to enforce understanding and integrating
study skills in conceptualization of Mechanics 1 was the process of teaching and learning to ensure understanding. By way of example, an illustrative vignette follows.

**Vignette**

A unit of Mechanics 1 was given to students to identify concepts that seemed difficult. The next step was finding equivalents in the home language. This became a daunting exercise for African language speakers in that they have not used their languages in conceptualising subjects. Their languages were used as a vehicle to communicate the subject/transfer knowledge. While, Afrikaans speakers were able to find equivalents while African language speakers were unable to come up with all. Feedback from the questionnaire informed us about students’ difficulty in concept understanding. So, key concepts posing difficulties to students were identified. Once these were identified they were discussed in terms of meaning in the home language of the learners, contextual meaning (what it would mean to mechanics), using scaffolding as a method to assist them in understanding questions and unpacking the meaning of concepts.

*The table below displays the nature of student engagement with each concept:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units</th>
<th>The standard denotations which represent quantity represented by a number</th>
<th>Lyunithi eligama okanye umfanekiso omele ubungakanani bomlinganiselo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>It is the size or quantity found by measuring</td>
<td>Umlinganiselo ofunyanwa ngokulinganisela okanye ukumetesha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forces</td>
<td>A phenomenon which causes a</td>
<td>Amandla okushukumisa okanye ukuhambisa into</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moving Body</strong></td>
<td>Moving body to come to rest or to move a resting body</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moments</strong></td>
<td>A quantity that represents the magnitude of a force applied to rotational system at a certain distance from the pivot point</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Umnyinge omele ubungakanani bamandla oshukumo asetyenziswa kwimo ejikelezayo kumgama othile encamini</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vector</strong></td>
<td>A quantity with both magnitude and direction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Umnyinge onobungakanani nomkhombandlela</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coplanar</strong></td>
<td>Forces of which the lines of action, pass through the same point</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amandla oshukumo apho kuldula yonke imigca yesehlo kwincam efanayo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Energy</strong></td>
<td>The ability to do work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amandla okuba nako ukwenza into</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows students’ thinking processes to understand the concepts. The process does not allow them to think of an equivalent but to work out the understanding so that the equivalent becomes the end result of the conceptualization process.

**Critique of mother tongue use**

This critique is gained through feedback given after presenting amongst colleagues the significance of using multilingualism to enhance conceptualization. It is not gained as a result of research but through discussions.

- It takes a lot of time and there is less concrete evidence that students’ poor performance is a result of language use, it is rather under-preparedness
• Time used in explaining concepts in the home language could be spent on second developing language skills
• There is a need to look at other factors that contribute to student’s performance other than language.
• Students need to focus more on sharpening their second language skill for the industry
• They need to be able to explain themselves in the language of the economy
• English is an international language in which case students' linguistic development should be more on the LOLT

**Student comments before the intervention**

When students were asked to comment before the intervention on the use of mother tongue in teaching and learning Mechanics, they did not see the benefits. Most students believed that empowering them to learn more English would assist to ensure that they have a voice in the class and outside the classroom. English is the language used to access opportunities. Furthermore, use of English would give them respect amongst peers and colleagues. Linked to this is an issue of status and social class. Influential people, according to them, are those who have a highest command of English. For one to participate fully in contributing to the economic issues of the country, English is the language of command. So, use of mother tongue would seem a waste of time and resources, since it would require interpreting and translation most of the time.

Another issue raised is the lack of role models in using mother tongue in powerful organizations. Most people in managerial positions use English to communicate with the outside world and the wider audience. None of them use or promote mother tongue in their workplaces. Institutions like parliament also use English which is an additional to the majority of people found there.
Students attributed their hesitation to use of mother tongue to lack of accessing better life and economic benefits. They made a strong link between speaking English and access to employment and international relations. Use of mother tongue in their view did not seem to provide such opportunities. Some questioned the availability of the language register of particular subjects particularly in higher education. Mechanics 1 was used as an exemplary subject to show case that any scientific related subject can be taught in a multilingual approach to enhance understanding. It is one of the subjects that were seen impossible to be offered in mother tongue in the eyes of students in engineers.

**Students’ comments during the intervention**

When students realize that promotion of the use of mother tongue is actually in order to enhance understanding of concepts and not to replace English, their thinking changed. They saw use of mother tongue as affirmation of their identity and as encouraging deeper learning.

**Affirming one’s identity**

Once concepts are understood well in the home language the additional language also developed. When students are comfortable with the language of the discipline or subject, learning becomes easier and enjoyable. When learners are confronted with a language that is not their own, their enthusiasm about the content is reduced. Using multilingualism enables them gain deep knowledge about the concepts they are dealing with and have confidence increased. Even though the intervention was over a semester, the following observations were made:
Deeper Learning

Working with the concept, looking for deeper meaning in the language it is, finding an equivalent in the mother tongue and then back translating enhances understanding. It further, enables students internalize the processes involved in applying the said concepts. This improved students’ conceptual understanding. Using mother tongue enabled students to engage more with concepts involved in their discipline. Probing concepts gave students an opportunity to be quite familiar with processes involved in applying and understanding these concepts.

Remarks

From my observations, students used the process of unpacking concepts as a study method. Working from the concept looking for deeper meaning in the language it is, finding an equivalent in the mother tongue and then back translating enhances understanding. It further, enables students internalize the processes involved in applying the said concepts. The process created an independent learner as students tended to use this approach to learning as a study method. Difficult methods would be identified and tried to be understood in terms of their meaning in the language understood better by the students and therefore back translated to English. The process allows probing beyond the surface meaning of the concepts, thereby, strengthening their second language skills.

Conclusion

Measuring the effectiveness of multilingualism in Mechanics 1 is being discussed. On one hand we would like to see whether there is improvement in terms of what the intervention aimed to do. On the other hand we would like students to see that the
language intervention is to their advantage. However, assessing the effectiveness of using multilingualism is still a difficult process. This is because it is difficult to single out one item to indicate success, as one would in the case of pure Mechanics/Mathematics where calculations guided by a set process or steps are involved. The best way it is done, at the moment, is to observe whether or not student participation increases during and after the intervention in Mechanics 1 and other subjects and whether marks tests and essay are improved. The follow up studies will inform us of these improvements.

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An evaluation of the impact of efforts at improving lecturers’ assessment practices

C. O. K. Allen-Ile & D. Scholtz

Abstract

Ensuring that assessment practices at South African tertiary institutions are of high standards has become topical over the last few years. At the Faculty of Business, a series of workshops have been conducted to enable academics to come to grips with the demands of standardized assessment practices. The idea was to ensure that the efforts already being made by lecturers become more systemic and embedded within the academic culture and incorporated more effectively in programme reviews and assessment of educational outcomes.

This article presents the findings of a descriptive study which utilised the survey approach to collect mostly quantitative data. Following a series of training workshops on assessment best practices for academic staff, a questionnaire was designed and administered to determine what assessment practices were most prevalent and whether lecturers were implementing improved assessment practices in the evaluation of their courses. All the lecturers who had attended these workshops were targeted as data sources for this study. The data were analysed quantitatively through the use of the SPSS computer software.
Key words: Educational Assessments and Evaluations, Teaching and Learning Practices, Educational Innovation, Curriculum and Instruction, Measurement of Learning, Outcomes in Tertiary Education.

Introduction

Pressure on universities in South Africa to assess their educational effectiveness has been growing over the past several years. As the culture that styles itself as “accountability-based” has gained prominence in publicly funded education, so has the insistence that universities “measure” the “outcomes” of their efforts to teach students and do so in a way that will demonstrate their effectiveness and justify increasing costs to individuals and the demands on public funding. While institutions are left to devise their own responses to this demand, the pressure to have some regime that will provide meaningful guidance for the improvement of education at each institution has become acute.

To this end, a series of workshops have been conducted at the Faculty of Business to enable academics to engage with factors that constitute standardized assessment practices. The purpose of the workshops was to ensure that the efforts already being made by lecturers become more systemic and embedded within the academic culture and incorporated more effectively in programme reviews and assessment of education outcomes.

The changing profile of higher education in South Africa is characterized by, amongst others, large classes, students with disadvantaged learning backgrounds and linguistic and cultural diversity (Sutherland & Peckham, 1998: 99). In addition to ascribing to the principles of Outcomes Based Education (OBE) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), educators have to contend with a demanding administrative workload, changing curriculum design and innovative technology in
teaching. All the above aspects of teaching should conform to appropriate learning theories and criteria for minimum standards as espoused by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) (refer to the Criteria for Programme Accreditation (2004). Thus, the need for staff development training programmes and capacity building has become paramount given the changing trends and modes of delivery in higher education. The HEQC has identified staff development as one of the key focus areas for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in South African higher education (Improving Teaching and Learning [ITL] Resource, 2004, No. 6: 5). In the HEQC Criteria for institutional Audits and Criteria for Programme Accreditation (2004), repeated requests are made for institutions to put staff development policies, strategies and practices in place, with particular reference to the assessment of student learning [Refer to the Criteria for Institutional Audits (2004), 3 (iv and v), 11 (v), and Criteria for Programme Accreditation (2004), 3 (iii), 5 (ii), 6 (ii), 12 (ii, iv, v, vi), 13 (i)]. Given the fact that assessment of students’ learning focuses on meeting the minimum standards set by the HEQC, this article examines the efforts by CPUT to build staff capacity on effective assessment practices for students.

Assessment within South African higher education

Assessment cannot be seen in isolation from other aspects of teaching and learning. It is not a means to an end, but is central to the process of teaching and learning. Assessment should inform teaching where all learning activities serve to prepare students for formative and summative assessments. Biggs (1999: 42) refers to this synchronization of activities as ‘curriculum alignment’, where the content, teaching and learning activities and assessment criteria support students in attaining the specified learning outcomes. Whilst curriculum alignment refers to horizontal alignment within a subject, there should also be
vertical alignment with other levels within a programme in order to meet the exit level outcomes. The final exit level outcomes of a programme should inform the learning outcomes of smaller units of learning that lead to the final qualification (ITL Introduction, 2004: 23). This horizontal and vertical curriculum alignment in the broadest sense should, in turn, conform to the quality assurance guidelines of the institutional, faculty and departmental policies, strategies and procedures. Therefore, assessment viewed on this macro level has far reaching consequences for teaching, learning and assessment practices that would adequately prepare students for their vocation. Assessment is an integral component of effective educational practice, alongside and in support of curriculum and instruction.

Many definitions of assessment have been presented by educational theorists (Atkins, Beattie & Dockrell, 1993; Brown, Bull, & Pendlebury, 1997; Falchikov, 2001). Given that educators are practicing within the OBE paradigm, the following definition would be considered most apt: ‘Assessment is a process during which evidence of performance is gathered and evaluated against agreed criteria’ (ITL Resource, 2004, No. 5: 3). Within the OBE framework, the focus of teaching and assessment is what students should be able to do as opposed to what they should know. This means that assessments should be criterion-referenced to ensure that assessments are specific to assessment criteria, that they are transparent and that ‘standards are more clearly defined and measure more consistently’ (Boughey, 2004:9). Furthermore, professional judgment is required to make context-dependent decisions about the quality of learning achieved (ITL Resource, Introduction, 2004: 26). For assessment to be a meaningful part of the learning process, it needs to be authentic and adapted to fit a specific purpose (see ITL Resource, 2004, No. 5: 4; Dunn, Parry & Morgan, 2002; Kotze, 2002: 78 and Biggs, 1999: 151). Authentic assessments focus on content and skills that are useful
in real life and should be set in such a way that it ‘creates a dynamic, coherent system for using developmental experience’ (Hager & Butler, in Kotze, 2002: 78). In addition to the vocational challenge, authentic assessments should encourage ‘the kind of self-reflection and perceptual shift that defines higher orders of consciousness’ (Taylor and Marienau, in Kotze, 2002: 78). Therefore, a range of assessment methods that incorporate credible and intellectual tasks (ITL Resource No. 5, 2004: 6) need to be employed to grant students an opportunity to prove their competence in transformative learning and provide appropriate evidence of readiness for their vocation.

It is important to recognize that there are no mandatory generic assessment practices in higher education given the myriad disciplines that are offered at the various tertiary level institutions. Educators should be allowed the flexibility to use their professional judgement to interpret learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The concomitant assessment methods should be carefully selected to take into account the differences and nuances that exist within and between disciplines.

**Staff development in higher education**

According to the ITL Resource (2004, No. 6: 3), staff development refers to developing the capacity of higher education academic staff to fulfill their professional roles effectively by providing appropriate training, education and capacity building. The aim of staff development should be to enhance transformative learning. This means that students should be engaged in learning activities and social interaction in order to ‘build and change their existing meaning and knowledge structures in order to assimilate or accommodate new knowledge’ (ITL Resources, Introduction, 2004: 13). Transformative learning, should therefore, be the backdrop against which all staff development is based.
According to ITL Resources (2004, No. 6: 3), staff development in South African Higher education has mostly been conducted on an informal basis, given the tenuous position of contract staff. However, where institutions have responded to the call for improved teaching and learning strategies, more formal staff development programmes have emerged rather than being a peripheral, adjunct activity. For staff development programmes to be effective it would need to be integrated and embedded into the culture and philosophy of institutions and teaching staff per se.

Staff development is more than the acquisition of skills and knowledge to improve teaching and learning practices. In essence, staff development should be embodied in the commitment to the scholarship of teaching where academics take ownership of their teaching practice and ‘seek to reflect, research, build theory and improve practice’ (ITL Resource, 2004, No. 6: 7). This implies that knowledge acquisition (i.e., capacity building) and critical reflection of existing practices within an action research paradigm are pivotal to the process of teaching and learning where the only constant is change and improvement. To this end, training and development programmes should not be foisted on educators who might perceive it as ‘additional work’, but should be administered within a philosophy of scholarship and critical reflection of practice. Given that teaching theories and practices are open to change, educators in higher education need to evaluate assessment practices and effect changes in the quest for best practice.

It is within this context that academic staff development is seen as imperative. A key element that emerged from previous research conducted at various South African universities was that ‘a genuine commitment to academic staff development and the enhancement of higher education in South Africa was essential’ (Weir, Radloff & Hudson, 2000:167).
Academic staff development in education theory and practice is by no means unique to the South African higher education scenario. Such training has become common practice in Norway, Holland, Australia and the United States of America (Preparing Future Faculty). In the UK the Dearing Report heralded an era of `radical changes in attitudes to teaching' and `change in the values of education' (Badley, 1999: 35). Training and development of educators focused on the demonstration of scholarship and excellence in the management of teaching and learning. A vital component of the Dearing Report was that ‘university teachers ensure effectiveness in assessing student learning and giving feedback' (Badley, 1999: 36). The Dearing Report resulted in national initiatives such as the Institute of Teaching and Learning and the Learning and Teaching Support Network. The UK’s initiative was not only aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning practices of educators in higher education, but also to establish discipline specific communities of good teaching practice, which includes promoting fair, valid and reliable assessment practices.

**Capacity building in assessment practices**

Against the background of the challenges in teaching and learning in higher education as outlined above, the Faculty of Business embarked on a series of workshops and discussion sessions for academic staff. The aspects of assessment that were discussed included teaching and learning policies, criterion referenced assessments, deep and surface learning, assessment criteria, continuous assessment, moderating assessments. The purposes of the discussion sessions for staff were to build awareness on the changing trends in higher education, equip educators with the necessary skills to enhance effectiveness in teaching and learning and to develop students who would attain success in academia and in their professional capacity. By implication, effective staff development and
training should lead to improving the dire throughput rates that seem to plague institutions of higher learning. Although the aim of the present study precludes throughput and success rates, it is important to determine to what extent educators in the Business Faculty have applied the knowledge of assessments that they have acquired in the formal workshop sessions to their respective disciplines. Dunn, Parry and Morgan (2002) claim that `there is a paucity of empirical research' on how academics link their field of knowledge to properly inform effective assessment.

**Rationale for the aspects of assessment addressed**

The first workshop held was on the institutional and faculty teaching and learning policies. The purpose of commencing training with the institutional teaching and learning policy was to familiarize staff with the learning objectives and to establish how the policy could be implemented in practice. In order to achieve the objectives staff members emphasized the need to become reflective practitioners and act as change agents where the culture of learning promotes independent learners. This ideal could only be achieved by changing and diversifying assessments that encourage independent learning and necessitate research, critical thinking and integration of information. The second workshop focused on how teaching and learning approaches impact on assessment practices. During this session sample assessments were critiqued to create awareness of the type of learning encouraged, as reflected by the assessment. The focus of this workshop was to distinguish between assessments that foster deep and surface learning and establishing a framework for criterion referenced assessment. According to Biggs (1999: 141) `how and what students learn depends to a major extent on how they think they will be assessed'.

With reference to deep and surface learning, Pennington and O’Neil (1994: 15) draw clear distinctions. According to them, deep learning is characterized by relating new ideas to existing knowledge, by reflection, critical thinking and by conceptual thinking within the discipline. In contrast, surface learning is about memorizing and reproducing information to meet assessment criteria without necessarily showing understanding of what was learnt. Cassidy (2006: 172) refers to surface learning as the intention to reproduce, unrelated memorizing and passive learning. Surface learning does not provide the depth of understanding required at tertiary level. Therefore, `the majority of learning resulting from a higher education should be deep by definition’ (Pennington & O’Neil, 1994: 16). Clearly, deep learning can only be assessed effectively if clear guidelines, that is outcomes and assessment criteria, are given. Hence the need to workshop these aspects of assessment in order to create a common understanding of standardized assessment practices.

**Aims**

Given the aforementioned micro and macro dimensions of assessments, the aims of the present study were to:

1) Provide a documented data-base of the variety of assessment practices adopted by academics in a university faculty;
2) Evaluate the impact of training on lecturers' assessment practices;
3) Identify constraining factors to the widespread utilisation of standardised assessment practices in a university Faculty; and
4) Propose strategies for improved teaching and learning practices in relation to lecturers' assessment of students' academic performance and the achievement of the learning outcomes of their courses.
Method

The current study employed the ex-post facto approach of descriptive research design. This approach was adopted because the data was only collected after the occurrence of the event (training workshops for the improvement of assessment practices). These workshops were in response to the changes in higher education as criterion referenced assessments became preferable to norm referenced assessments.

The population of this study comprised of all academic staff of one university faculty located on a specific campus. The entire population of 46 lecturers who previously attended training workshops for the improvement of assessment practices were targeted. The demographic composition of the population is described in subsequent sections.

Procedure and Method for Data Collection

Data were collected mostly quantitatively from participants through the use of the questionnaire. A five-section questionnaire was designed and administered to the participants in groups, especially when they held the meetings of their individual academic departments. The questionnaire was completed at the commencement of departmental meetings. This procedure was followed in order to ensure that response and return rate was high.

The questionnaire utilised for data collection contained the following five sections:

Section One captured the respondents' demographic information.
Section Two contained an exhaustive checklist of the current assessment practices that should be employed by the lecturers.
Respondents were requested to indicate as many practices, out of the 23 supplied, as were utilised in their assessment of students’ academic performance. This checklist was derived from Brown (2001: 11-14).

Section Three required the respondents to indicate the impact that training has had on how they actually, presently assess the academic performance of students. This section contained fourteen questionnaire items.

Section Four was open-ended in which respondents were expected to furnish a list of the factors which they considered to be constraining them from fully implementing standardised assessment practices.

Section Five was also open-ended and required respondents to suggest strategies for improving theirs’ and the institutional assessment practices.

The quantitative aspects of the instrument used for data collection yielded an acceptable level of reliability as indicated in the table below:

**Table 1: Instrument Reliability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliability Statistics</th>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach's Alpha</td>
<td>.659</td>
<td>.770</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data analysis and discussion of findings**

The data collected in this study was primarily analysed quantitatively through the use of the Statistical Package of the
Social Sciences (SPSS). A simple descriptive statistics was computed in most cases since the research was largely exploratory and descriptive. However, the fourth and fifth sections of the questionnaire, which were largely open-ended, were analysed qualitatively. The analyses reveal the following patterns:

**Participants’ Demographic Features**

About 56% of the participants in this study had been in employment at the university for over 7 years (See Figure 1). Of these, 61% were female and 39% male, while 44% possessed masters and doctoral degrees. 39% of the participants lectured an average class size of between 61 and 90 students at any given time (See Figure 2) and over 95% reported also being expected to fulfil additional administrative responsibilities within their employment environment. This reported high rate of involvement in administrative duties may have implications for the rigour with which students’ academic assessment exercises are executed. Over 56% of respondents are not involved in cross-campus assessments in this multi-campus institution. However, of those involved in this kind of assessments, 80% reported that their cross-campus assessment practices were harmonised. Furthermore, participants reported undertaking two to six assessments per semester for the courses or subjects that they taught.
Figure 1: Distribution of Participants’ Length of Employment (Tenure)

![Chart showing distribution of participants' length of employment]

Figure 2: Average Class Size Lectured by Respondents

![Chart showing average class size]

- 0 years
- 1-3 years
- 4-6 years
- 7-10 years
- 11-13 years
- 14 years and over
Variety of Assessment Practices

In order to provide a documented data base of the variety of assessment practices adopted by academics in this university's faculty, a frequency distribution was computed which yielded the following patterns as indicated in Table 2:

Table 2: Variety of Assessment Practices Adopted by Lecturers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Method/Practice</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
<th>Yes %</th>
<th>No %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Cases and open problems</td>
<td>Learners are given short case scenarios to analyse or problems to solve.</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Computer-based assessment</td>
<td>Computer-based software is used to assess multiple-choice questions.</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Direct observation</td>
<td>Used for individual or group assessment tasks that requires immediate feedback on performance.</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Essays</td>
<td>An assessment requiring long or short narrative exposition showing understanding, synthesis and evaluation of problems.</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Learning Logs / Diaries</td>
<td>Uses structured or unstructured self-reporting in Logs, Diaries or Journals) to enable students reflect on daily (or period) learning tasks.</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>87.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mini-practicals</td>
<td>A number of timed, mini-</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>43.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>practical exercises are given to students to undertake to measure analytical and interpretative skills.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Modified Essay Questions (MEQs)</td>
<td>Students are required to answer a series of questions based on a case study and one set of answers elicits further questions to encourage reflection and analysis</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Multiple Choice Questions</td>
<td>A variety of formats that cover a wide range of knowledge quickly.</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Orals.</td>
<td>A method that tests communication skills, understanding and the capacity to think quickly under pressure</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs)</td>
<td>Useful for quickly assessing practical and communication skills. Can also be used towards the end of a course to provide feedback and to test performance against outcomes.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Portfolios</td>
<td>Includes collection of assignments, reflection upon critical incidents, may be basis for orals and may be the basis for orals.</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Poster sessions</td>
<td>Tests the capacity to</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>present research findings and interpretations succinctly and attractively.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td><strong>Presentations</strong></td>
<td>Tests preparations, knowledge, capacity to structure information and communication skills.</td>
<td>71.7 28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td><strong>Problems</strong></td>
<td>Students are given simple or complex problems to solve in order to measure application, analysis and problem solving strategies.</td>
<td>63 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td><strong>Projects, Group Projects and Dissertations</strong></td>
<td>Samples a wide range of knowledge, practical, analytical and interpretative skills through the completion of a project.</td>
<td>56.3 43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td><strong>Questionnaires and Report Forms</strong></td>
<td>The use of semi or open-ended structured questionnaires to get information from students.</td>
<td>28.3 71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td><strong>Reflective Practical Assignments</strong></td>
<td>Measures capacity to analyse and evaluate experience in the light of theories and research evidence.</td>
<td>28.3 71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td><strong>Reports and Practicals</strong></td>
<td>Measures knowledge and experimental procedures, analysis and interpretation of results. Measure know how of practical skills but not the</td>
<td>23.9 76.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-assessed questions based on open learning (distances learning materials and computer-based approaches)</td>
<td>More of a method of leaning than of assessment to provide feedback and guidance to users.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Short answer questions</td>
<td>Requires learners to provide short answers to measure analysis, application of knowledge, problem-solving and evaluative skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Simulated interviews</td>
<td>Useful for assessing oral communication skills and for developing ways of giving and receiving feedback on performance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Single Essay examination</td>
<td>Students write a three-hour essay on a prepared topic to test capacity to draw on a wide range of knowledge and to identify recurrent themes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Work-based Assessment</td>
<td>Variety of methods including learning logs, portfolios, projects, structured reports from supervisors or mentors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above analysis, it appeared that the most used assessment practices employed by the participants in the study,
in order of percentages, were cases and open problems, multiple choice questions, presentations, short answer questions, mini-practicals, problems, and projects (including group projects and dissertations). It was found that essays, modified essay questions and orals were only used by half of the participants. Furthermore, the least utilised assessment practices were learning logs, objective structured clinical examinations, self-assessed questions, single essay examinations, poster sessions, simulated interviews and reports and practicals. The majority (14 out of 23) of the assessment practices were not being widely utilised by the participants in the present study.

The Impact of Training on Lecturers’ Assessment Practices

The study further sought to evaluate the impact that the training received had on lecturers’ actual assessment practices. The results obtained showed the following:

**Table 3: Impact of Training on Assessment Practices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Yes %</th>
<th>No %</th>
<th>Somewhat %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Have the workshops you attended changed the way that you teach and/or assess?</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you specify assessment criteria when setting assessments?</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do you indicate a range for mark allocation or assessment outcomes?</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you undertake negative assessments, i.e., learners lose marks for answering wrongly and not merely marked for the correct answers?</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Yes (%)</td>
<td>No (%)</td>
<td>Not Applicable (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Does your assessment focus on skills or application and knowledge expectations for the particular level of students you teach?</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Do you assess students across subjects, i.e., by drawing from materials that may have been covered by them in other subjects?</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Do you assess students’ knowledge across semesters within the same subject, i.e., by drawing from materials that may have been covered by them in other semesters?</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Do your assessments incorporate the basic critical cross-field outcomes?</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Are all assessments authentic, i.e., relating to real world experiences of the students?</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>45.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Do your assessments differentiate between ‘deep’ learning (i.e., requiring interpretation, analysis, synthesis and application) and ‘surface’ learning (i.e., requiring the display of mere knowledge)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Do you hold pre and post-assessment sessions to explain assessments?</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Are students encouraged to discuss marks and their performances with the lecturer?</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Do you use feedback to your assessments to inform subsequent teaching and learning practices?</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A critical point to observe from the table above is the fact that only 43.5% categorically indicated that the training they
received actually changed the way they presently assess students. However, responses to items 2, 3, and 5 overwhelmingly indicate that the focus of the workshops have made impact on the assessment practices of lecturers. These ‘new’ concepts in higher educational assessments in South Africa were, prior to these workshops, not necessarily required.

The table (see item No. 6) shows that 60.9% of assessments are integrated across the curriculum where transfer of knowledge and skills are assessed to determine how students interlink content from one learning domain to another. The final question sought to determine the frequency of assessments undertaken by the lecturers. Approximately half of the respondents use authentic assessments and differentiate between deep and surface learning (see item Nos. 9 & 10) which is particularly relevant for a University of Technology (such as the study site) concerned with vocational preparation of students. The challenge highlighted by this aspect of the result is that not enough academics are actively assessing students’ performance in this manner. The patterns revealed in items 12 and 13; on the other hand, reflect that lecturers acknowledge that the feedback from students on their assessment practices informs teaching and learning. This provides evidence that the majority of respondents reflect on feedback from students which in turn informs future teaching and assessment practices.

The results also showed that 17.4% assessed once a month, 26.1% assessed once a term, and 56.5% assessed once a semester. The fact that the majority indicated undertaking assessments once a semester may be attributed to the fact that respondents may have been referring to the final summative assessments and not necessarily the continuous, formative assessments.

Another point to highlight from the above data is that while all the participants indicated incorporating the basic critical cross-
field outcomes in their assessments at one time or another, a further examination showed that not all outcomes were measured by the lecturers in all their assessments. When asked which of the following basic critical cross-field outcomes they actually incorporated into their assessment practices, the results were as follows:

Table 4: Critical Cross-field Outcomes incorporated in Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fields</th>
<th>Percentage of times incorporated into assessments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Communicate effectively</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Demonstrate an understanding of the world as set of related systems</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Organise and manage oneself</td>
<td>67.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Identify and solve problems</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Work as a member of a team</td>
<td>67.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of the relationship between average class size taught by lecturers and their utilisation of the different assessment practices was computed. The Quality Chart indicates as follows:
The above chart shows that the variety of assessment practices adopted by lecturers increases as the smaller the average class size taught. This is indicative of the fact that academics are more inclined to experiment with different types of assessment practices if the class size is more manageable. The data reveals that a class size of between 30 and 60 students were the optimum for innovative assessment practices and the variety of assessments begin to decline thereafter.

**Constraining Factors to Assessment**

Based on the qualitative aspect of the study, the factors constraining lecturers from utilising standardised assessment practices were identified to fall under four thematic areas (student-related, systemic and lecturer-related). The participants indicated that the most constraining factors to their implementing standardised assessment practices, in no particular order, were:
(a) **Student-related issues**, that is, those arising from the students and how they approach assessment exercises. The respondents were of the opinion that the academic literacy proficiency of students affected their ability to cope with assessments. Students' limited world view and general knowledge did not always allow for critical thinking or to determine how micro issues relate to macro factors. The student numbers and class sizes were too large and there seemed to be a lack of preparation for assessment tasks.

(b) **Systemic issues**, that is, those largely related to the environment in which the assessment takes place, especially planning, resourcing and administration of assessments: Respondents reported that there was not always access to technology for large student group assessments and lack of administrative support. The large marking load of assessments and addition of administrative responsibilities to lecturers' workload impacted negatively on time allowed for evaluation, planning and improvement of teaching and learning. The lecturing and assessment periods were limited as a result of short semesters, with too many assessments being crammed into one semester.

(c) **Lecturer-related issues**, that is, those dealing with the assessors themselves. Although there are subject guides with faculty dates for assessment, poor planning, adherence to schedules and poor time management by both lecturers and students proved to be problematic. Respondents claimed that the time constraints as a result of semester courses and improper planning did not always allow for creativity and innovation in teaching and assessment practices. In addition, the social conditions external to the learning environment that impact on student performance should be factored into assessment reviews.
Conclusion

Brown (2001: 1) emphasised the need to align assessments with other features of a course and cautioned against the common error of using particular assessment practices meant for one set of purposes and then assuming that the results would be suitable for other purposes. This study has shown that the majority of available assessment practices are not being used by lecturers. This may be an indication that most lecturers are not familiar with these practices. The limited number of types of assessments being used means that there are many that could be beneficial, but that are not currently being considered. This may be attributed to the notion that certain assessment methods are more relevant to formative than summative assessments (Heywood, 2000: 21).

The fact that the marking of assessments is time-consuming means that respondents would be less inclined to use the more time-consuming assessment methods. As a means of alleviating the marking volumes, Brown (2001: 19) suggests it may be useful to provide postgraduate students with experience in appraising students’ assignments and in providing feedback for the more time-consuming assessment exercises. The findings reveal that the training that was given to lecturers in this study site did not quite achieve the desired result as it did not have any meaningful impact on their assessment practices. Interestingly, however, the identified systemic issues, especially, class size taught by lecturers, appear to weigh heavily on and affect the assessment practices of lecturers.

Given the findings and discussion above, if staff development programmes and assessment practices are meant to be more meaningful, communities of learning could be created to share data and innovations on assessment practices; additional training of academics in tertiary institutions would be needed to expose them to the wide variety of assessments available and
the contexts of their use; engage in fewer assessments concerned with deep learning rather than more surface learning assessments; improve the infrastructure of assessments and resources to ensure that lecturers apply technological developments in assessment practices and adopt staff development as core to the culture of improving teaching and learning practice.

While there is no consensus on what should constitute best practice in the assessment of learning outcomes in tertiary education in South Africa, the present analysis indicates some factors to be considered by policy-makers and educational administrators in determining and predicting effectiveness of future assessment practices of students’ academic performance.

References


Passionate detachment:
Journalism education in South Africa and the discourse of the African Renaissance

Gilbert Motsaathebe

Abstract

The 21st century has often been hailed as the ‘African century’ (Ban, 2008; Makgoba, 1999; Mbeki, 1999; O'Reilly, 1998; Zoellick, 2009). This pronouncement together with the parallel call for the African Renaissance are thereby openly challenging many institutions to revisit their epistemological preferences and pedagogical aims with a view to align themselves with this crucial phase in the history of Africa. In the process, expressions such as ‘de-westernisation’, ‘Africanisation’, ‘indigenisation’ and ‘domestication’ have become buzz-words. This article is situated within those embryonic debates on the Africanisation of the curricula. The article explores the current thinking on journalism education and practice in the country with a view to furthering our understanding of journalism agility required for the ‘African century’. The article also explores opportunities and possible limitations of situating journalism education and practice within the discourse of the African Renaissance. The key data for the research that forms the basis of this article was collected through key-informant interviews and an open-ended questionnaire from an information-rich sample consisting of journalists, journalism educators and senior journalism students. The article concludes that while the merits of the trend of
globalisation are clear, the need to challenge the present situation regarding journalism education and practice which, in the case of South Africa, is still dominated by Anglo-American discourse, is even more compelling.

Introduction

As in many parts of the world, education and training are being re-defined in South Africa. Higher education has been at the forefront of these reforms which include restructuring and re-curriculation. This revamp was stimulated by the realisation that the country needed to provide university education that is more suited to the unique challenges confronting the country and the continent.

The relentless pressure to embrace the much-heralded African Renaissance (see definition under the section on ontological conceptualisation) has also prompted many African countries to promote education in driving this significant era of fortified African identity, development and excellence, following the onslaughts of colonialism and apartheid (in the case of South Africa). This change is inspired by the need to bring the system more in sync with the African Renaissance ideal which promotes the need to assimilate much of the indigenous knowledge system previously undermined by colonialism and apartheid. Journalism education is not left behind, as evidenced by many debates, symposia and conferences on Africanising the curriculum such as the 2008 South African Broadcasting Corporation 2008 seminar in Cape Town, with specific focus on Media and the African Renaissance; the Journalism department at the University of Stellenbosch’s 2009 conference entitled “Africanising the curriculum; and a range of papers presented at the 2010 World Journalism Education Congress hosted by Rhodes University in Grahamstown.
However, in spite of these efforts, journalism education in South Africa is still being seen as largely out of sync with Africa and South Africa in particular and its people due to much of Western discourse underpinning much of journalism education and practice (see Ochilo, 1997; Fourie, 2004; Mogekwu, 2004; De Gouveia, 2005; Banda et al, 2007; Banda, 2008). This implies that journalism education and practice does not account for what Skjerdal (2009) refer to as journalism “particulars” (cultural and local context) which needs to be balanced with “universals” (fundamental generic values). The research on which this article is based explored the current thinking on journalism education and practice in South Africa with a view to gaining an understanding of which particular skills, if any, are perceived to be appropriate for journalism practice in this era of the renaissance of Africa also called the African century.

The impetus of this research

The research was prompted by a discussion with media practitioners during an in-service training visit by myself. During these meetings industry representatives and media practitioners spoke openly about their expectation regarding journalism students from institutions of higher learning, some referring to the next generation of journalists to take journalism in the 21st century to the next level. They talked about the need for “a new generation of students who will take journalism to a new level.” The significance of this article therefore is to broaden our knowledge regarding skills deemed relevant for journalism practice in the 21st century by the media industry. A clear understanding of the industry requirements, attitudes and expectations could inform curriculum reviews, and teaching and learning approaches. This research is also crucial in the light of the fact that it was conducted almost immediately after the merger of higher institutions in South Africa aimed at bolstering teaching and learning.
Popular in the many discussions with colleagues, were notions of de-westernisation, Africanisation, indigenisation, domestication of the curriculum. The first section of this article will look at the educational landscape in South Africa and the emerging debates on the Africanisation of the curricula and try to point to possible tensions between scholars and practitioners. Lastly, this article will also attempt to point to opportunities or possible limitations of aligning journalism education within the African Renaissance paradigm.

As a preliminary account of a much longer, elaborate and broader study, this article focuses only in the Western Cape province of South Africa.

**Recent development in the education landscape in South Africa**

At the official end of apartheid South Africa had over 35 universities and technikons (similar to what they call polytechnics in the UK and Germany). However these institutions were the brainchild of the apartheid system which designed differential educational infrastructures for blacks and whites, based on a discriminatory practice of apartheid described by French Philosopher Jacques Derrida as “the unique appellation for the ultimate racism in the world” (1985, p. 291). There were amongst these universities and technikons those which were referred to as historically black institutions and white institutions with the latter being in the early days, more advanced in terms of resources and quality of education. From 2005 all the universities and technikons were restructured to enhance quality and make sure that they cater for the educational needs of the country and to offer a range of study and research options for both local and international students; many of the historically black and white institutions were combined. The merger served to capacitate and enhance quality and technikons had to apply and meet certain requirements for a full university status. Those technikons were then renamed
universities of technology, while those former universities that merged with some technikons were called comprehensive universities. The latter institutions were to provide a wide range of qualifications, including those that would normally not be offered by universities or universities of technology. Thus, following this restructuring process, the country ended up with 23 public institutions of higher learning divided into three types of universities, namely a) universities, b) comprehensive universities and c) universities of technology, each with specific priority. Further, as part of the broader transformation, many institutions also sought to position themselves with the embryonic discourse of the African Renaissance, by challenging myths and prejudices about Africa and its history and acknowledging knowledge systems indigenous to Africa.

CPUT, which represents the setting of this article, came into being as result of the merger between the former Cape Technikon and Peninsula Technikon and is currently the largest university in the Western Cape in terms of the number of students. The journalism department at this institution could be said to be operating within the ambit of train-for-the-employer situation where emphasize is on imparting critical core skills such as writing and operating equipments in order to match the exact skills required by the projected immediate employer. As with many universities of technologies which are still steering their way cautiously to assimilate the new role, after converting from technikons to universities, there is a strong linkage with the industry. Students in the department of Journalism at CPUT are required to complete 12 months of supervised experiential learning and as such they go for internships in the industry to consolidate what they learn in class. Such an experiential learning is considered crucial for effective learning and mastering of skills and competencies. However one of the major shortcomings of these internships is its inability to provide for a holistic experience in all streams of journalism i.e. a student placed in a newspaper house will miss the opportunity to
consolidate what he learned about TV or Radio and vice-versa. In general the journalism curriculum at CPUT revolves very close to the basic requirements for the Unesco model curricula for Journalism Education (2010) with the only exception being that at the moment the journalism qualification offered by CPUT doesn’t give students an option of a second major in other fields.

**Ontological conceptualisation**

The African Renaissance can be understood as Africa’s rebirth from colonialism which interrupted Africa’s normal progression and stripped Africans from their human dignity, portrayed them as backward while looting the continent’s resources to advance the colonialists. Nabudere (2006) sees the call for an African renaissance as “a call for a continued African resistance to Western domination and exploitation of Africans in the process of Africa restating its original message and its own way that was at the same time universal (p. 13). Terminologies such as de-westernisation, Africanisation, indigenisation and domestication become central concept in the African Renaissance debates.

**Africanization**: Literally speaking Africanisation implies “to make African. According to Mangu (2006, p. 157) Africanisation (of education)“goes far beyond a simple adaptation to include transformation and innovation in the sense that the curricula should respond to the needs of the people and help them in their fight against underdevelopment, poverty, wars, diseases, unemployment, illiteracy and a better life, African Renaissance and progress.” Horsthemke (2004, p. 571) puts it this way:

Africanisation is generally seen to signal a (renewed) focus on Africa, on reclamation of what has been taken from Africa, and, as such, it forms part of post-colonialist, anti-racist discourse. With regard to knowledge, it
comprises a focus on indigenous African knowledge and concerns simultaneously “legitimation” and “protection from exploitation” of this knowledge. With regard to education, the focus is on Africanisation of institutions, curricula, syllabi and criteria for excellence (in research, performance, etc.).

To understand Horsthemke’s point above it is important to note that during colonialism the western system of knowledge was privileged over the African system, starting with the destruction of Africa’s oldest universities such as Sankore at Timbuktu in Mali. Often the African knowledge was reproduced as western discovery to deny African claims to knowledge and civilisation. It is this legitimisation and exploitation that Horsthemke refers to above. However a reclamation of Africa’s indigenous knowledge system does not mean an erosion of Western knowledge system and thus as Makgoba puts it, “Africanisation is not about expelling Europeans and their cultures, but about affirming African culture and their identity in a world community (Makgoba, 1997, p. 199). It is a necessary process in the course of African renaissance, “If we are to draw our inspiration and materials for our learning from real life situations of the African people, especially in the rural areas, we have to adopt those pedagogical methods and techniques that inform their philosophy of life, their worldview and their lived experiences and practice.”

The term de-westernization denotes attempts to disentangle Africa from the colonial legacy introduced by Western nations during colonialism. Like Africanisation, de-westernization is a necessary process for the renaissance of Africa. This is the sort of thing that academics such as Banda et al (2007, p. 157) refer to when they say “Journalism education in Southern Africa must contend with defining a new academic identity for itself, extricating itself from dependency on Western oriented models of journalism education and training.” De-westernization is often
used interchangeably with localisation and Africanisation, in the case of the African context. In the context of Africa, the westernisation becomes important because colonialism discredited African language, culture and way of life sought to westernises Africans by introducing their culture and languages in Africa. The above conundrum stems from efforts to document, theorise and finally contain what African scholars such as Nnam (2007) refer to as ‘Disafricanisation’. The concept disafricanisation describes “a process through which contemporary Africans chose, to the dismay of their ancestors, Western institutions, values, and ways of life over, and above, African culture” (Nnam, 2007, p. 53). For Nnam (2007, p. 52), “There have been many theories as to why ‘reasonable Africans engaged in such a disgraceful action, however, the one that stands out the most is that when a rumour, gossip, or even a false statement is spread about an individual or a group of people for a very long time, even they begin to believe it.” Colonialism used all mechanisms at its disposal such as the media and other public institutions to discredit the colonised and spread the hegemony of the colonisers.

Indiginisation refers to resuscitation, reintroduction or rediscovery of culture, knowledge, languages, values, resources and history of indigenous people, African in this instance. All these were displaced during colonialism as mentioned elsewhere in this article Domestication explains “the process of making an imported resource more relevant and appropriate for the African situation” (Osei, 1991, p. 7). What is clear about the concepts described above is that they all express the apprehensions to disentangle Africa from over-reliance on canons developed elsewhere.
A brief critical inspection of divergent views on Journalism education and practice

In line with efforts to disentangle Africa from the Western discourse underpinning much of journalism education, current debates on journalism training and issues of skills development focus on the quality and relevance of journalism education. Generally scholars and practitioners raise two critical issues, namely, (1) that of journalism training and practice being not (South) African enough to respond adequately to its local context; and (2) questions of how journalism students should be prepared for work in journalism in Africa. With regard to the former, there are those who question much of the foreign influence, particularly the Western influence, currently underlying much of African journalism (Fourie, 2004; Banda et al., 2007; Mogekwu, 2004). Foreign influence could be seen in the light of colonialism and imperialism where colonisers and other dominant nations imposed their culture and exerted their influence on weaker nations through all mechanisms and institutions available to them, which continue to serve as hegemonic devices long after the colonisers have left. With regard to the second question mentioned above, some believe that journalism schools should thoroughly give students all the hard skills (skills that students learn through practice to perform specific duties), while others think that such skills can further be developed in the industry, as evidenced by the 2005 colloquium on journalism education convened at Rhodes University. Instead of harmonizing all the writers into a critique of Western journalism practices and celebration of African values in journalism, this article tries to point rather to areas of contestation between the authors. African values include concepts such as ubuntu which in the context of journalism encourages reporting with respect, agility and calls for empathetic understanding so that people reported in the news are not merely seen as commodities to be packaged and sold to the public as stories. This view is underscored by veteran
journalist Joe Thloloe (2008): “[T]he journalism that starts from the foundation of ubuntu would go a long way towards bringing understanding to readers of newspapers and magazines, listeners of radio and viewers of television programmes.” Thus, instead of news being “seen through western values and interpretation” as pointed out by Mogekwu (2004), news will be seen more as an empowering tool that should benefit the poor and contribute to the developmental agenda of African countries. This implies that the newsworthiness of the story will then be decided, for example through the question, what do I contribute to society by this story? Rather than through the symptomatic question, Is the story newsworthy? However the incorporation of ubuntu raises other concerns. For instance Botha and De Beer (2006) observe that, “it raises perplexing questions of how educators working from a libertarian, Western background – both in terms of culture and newsroom practice – will manage to align the philosophies of African ubuntu and Western notions of ‘objectivity’ let alone the individualistic drive for personal freedom and attainment, as well as a market-driven economy vis-à-vis the collective nature of ubuntu” (p.3).

Fourie (2004) recommends that South African journalism studies should focus on the development of what he calls an “African-based epistemology.” Epistemology entails how knowledge is constructed and acquired, and thus constructing knowledge within an African perspective would require one to deploy lenses innate to Africa as opposed to those developed elsewhere as is currently the case. Fourie's point resonates with many scholars who argue that journalism institutions in Africa and South Africa in particular have not made enough attempts to Africanise their curricula.

South Africa’s situation as far as the journalism curricula are concerned is not unique. Similar concerns are being raised elsewhere in Africa. In his study on The growth and development of Africa media studies, Salawu poses a hard
question: “If the media are American, would it still be logical to talk about African Media?” (2009, p. 81). Mogweku (2004, p. 7) puts it candidly: “[W]e are so concerned with grooming our students to see and identify newsworthiness along the same lines as the New York Times reporter or the Washington Post correspondent. News values are western, news structure is western, and news interpretation is western.” Banda concurs: “[A]frican journalism education reflects, in almost every conceivable way, Western forms of journalism training and education” (2008, p. 50). This concern is also echoed by De Gouveia (2005, p. 9) who proceed by cautioning that “African media do not need to closely resemble BBC or CNN to be good”. This comment is in line with Mogweku’s concern that African journalists ignore poignant African values in their news reportage, which could address some of the weakness especially on the question of ethics.

In an article on Communication and Journalism Curricula in Africa, Ochilo (1997, p. 54) also questions the reliance of journalism curricula on the foreign models: “[M]any African scholars argue that this kind of curricular orientation is not based on an African philosophy and therefore, fails to take into account the continent’s cultural diversity, the environment, political and social developments.” Explaining why journalism in Africa was heavily influenced by the American model when in fact the continent was mostly colonised by Britain, Salawu, says: “This was because the Europeans who were the colonial masters had no clear academic model of journalism education” (2005, p. 82).

The road ahead

De Gouveia (2005, p. 8) argues that, “A robust and independent Africa-wise media which can project an indigenous understanding of Africa both to its own people and to others beyond the continent will aid the development of a
more stable, prosperous and confident Africa." However, the critical question here is, “To what extent would industry in South Africa be open to a change in journalistic values?” This is a crucial question more especially in light of the financial imperatives dictating much of journalistic practice today. With regard to that question Veteran journalist and former academic Graeme Addison (2003) is of the opinion that media operations such as newspapers must be run by businessmen instead of journalists: “Running a newspaper requires much more than journalistic skills. In order to achieve the success of a newspaper, you must think like a businessman, not a journalist.” Addison’s view remains hotly contested in media circle by those who think that leaving media operations in the hands of business entrepreneurs will compromise fundamental journalistic values.

Also the type of media as suggested by De Gouveia cited above may not be possible if institutions of higher learning do not produce graduates with well-versed indigenous understanding of Africa and appreciation of African history. In echoing the preceding sentiments, Mugo (1999, p. 228.) suggests that “education [in Africa] should have a cultural component, which specifically draws upon African indigenous knowledge and culture”. Mugo is not the only one who believes that education can be an enriching means if it takes into account the indigenous ways of knowing. Megwa (2002, p. 23), advises that tertiary institutions need “to produce journalists who are well equipped to understand and explain the dynamics and complexities of the change that has taken place and continues to take place in the [given] country”. African scholars Odora-Hoppers, Moja & Mda (1999) suggest the following fundamental points which they say should underpin the role of higher education in devising the appropriate curricula based on African knowledge systems: “to increase a body of African knowledge systems (both contemporary and indigenous) and a directory of experts in African indigenous knowledge systems; to increase core courses on the African Renaissance perspectives
in all faculties, which should lead to the development of guidelines towards an African-centred teaching methodology; and to develop mentorship programmes within the framework of the philosophy of ubuntu and create programmes for its application in practice” (p. 236)

Tomaselli (2003, p. 438) proposes a course with a strong cultural connotation which he says will, among others, offer students “a conceptual link between ‘communication/s studies’ and ‘culture’ in terms of their own subjectivities, personal/communal and frames of reference in both making and interpreting media messages.” If we are to agree that the majority of educators have been oriented within a European or American paradigm as Botha and De Beer (2006) point out, then such a course is crucial. According to Makgoba (2007, p. 8), who has been vocal in his support for the African Renaissance “[t]he central issue for our universities today is an institutional transformation in higher education that will provide for the production of knowledge that recognises the African condition as historical and defines its key task as one of coming to grips with it critically”. Nonetheless, some values are fundamental to journalism and therefore universally applicable to this context. Journalism educator with wide experience in Africa Terje Skjerdal (2009, p. 30) contends that values transcend journalism across culture, but there are those “social political conditions that define journalistic practices within the particular cultural spheres”. It is these cultural and socio-political conditions and the way that they could partake in shaping journalism as practised in Africa, which this article explores. What is clear from above discussions is that the curricula at most universities tend to be more synchronous with foreign countries, particularly European and Western countries and more out of sync with their local context and the specific cultural spheres that Skjerdal refers to. Inevitably, as Botha and De Beer (2006, p.3) find, such a situation does not allow for “the innate spirituality of Africa’s various culture and ethics”. Previously this kind of curriculum has simply been endorsed in many of our institutions without much
critical examination of its relevance to Africa. For this reasons journalism educators such as Wasserman cautions that “journalism education should not be about the transmission of knowledge or skills from one generation to another, in order to create a new generation journalists to follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before” (2005, p. 16).

**Methodology**

**Study participants**

In line with the exploratory nature of this research, the design adopted was that of an information-rich case study, since the idea was to solicit views from journalists, journalism educators and students. By deploying these empirical efforts, the study approaches this question from a more realistic perspective as most previous studies are hardly based on empirical data.

Participants on the study included news personnel, from South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), E.TV, the People’s Post, Cape Times, Cape Argues, Die Burger, educators from departments of journalism and media studies at the universities of Cape Town (UCT) and Stellenbosch (US) and two batches of senior students from Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), consisting of those who completed their national diploma and were entry-level journalists at the time the data was collected and those who were in their last semester of their third year and had just returned from their in-service training.

**Instruments and sampling**

The first category of data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire. The first section of the questionnaire requested the basic information of the respondents regarding their organisation, the organisation’s main area of work and
their occupation and level. These were regarded as important in having an influence on the responses given and views expressed. For instance, it was assumed that views expressed by TV journalists might be different to those expressed by those working as radio journalists inasmuch as views expressed by student journalists can be different from those expressed by senior journalists.

The second part of the questionnaire solicited views about students with respondents being also asked to describe their ideal journalism students. Describing the ideal helped to paint a clear picture of the model student that most people in the industry would like to see graduating from teaching institutions offering journalism. The third part solicited views on curriculum content, where respondents were asked, among others, if there were any course or module that they would like to see taught in journalism schools. The fourth part probed perceptions of the industry. Participants were asked if they saw the industry playing any specific role in helping educational institutions prepare students, given time pressure and limited resources. They were also asked to indicate their opinion as to what extent hard skills (skills that students learn through practice to perform specific duties) should form part of the curricula. The final part solicited views on African vs. Western pedagogies. Here respondents had to state their opinion regarding the view that journalism schools across South Africa were producing replicas of American journalists.

With regards to sampling, the researcher made use of convenience sampling since the research was conducted in Cape Town and all participants were based in Cape Town at the time. Information-oriented sampling, which is renowned for yielding a richer and deeper level of understanding of the phenomenon, was chosen for this study rather than random sampling, which emphasises representatively. In this case the sample chosen was the one that was likely to yield information that would clarify the deeper causes of the problem.
Results

Questionnaire responses

The respondents in the study represented a fair spread of professionals working in various media organisations. Others worked in teaching institutions and communication or public relations divisions of various companies and government.

Figure 1 below details the profile of respondents who participated in the study.

![Profile of participants](image)

**Figure 1**: Profile of participants

**Views about an ideal journalism student (in the African journalism context):**

In the context of the study the ‘ideal’ implied a student that exemplifies what a typical journalism student ought to be in terms of the skills and personality traits he/she exhibits. For the sample population, an ideal journalism student should
possess a combination of the following qualities grouped in order of their relatedness to each other:

- Being immune to criticism
- Perseverance
- Writing skills and general knowledge
- Initiative
- Being knowledgeable about Africa/the African worldview
- A good grasp of grammar
- A keen interest in news and current affairs
- Innate curiosity
- Accuracy
- Ability to think on their feet
- Resourcefulness

**Limitation of resources and time pressure:** When asked if they saw industry playing any significant role in view of the fact that educational institutions often have limited resources to prepare students thoroughly for the workplace, all of the respondents said the industry can play an important role. The responses as to the specific roles industry can play ranged from an array of suggestions such as giving students skills they missed in class to simply making the industry more accessible to students.

**Whether African journalists imitate their foreign (Anglo/Western) counterparts:** Regarding the perception that journalism schools across the African continent were producing replicas of American journalists, a large number of respondents (77%) felt that there was an indication that journalists in South Africa resembled their American counterparts. Thirteen percent of the respondents disagreed with the foregoing while 10% were more cautious with their answer. One respondent commented: “We take what is good from them and leave the bad things.”
Anxiety about the African pedagogy vs. the Western pedagogy: the question drew two different responses. The first was that Western education is often regarded as a yardstick of excellence, and as such there is nothing wrong with imitating best practice. The second response was that this was bound to happen because most of the people in both the industry and education get their training from abroad. There seemed to be an indication that all respondents feel that the African journalism education curriculum should ideally embrace African values and ways of knowing to be distinctively African. The reasons for or against this question can be found in the participants’ responses when asked to name some of the courses or modules that they thought should be taught in journalism schools as indicated below.

Subjects/modules: When asked if there were any subjects or modules that they would like to see taught in journalism schools, 90% of respondents wanted to see more courses added or introduced. Courses mentioned included economics, financial journalism, African history, South African English literature (“to stimulate the mind” as one of the respondents put it), magazine journalism, the Internet, and shorthand. One respondent suggested “a course in transformation” - an interesting find which can be viewed against the transformation process that has been taking place in South Africa both within academe and overall. The transformation which began after the 1994 democratic elections that ended apartheid was meant to transform public and private institutions which had been characterised by discriminatory and unfair practices.

Industry-oriented education: As to whether universities should educate for the industry (specifically prepare the students for the job in the industry) or merely produce a well-versed student who is able to adapt; only 16% were of the opinion that universities should educate for the industry. Eighteen
percent said universities should do a bit of both while 66% said they should produce well-versed students, who could adapt to the industry. The latter felt that well-versed students would be able to adjust in the work environment promptly, irrespective of their working environment. This seems to resonate with the arguments of many academics mentioned in the literature review.

**Core skills:** Sixty percent of the respondents agreed that core skills should form only small part of the curricula, 30% of the respondents took no particular position, while only 10% disagreed.

**In-service training:** When asked to rate their in-service training, a large number of students (B-Tech) who participated in the study indicated that they had had a good in-service training overall although they differed in the intensity of their responses. Twenty percent of the students said they had had excellent in-service training; the majority (63%) indicated that it was good; while 10% said it was fair; and 7% rated it as poor. Overall it can be concluded that the quality of the in-service training South African students receive is good.

**Interviews**

In order to gain more insights to the questions raised on the questionnaire, interviews of journalism educators and industry professionals were used. Interviewees (telephonic) were from the University of Cape Town, the University of Stellenbosch and media organisations such as the SABC, ETV, Kfm and the People’s Post. The interview guide included four questions to shed light on the current thinking regarding journalism education and practice in South Africa.
1. Some people believe that hard-skills should form only small part of the curricula, while others believe that universities should produce a well-versed student who is able to adapt in any environment instead of specifically preparing students for the job in the industry. What is your take on that?

2. Recently concepts such as “De-Westernisation” and “Africanisation” Indiginisations…localization…of the curricula have gained currency following debates regarding the African Renaissance. What is your view regarding the viability of aligning journalism education and practice within the discourse of the African Renaissance?

3. Journalism schools across the African continent are often criticized for producing what some people perceive as “copy cats of American journalists”. What is your view regarding this perception?

4. What is your view regarding the media tribunal currently being proposed in South Africa?

Responses to the first question revealed that both practitioners and academics were divided as to how the students should be prepared or what kind of curriculum was appropriate in terms of balance between theory and practice. But in general all of those interviewed felt that there should be a mixture of both theory and practice, and this was illustrated by statements such as these:

   a) I think if it is a programme in which beginner journalist must be educated, the programme must consist of both practical component and analytical component…otherwise one cannot say you are preparing the beginner journalist for the industry if it is only theory;

   b) I think that one needs a mix of broad academic background and skills;

   c) Conceptual frameworks need to be examined and taught for intellectual depth.
One interviewee felt that practical skills were more important or that, “the more practical’s the better,” as she puts it while another was adamant that the theoretical aspect was more important and that it should form the bulk of the curriculum. It seems practitioners and academics on various levels are also divided with regard to views about aligning journalism within the discourse of the African Renaissance. For instance one interview responded as follows: “This sounds very Mbeki-era to me. Who is still talking of the African Renaissance? Surely the concern should be with the re-naissance of Afrikaner nationalism media controls in ANC clothing.”

Two respondents thought it was appropriate to relook at the curricula and one of the latter had this to say: “We need to go back to the drawing board and critically examine what we teach so that the knowledge produced is relevant.”

On the question of whether journalism education and practice in South Africa is often criticized for being too American, four of the respondents concurred but reiterated that there should be more critical examination as to what is relevant as opposed to a narrow approach of simply glorifying African values while being defiant of anything considered as foreign, irrespective of its virtues. This is how one of the interviewees responded:

I think it shouldn’t be a case of just being in anti-American mindset and just say that we should not follow these principles because they are American...we should ask ourselves...are they valid and if they are valid, why they are valid for what purposes and how can maybe change them to be more valid for purposes of the African continent to tell the African stories in a way that won’t be a stigmatization of Africa or stereotyping of Africa.
One respondent said he didn’t take such criticism seriously, adding that there will always be good and bad journalism. All the interviewees were opposed to the media tribunal. In spite of their opposition against the tribunal two of the interviewees indicated that there were problems with the current self-regulatory mechanism of the media. One of these respondents said there was a need to improve the current system.

Discussion

The responses reveal that academe and industry hold different views about what they want from students, i.e. some within both academe and practice prefer hard skills, others prefer practical skills, while others advocate for a mixture of both. When educators are asked about the role that industry could play, they typically refer to limited resources at their disposal in terms of keeping up to speed with latest and industry standard technology. In spite of some of these limitations, they all feel that the industry could play an important role and this view came from both sides namely the industry representatives and educators. When asked about the kind of support that the industry could provide, most said industry could make available more spaces for students, for example in the form of internships, job shadowing or cadet programmes, and by availing themselves as guest lecturers, when needed.

Juxtaposed against students’ perceptions of the industry, it seems the industry plays a pivotal role in preparing the students. The following are some of the responses provided by students when asked about their industry experience: a) I was told to forget everything I had learnt at tech, and taught from scratch, how to use the operating system and how to write a good news story, b) In the industry the students have more time to learn in a real newsroom environment, c) I was exposed to all aspects of news reporting more realistically as well as the mechanics of a news department, d) I was given an opportunity to put into
practice what I had learned at school, e) I got exposure to different fields of communication such as PR and advertising. The response here was interesting. It indicates that the industry is regarded as a major role player in the education and training of students. Given this, one can say it is a win-win solution because the more the industry becomes involved, the more likely that they will get ‘suitable’ graduates they need, although one must acknowledge that the industry is also often overstretched in terms of resources.

The question whether African journalists imitate their foreign counterparts elicited interesting responses from educators, students and media practitioners such as the following statements: a) We tend to look at western journalism as paragon of excellence; b) America is seen as be all and end all; there is at the moment little or no emphasis on African culture, norms and tradition; c) world-over most trends are adopted from America; they are the best, why not learn from them?; d) I think the problem is that the media is more powerful in America than in African countries, but we can take what is good from them; e) Western education is often regarded as a yardstick of excellence, and as such there is nothing wrong in imitating best practice. One respondent said that applying Western values and ways leads to bias in reporting on Africa. Various respondents emphasised the need for an African approach': a) I think journalists in Africa journalists should adopt their own approach of reporting, b) I feel that we must stop imitating others. For instance, if you are a young journalist you ought to respect elders, you should say ‘Tata’ Mbeki, not just Mbeki.’ One student said he sees nothing wrong: “they are the best, why not learn from them?”

Views about the ideal students were interesting with some respondents mentioning that the African worldview was an ideal attribute for such journalists. Some respondents mentioned
the African worldview as an ideal attribute for such journalists. There is a need to find a unique, unambiguous approach for African journalism that doesn’t necessarily emphasise the Western ethos at the expense of African values and indigenous knowledge systems. This affirms the importance of current debates about the African pedagogy in journalism education and practice. On the other hand, it seems that the attributes for an ideal journalism student as mentioned by the respondents are generally regarded as indispensable traits for ideal journalists, and since virtually all these attributes can easily be developed on the job, a hard question arises: “Is tertiary education relevant to journalists or is it all about practice, practice and more practice?” as veteran journalist Ryland Fisher (See Fisher, 2005, p. 5.) puts it.

The findings resonate with the literature. With regard to the proposed media tribunal the respondents felt that any effort at stifling media freedom were premature. Some acknowledged that there were problems but felt that the tribunal was not the best way forward. They felt that the current self-regulatory mechanism in the form of press ombudsman for instance must rather be strengthened. This finding is consistent with mass communication literature which suggests that “when media freedom is weakened, democracy also takes a dive” (Motsaathebe, 2004, p. 7).

In general the findings reveals that journalism educators are receptive to interrogating what they teach and the way they teach, as one of the educators interviewed professor Lizette Rabe of the University of Stellenbosch puts it, “I think African institutions should revisit their curricular in terms of content. Are we just following blindly a western type of journalism or can we re-imagine journalism? I don’t mean that we should promote sunshine journalism in terms of the African continent, but should we just follow western paradigms of journalism practice or can we re-invent journalism for our purposes instead of restating
western news values we could incorporate *ubuntu* in news values and I think it must be part of the current discourse on journalism education." The most imposing piece of information during these interviews was that it is clear that there is a need for the type of journalism that account for a balance between what Skjerdal (2009) refer to as journalism “particulars” (cultural and local context) and “universals” (fundamental universal values). The interviews with these educators and media practitioners demonstrate their insight, frustrations, needs and aspirations in the transforming media and educational system.

**Conclusion**

This research is not inclined to make strong claims about the application of its findings to curriculum reviews especially due to the fact that it was limited to the Western Cape in terms of its sample, nonetheless it reveals divergent views on journalism education and practice in South Africa, which all point to the need to rethink journalism education and practice. The findings demonstrate a more complex situation regarding journalism education and practice. It indicates that tension exists in terms of what is perceived as the best ways to prepare students, i.e., what may be perceived by one industry or institution as the best way to prepare a journalist may be perceived by another as the worst. For instance some feel that students need more practical work others feel that they need more theory and others take a middle ground stance of balancing theory and practising. The question of the type of curricula that accounts for what may be referred to as an “Africanised” curricular also seems problematic as such curriculum could in some instances be viewed as an erosion of fundamental journalistic values. However all journalism educators interviewed were receptive to interrogating what they teach and the way they do it, and feel that the curricula need to incorporate some of the fundamental African values such as ubuntu. All the respondents in this study feel that the media tribunal as being proposed by the ruling
party, the African National Congress, is undesirable. Future studies could focus on what exactly the Africanised curricular could look like.

References


communication: Re-examining journalism education content in Africa as a viable strategy.

Http://academic.sun.ac.za/journalism/papers/mogekwu.doc
(Accessed 25 April 2008)


Notes

1 The 2005 Colloquium on journalism training in South Africa since 1994 was convened by the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University and the papers presented were published on a special edition titled *Teaching South African journalists 1994-2014*. Other papers were subsequently published in *Equid Novi: South African Journal for Journalism Research*. 
Living and learning in tertiary institutions settings: A comprehensive approach

Guy-Roger Mihindou

Abstract

There is a need for a more comprehensive approach to students’ living and learning development in institutions of higher learning. This paper has the assumption that the creation of environments that ensure excellence in students’ achievement must be informed by a meticulous and well balanced mechanism of learning. It includes dwelling, culture of hard work, spirituality, identity and many more aspects. This paper argues that “Learning Reconsidered” as an academic movement in favour of a holistic approach to student learning development, can be useful in African settings. Considering the call, for higher education to provide a practical and liberal education that would prepare students for life, work, and civic participation, learning reconsidered is needed more than ever.

Mullendore (2006: 65) argues that what is different or specific with Learning Reconsidered is that it has put academic learning and student development processes together in a format that requires all the resources of the academy to function together in an integrated manner on behalf of students.

The ultimate goal is to propose positives changes within institutions of higher learning, by becoming a transformative learning community. The implementation of positive changes
therefore, requires time, energy, resources, patience and tenacity.

**Introduction**

My observations and discussions with first year students living on campuses, has prompted the question: What is essential in Education? For some it might constitute the hidden treasure that everyone ought to discover. For others, it is a wonderful dream that anyone can undertake which may lead to something interesting in the future. Others might see education as the only way to ensure enlightenment of one's spirit. The student’s journey at tertiary institution creates a certain perception in the mind of a youth growing up in the township that education is the key to becoming a respectable person in the society and living a decent life which may inspire the youth of their community. Education becomes the ticket to both the dream and the reality one would have audaciously hoped for even though circumstances may dictate otherwise.

**Some theoretical views embedded in Learning Reconsidered.**

On one hand, conflict theorists in education, such as Weber, Collins and others, describe “the growing ‘tyranny’ of educational credentials as a prerequisite for high-status positions” (Ballantine and Hammack, 2008: 19). From this perspective: ‘credentialism’, becomes a technique of increased requirements for higher-lever positions used by more advantaged individuals to further their status (Collins 1979). On the other hand, financial and time pressures of modern life have changed the pace, the amount of time students devote to studying and both their ability and willingness to think about the meaning of what they are learning. Finding a better Job or
developing one's own career possibilities rank at the top of the list of reasons for higher learning attendance (Fried 2006:3).

In Ubuntu economy, going to school in this sense is not and was never an option that many could have a luxury to choose. The ethos and/or cultural dynamic which commands that the success of one becomes the success of all fuels the determination of school leavers to attend university with one clear idea and objective in mind, that failure should be erased in one’s vocabulary for the future of a student depends solely on the qualification he/she would obtain after university. Studying against the odds in this particular context is a “delicacy” that any school leaver has to enjoy with bravura and heroism. Because just the thought of living adulthood in poverty and misery is an experience that no-one would wish for.

In the African context in general, and South Africa in particular, where capitalist systems are influencing almost every value, education in this perspective is key for any type of cultural emancipation. In the view of cultural reproduction and resistance, (Sadovnik, 2004; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) for instance forms of culture are passed on by families and schools. The implication is that the amount of cultural capital one has is considered as an indicator of one’s status (Ballantine and Hammack, 2008: 19).

From such a paradigm, the vision of putting pride in one’s family left back home is an honour given to college / university graduates to conquer illiteracy, ignorance and poverty. Jones & McEwen (2000) concede that in a normal educational setting, and in pursuance of student emancipation, it is impossible to separate learning, development, and context. The South African context is of social justice in educational systems (Kioko, 2010:78), with particular attention to programmes, generally aimed at widening access and success in Higher Education (Boughey 2007). The concept of social
justice presupposes many years of social injustice with its corollary faces of exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence (Young 1990). To address such challenges at tertiary institutions Kioko (2010: 88) cautioned students or staff of any sort of exclusion.

Boughey (2010:9) argues further by pinpointing some determining factors in education, that if properly addressed, may guaranty success. She brings forth Critical ways of Knowing which in itself corroborate the philosophy behind the Learning Reconsidered movement. Boughey (2010:9) affirms:

> When these constructs are interrogated, we will be able to see how other structural factors might be involved in denying success to some groups of students. How the way we teach and assess privilege some and disadvantage others? How does the way the institutions are organised privilege some and disadvantage others.

Hence, students come to university with a particular or contextualised background, which often dictates certain attitudes towards learning. The problem is that this momentum needs to be kept in order for future graduates to reach their goals. One would come to study at university of technology for instance, with the hope of being one day, the agent of change and improvement of one’s “constituency”. The role of a lecturer in teaching students in whatever subject, gets exponential; teaching students from that paradigm is indirectly teaching and enlightening a certain community.

Constructivism as a plural way of accommodating and acknowledging other forms of learning is vital and plays a significant role in Learning Reconsidered. In a South African context, for instance, Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS), can form part of leaning reconsidered. As Cameron (2007:177)
asserts: “the worldview perspective of students is very important in terms of their ability and willingness to learn concepts that may be perceived of as contradictory or in conflict with their own beliefs”.

**Learning and Community engagement**

Community engagement would not just be an academic pursuit destined for conferences and seminars but another expression of living Education at its best. It may constitute an indicator that dictates educational development and policy making mechanism for bettering the future for all. Two major challenges in a community are to be considered despite what has been said so far:

1- The setting described above is an ideal yet pragmatic way of thinking of education that can work if and only if the education itself was not subjected to other external factors that influence teaching and learning. War, racial segregation, poverty and politics are a few variables that can be cited.

2- Modernisation is also a paradox that hinders the empowerment of education especially in developing countries. Education from its Latin form EDUCARE is meant for developing both the content and the quality of life. An educated person in the sixties was synonymous to having on his or her account enlightenment of mind and quality of life. Modernisation though advocates for progress and economic development and has unfortunately some side effects; it propagates capitalism and classicism and rapid enrichment at all costs. Modernisation in a way lifted up economically some communities and suppresses and destroys at the same time cardinal values that had sustained the very same societies for a long time.
In the 60s getting educated was a passport to ensure the future and quality of life, whereas, in the 21st century education alone does not suffice anymore. There is a culture of “more”: we long for more knowledge, more money, and experiences; to be precise, more learning. This alone breeds new ways of teaching, and therefore new ways of learning and “re-curriculation”. The question then will be what are the students learning and for what purpose?

What will be the use of a nuclear physicist trained in the finest way of classical education if his or her training does not relate and benefit the community in which he lives? This is the tragic case of many Africans trained at the best and world renowned universities but unable to implement this knowledge for the upliftment of his fellows.

We came to the realisation that the pursuit of students’ success and achievements from academic teachings as it is offered in various theatres would not hold any longer in the 21st century. Challenges that students are faced with require transforming learning to the better in more contextualised settings. This implies that other forms of learning that were left aside in the past have to be reconsidered. For a very long time learning was widely viewed or understood only through the scholarship of traditional settings in which the teacher or the lecturer pays a fundamental role on passing knowledge to the learners.

The observation of confronting challenges that need to be addressed is echoed by the 2005 UNESCO report (2005:7) in the following terms:

a) Changes in society, the economic and the world of work place pressure on education systems to consider new approaches to learning;

b) Preparing young people for higher education is no longer an exclusive or adequate objective, especially
with so many moving directly from secondary school to employment, or to unemployment;

c) Because traditional institutions such as the family and religious organisations are progressively less available as guarantors of support for younger generations, there is a need to encourage transition from a culture of dependence to a culture of autonomy, independence and interdependence;

d) The inclusion of many additional subject areas has created an overcrowded curriculum that may have reinforced a prejudicial tradition of learning by rote and/or avoiding linkages across curricula;

e) The need to impart in a holistic way the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable young people to be effective in life and work, including being able to deal with paradox and conflict generated by change, being agents not just recipients of knowledge, skills and attitudes and being lifelong learners and members of a flexible workforce.

The last point of the report puts an emphasis on the need for a holistic approach to learning in line with the concept Learning Reconsidered first explored in United State of America. It reads as follows: “in the context of an increasing diversity of learners on campuses, the typical fragmentation of college life, curriculum, and organization becomes problematic and the purpose of college attendance mostly instrumental (Dungy et al, 2004)”. Typically, both undergraduate and graduate students attend colleges and universities to get a degree so that they can get better jobs.
Multiple sources of learning

From an indigenous knowledge point of view, for instance, we take cognisance that learning itself is drawn from multiple sources of knowledge; discipline-based knowledge, the student’s own knowledge and experience; the community’s knowledge and experience and esoteric-based knowledge. I will just consider the first and the last point.

**Discipline-based Knowledge**

Learners are instructed in discipline-based knowledge by means of texts, lectures and use of technology. Learning is also reinforced by one’s own journey filled with both good and challenging individual experiences. The collective source of knowledge is also vivid in the African context in which the community constitutes the cement of healthy apprenticeship of life that enable the acquisition of both moral and civic qualities, which are important for social betterment.

**Esoteric-based knowledge**

The typical example of esoteric knowledge in my view is religion in particular in Israel, where it is difficult to dissociate the Jewish set of beliefs from Israeli education. The underlining ethos in this case is that a lot is viewed from an esoteric dimension; discourse around the land, the economy, culture, the politics and education are dominated by the faith in El Ohim, the creator, and Sustainer of the universe. Fried (2006:4) concedes that there is a great deal of current interest in student spiritual development and in the processes by which students construct meaning in their lives (Baxter Magolda 1999; Miller & Ryan, 2001; Parks 2000). Constructivism, as an alternative epistemological and pedagogical approach to teaching and learning, addresses the issues of construction of meaning, the role of self

**Learning Reconsidered as an academic movement in favour of holistic approach to student learning development**

Learning Reconsidered is currently a movement towards seeing the process of student learning re-examined from a more holistic, multilingual, multi-cultural and multi-purpose point of view. In this movement, there is an attempt to develop conscious awareness of all key role players in the learning process. Often the question about who should be answerable for developing, or ensuring and assessing learning outcomes is raised. For some, this role belongs to academics within faculties, whereas others argue in favour of student affairs department with an emphasis on the living (residence) and learning (academia) as inseparable contributing factors that address the student needs as a whole.

Dangy et al (2004:5) contrast the traditional from the new concept of learning in the following terms:

We have come to understand that learning is far more rich and complicated that some of our predecessors realised when they distinguished and separated learning from student life. Seeing students as their components parts (body, mind, spirit), rather than as an integrated whole, supported the emergence of fragmented college systems and structures - academic affairs to cultivate the intellect, and student affairs to tend the body, emotions, and spirit. The new concept of learning recognizes the essential integration of personal development with learning; it reflects the diverse ways through which students may engage with the
task and the content of learning. Student learning produces both educational and developmental outcomes; distinguishing them is pointless and potentially harmful, and the goal of institutions of Higher education should be the integration of all domains of learning and of the work of all educators (King & Baxter Magolda 1996; Baxter Magolda 1999).

Learning reconsidered is more about preparing students holistically, like “moving beyond traditional ideas of inside and outside the classroom learning and transcends the boundaries between curriculum and co-curricular education by applying new models and examples of the theory and principles in learning reconsidered” (Dungy et al, 2004).

The January 2004 Report of “Learning Reconsidered: A campus-wide focus on the students experience" defines the concept as an argument for the integrated use of all of higher education’s resources in the education and preparation of the whole student. It is also an introduction to new ways of understanding and supporting learning and development as intertwined, inseparable elements of the student experience. It advocates for transformative education – a holistic process of learning that places the student at the centre of the learning experience.

Helping college students learn and develop is not limited to just the domain of faculty professors. Learning Reconsidered claimed that other campus staff could also play a huge role in helping students in their overall development. These other campus staff could include leaders and student advisors in campus activities, student affairs or residence life. Even student governments can play a role here. Instead of programming activities that are just purely entertainment, different types of programs with some inclusion of a learning element for students can be added. Such programs represent golden
opportunities that will help fulfil specific learning outcomes described in Learning Reconsidered. (Cora 2009)

The role of traditional institutions, such as family and religious organisations raised in the third point of the 2005 UNESCO report is important in many ways. It touches two key institutions directly linked to the well being of students and their development. Learning as a process is influenced not only by the teacher, the techniques used, the classroom setting, and the formal or informal material being taught, but also by the child’s ability, motivation, interest in the subject matter, readiness to learn, retentiveness, values and attitudes, relationship with the teacher, feelings about self and ability, relationship with peers, background experience, home life, encouragement from home, and a myriad of other factor. Ballantine and Hammack (2008: 47)

Other variables that affect learning include family support for learning, race, gender, environment and religion with its belief system.

The Israel: assumption of belief in learning that advocates for education based on generational transfer of knowledge, (Alexander 1989) is also in practice in many African and Asian societies on a relatively small scale. It has the advantage of learning beyond the subject-bound classroom. In a way, by affirming the son, the father is affirming the future citizen, the director, or the businessman. Learning in this sense, has a greater purpose than just acquiring a degree or obtaining a job; it has life, and can be humanized and it benefits the entire society. Thus, it takes the whole community, to raise a child and whole nation, to shape a leader. This is what I would call responsible learning in a contextualized education setting. In our time, this could point to mentorship system, in which the mentee, or protégé, receives pedagogical coaching, and a
holistic socio-academic support favourable to the development of the learner, or the apprentice.

However, today, it may not be practical to pursue such a learning style. For one, communities have different perceptions of priorities; different belief systems, which might dictate the way they perceive education and therefore the manner with which they conceive learning. Secondly, the systematic pursuit of excellence for the sake of competition and reputation as practiced in our institutions of higher learning does not cater primarily for community building but rather for individual ascension. The question would then be what type of students are we forming and for what purpose? The purpose of education should be development of human kind and his environment, and learning, constituting the means by which the betterment of humanity is achieved or understood. Studying then should have multiple dimensions, among which, spirituality.

Duclos (2008:1), in favour of higher learning that accommodates spirituality, underlines that globalisation in terms of trade, production and communication has established a highly networked world. Nonetheless, huge gaps have been increasing between rich and poor both within and between nations. Sustainable development remains a long-term, unreachable goal, usually sacrificed on the altar of short-term gains. It becomes imperative for higher education to provide solutions to the prevailing problems in order to prevent the future ones.

To prepare future leaders and citizen for highly independent nations, such as South Africa, Duclos (2008:1) proposes a higher education system that is favorable to cultural diversity and develops understanding, respect and tolerance between people. That is to say, universities should also play an incentive role that will lead to sound spiritual, ethical and cultural
foundations in a perspective of openness and links between people.

Often the best test of higher learning is whether it can be matched against the fundamental principals of human life and dignity. According to Duclos, 2008:

Albert Einstein would have said: “Science without Religion is lame; Religion without Science is blind. Morality as a value cannot be replaced by intelligence, and I will say thank God! The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.

Attitudes to Education in South Africa

The Higher education system both internationally and nationally, has one common ground; a sense of unsatisfactory outcomes expressed by some stakeholders be it the media, parents communities, public or private entities. Since 1994, the South African Department of Education has increasingly experienced changes and reforms that would accommodate the new democratic dawn, yet many are still critical with regards to the qualities of graduates institutions of higher learning produce every year. In some instances, the relevancy and adequacy of the curriculum itself is questioned (Jansen 1995; Poutianen 2009; Jansen et al 2007).

In the light of this, works of scholars with regards to burning issues on education are bountiful. Herman (2009) questioned whether doctoral education can address global challenges. Nkomo (2009) explores and examines in his review achievements, challenges, and contradictions of educational transformation in the light of educational change in South Africa. Gerwel (2009), in his exposé of educational transformation, refers to the work of
Jonathan Jansen (2009), author of Knowledge in the Blood, in which racial issues and the Apartheid past are confronted.

Van Rooyen (2009) offers a view from the private sector on the challenges facing the new higher education minister. Chetty (2009), stresses, that South African universities have a unique chance to decide what kind of institution they want to be. He advocates for more academic freedom, and argues that if we do not pay much attention to the means of transformation as we do to the ends, we will destroy the very basis of university. Nel (2009) focuses on a private search for quality, by comparing the local higher education institutions’ reputation in seventeen years of democracy, with some international universities seeking a foothold in South Africa.

From these authors there is an expectation about what the Institution of Higher learning should deliver. However the National Benchmark Tests results show that most students entering universities across the country do not have adequate academic literacy skills, and just a tiny proportion have adequate mathematical skills required for higher education (Smetherham, 2009).

**Remark**

It is fundamental to underline that in the current education system, solid pre-requisites are key for undergraduate studies but also for learners to pursue studies at postgraduate level where innovation, character and high quality research are crucial. Using pre-requisites as a condition for access to universities creates a new type of problem where only those few learners possessing the aptitudes are eligible to undertake studies at university. Universities have become more concerned with attracting the “best students” for their own reputation, rather than providing a space of learning for all, with a forceful
capacity of formation that may assure a positive individual transformation as well as the society.

The educational discourse behind the Ba’thi revolution, and the Arab unity that resulted thereof may be illustrative as to which extent higher education can be used as tool of societal integration and emancipation. The key ideological premise was that through education, the individual would be awakened, to the necessity of Arab national unity. The Ba’this’ rural background being well known, may force some to acknowledge that their most remarkable achievement was the abrupt replacement of the traditional, urban ruling elite with an entirely new social group whose roots were in the lower and middle class and in the village (Roy and Naff, 1989).

**Food, shelter and learning materials**

Food, shelter and learning material constitutes the fundamental cornerstone of every learner. Creating an environment conducive to learning is not only about providing a lecture and a classroom. When the mind of the learner is preoccupied by questions pertaining to shelter, he or she would not have time to focus on his or her study in comparison to students having everything provided for. In this regard, many of our students, especially those coming from challenging conditions of living are more than often confronted with the same situation.

Students first have to find accommodation and food. If these are provided, only then he/she will start thinking on how to compete on equal footing with students who do not have any problem with issues of living. The limited capacity to absorb the maximum of students applying for accommodation in residences is an additional problem that affects student learning. Because residences cannot accommodate everyone, some students find themselves living with relatives in dismal
poverty, or renting far from the university perimeter. This also constitutes a burden in the learners’ mind.

For those who may obtain bursary/scholarship such as, “NSFAS,” the funding reaches university long after courses have begun. To avoid such an inconveniencing and irritating situation, students often look for a temporary job, which in return impedes on their precious hours of study. If it could be the duty of the state to take on the entirety of education, some conditions should be clearly defined in advance, with the meritocracy system well planned to assure fairness and justice to the beneficiaries.

Let us take the example of Gabon’s education system, in which the state is the main educator and provider of educational and development services. Public schools and universities are owned by the state and the education is therefore free. However, to avoid the “laissez faire” and the “laissez aller”, the government had introduced the culture of hard work and meritocracy, starting from the secondary school up to university who ever passes with a distinction obtains a monthly stipend which is enough to buy learning material. As education is free, there is no need to look for funding except when studying abroad.

At university level, one has to maintain a success pass rate to continue with the stipend. Should one stop performing academically, the bursary will stop immediately. The student may regain the privilege only after obtaining two consecutive successes at university. It is important to stress that students manage their stipend with no restriction or condition. They have the liberty to use it or not, and at their convenient time. In such a system fairness is by means of academic records acting as the currency students should use to continue and further their studies. So meritocracy can be useful if properly administrated in a more contextualized way.
Living and learning also includes the background of the student. For one to perform well at university many parameters are involved; for instance, student should compete on an equal footing. In South Africa, the history of apartheid and its consequences in education could not allow fairness. However, with the new dispensation, the bold stand that the student should compete in the same environment, with the same chances and opportunities may constitute the beginning of a solution.

At the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) for instance, English is the medium of instruction. Most of learners do not have English as their first language of acquisition, therefore they either, come from Afrikaans or Xhosa communities, and others have French or Portuguese as first medium of expression. So competing in English is a disadvantage for most of them. In that sense, they may not compete on an equal footing.

Another element that should be taken into consideration is our ways of affirming the learners. It is not right to believe that a first year student is necessarily an empty container that needs to be filled with “knowledge”. Often, the student’s inability to express himself/herself in English is concluded by the lecturer as lack of literacy, and a sign of “intellectual infirmity” as in the recent case of benchmarking test reported by Smetherham (2009).

Boughey (2009) on the other hand, argues, “It is wrong to say that national benchmark test shows that school leavers cannot read or write.” Maybe teaching such students would first require acknowledging their own literacy, for university is, as Senghor puts it “the round about of giving and receiving” in a reciprocal way of exchanging information and knowledge. For wisdom is the appropriate application of what we all know. By acknowledging students pre-requisites the lecturer is building a bridge between the information gained by and through the
learner’s previous experiences, and the expectation the educator wants the student to possess before graduating.

Universities require students to make inferences and draw conclusions from what they read, and to use their knowledge of the world and reading of other texts to question what they are reading.....it is not simply the case that reading at university is more difficult than other sorts of reading, but rather that it involves the reader taking up a different position in relationship to what he reads – a position which is ultimately derived from values and attitudes related to what can count as knowledge and how that knowledge can be known – and which makes the reading qualitatively different to many other kind of reading.

So, there is reading and there is reading, and what the national benchmark tests show is not that the South African school leavers who took the tests cannot read and write per se, but that many cannot read and write in ways specific to the university. Boughey (2009:6)

Discipline-based knowledge is important, however, Higher Learning systems ought to take into consideration or accommodate the cultural background of learners, including faith-based knowledge to remain relevant to the student community at large. As Chetty (2009:3) concedes, just a glance at universities around the world quickly reveals that universities are not at all as universal as the term "university" might imply. Universities show enormous differences in ethos, standards, reputations etc. Highlighting the facts mentioned above leads one definitively to reconsider the whole process of learning in Higher education setting; thus the concept of Learning reconsidered.
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