Strategies for the Design and Delivery of Quality Teacher Education at a Distance

A case study of the Further Diploma in Education (English Language Teaching) University of the Witwatersrand

Researched

for the President's Education Initiative by The South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE)

March to September 1998

Contents

Acknowledgements

Chapter One

Introduction to the Research

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research is to contribute to an understanding of the role of distance education in the development of teachers in South Africa. Because of the generally poor quality of teacher education offered at a distance in South Africa, there is suspicion about the use of distance education methods in the training of teachers. The lack of relationship between teachers' achievement in distance courses and improvement of teachers' classroom practice is the main source of concern. This research claims that quality teacher development programmes can use distance methods effectively to result in improved classroom practice.

The research investigates a teacher development programme using distance education methods that from its inception aimed to develop quality learning and teaching in schools. This programme is the Further Diploma in Education (English Teaching) offered by the University of the Witwatersrand. The report examines the teaching and learning practices in this programme to establish their effect on teacher development and particularly classroom practice. It concludes with a set of strategies for the design and delivery of effective teacher development programmes using distance education methods.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

THE ROLE OE DISTANCE EDUCATION IN TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Distance education is generally understood as a structured teaching and learning process, delivered through a collection of methods, where educators and the learners are physically separated for part or all of the time and where the course materials are the main means of communication of the curriculum. The interaction between educators and learners involves the use of a variety of media which includes face to face interaction. Face to face interaction can take different forms such as tutorials, peer support and practical work.

Distance education programmes for teachers have a significant role to play in a changing South Africa. As noted by the national Teacher Education Audit [1], `distance education has demonstrated great potential for increasing openness in learning and for reducing cost'. Distance education also has the capacity to reach large numbers of students in a wide geographical area, and in this way, open access to teacher education programmes and ongoing professional development.

Key to distance education provision is that teachers can study while continuing to teach, making it less disruptive for teachers and schools. This is significant in South Africa where the majority of teachers are women. In 1995, 70% of student teachers on various teacher education programmes at a distance were women. [2] In addition, distance education supports new models of school focused teacher development which allow for the integration of theory and practice. [3]

A question that is being asked is whether or not distance education programmes for teachers can improve classroom practice. Despite notable successes in South Africa of programmes aimed at improving classroom practice, the majority of teacher education programmes have tended to develop the extension of knowledge and place little or no emphasis on improving practice. [4] Poor quality and the inappropriateness of programmes have been well documented by the Audit. It can be argued the effectiveness of conventional teacher education programmes is as much in question as the effectiveness of those using distance methods. Questions relating to the organization and operation of teacher development systems, the integration of theory and practice and cost effectiveness should also be asked of conventional forms of teacher education. [5] However, this research confines itself to looking at a teacher education programme offered at a distance.

[1] SAIDE, 1995, *Teacher Education Offered at a Distance in South Africa,* Braamfontein: SAIDE
[2] 1bid. p. 141
[3] Department of Education, 1997, *Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, Training and Development,* A discussion document prepared by the Technical Committee on the Revision of Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, Pretoria.
[4]°SAIDE, 1995, *Teacher Education Offered at a Distance in South Africa,* Braamfontein: SAIDE
[5] Perraton, H. (Ed.), 1993, *The Effects in Distance Education for Teacher Training,* London: Routledge, pp. 391 - 405.

The framework by the World Bank to identify elements of an effective ongoing professional development of teachers is important to look at. It involves,

> exposure to new theory and techniques, demonstration *of* their application, practice *by* the teacher, feedback to the teacher and coaching over time. [6]

Research done by the World Bank has shown that while distance education can provide these elements, it might be more difficult to do so at a distance. To provide support and coaching to teachers in their classrooms, might require working together with local partners who can carry out observations and provide feedback to teachers. In some instances new interactive technologies such as two way videos might be used. The question then becomes, how can distance education programmes for teachers improve classroom practice rather than whether or not they can.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Two extensive research processes into teacher development in South Africa have been conducted. The national Teacher Education Audit of 1995 was conducted by a research consortium of which SAIDE was a part. An investigation into Gauteng Teacher Supply, Utilization and Development (TSUD) (1997) is being carried out by Paul Musker and Associates on behalf of the Gauteng Department of Education and will be completed later this year. The TSUD process emanates from the work of the Audit and it is an attempt to develop provincial policies in issues of supply, utilization and development.

The Audit painted a very bleak picture of teacher education in South Africa. [7] Central to its findings, was the generally poor quality of teacher education. The Audit noted huge fragmentation and a lack of coordination in the provision of teacher education, `... often without any vision to work towards and often by institutions not intent on improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools. [8] According to the Audit, teacher education offered at a distance constituted the largest and most rapidly expanding teacher education sector. More than a third of South Africa's teachers were involved in some form of `distance education' in 1995. The sector also experienced a 23% increase in new enrolments between 1994 and 1995. [9]

The Audit discovered that:

- the quality and appropriateness of teacher education courses was very weak in the areas of `improving [teachers'] practice and enabling them to reflect on their practice'; [10]
- often institutions regarded teaching practice simply as a form of assessment (and this observation is not peculiar to distance education for teachers) with little, and in some instances, no support given to student teachers; and

---

[6] Robinson, 13,1997, `Distance Education for Primary Teacher Training in Developing Countries,' *Paper presenter(tit Distance Education for Teacher Development, A colloquium at the Global Knowledge 97 Conference,* Toronto, Canada, 22 June-25 June 1997. p.9

[7] Hofmeyr, J. & Hall, G. 1995, *The National Teacher Education Audit: The Synthesis Report.* [8] Morojele, M. 1997, Professional Development *of* Teachers *tit* Gauteng: Eight *Focus* Groups, Johannesburg, Gauteng TSUD Project team, *p. 1*

[9] SAIDE, 1995, *Teacher Education Offered at a Distance in South Africa, B*raamfontein: SAIDE, p. *iv*

[10] Ibid p. 67

- the courses also showed very little understanding of the realities of schools in South Africa and the contexts of teachers. The need to integrate schools in teacher development and recognize them as sites for generating and applying new ideas and practices was missing in most courses.

The Audit identified a few `pockets of excellence' and one such example is discussed in the next section.

Teachers who participated in the focus groups interviews conducted as part of a broad investigation into issues in teacher supply, utilization and development in Gauteng, pointed to the disjunction between initial teacher preparation programmes, ongoing professional development initiatives and what actually happens in the schools. [11] Teachers expressed a concern that in-service curriculum is largely determined by provincial needs at the expense of individual preferences. As one teacher put it,

> ....I didn't like PRESET [pre-service education]. We were stuck in the syllabus, forced to use the syllabus. But now we are experiencing many problems, you experience them when you come to school; most things from college are not useful.[12]

Another said,
> I wasn't really prepared in my first year. I really battled with my teaching and I didn't really know what I was doing. I've learnt a lot since I've been teaching - that's when I leant the most. [13]

AN EXAMPLE OF A DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME WHICH COULD IMPROVE CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Despite the bleak picture painted by the Audit regarding the quality and effectiveness of distance education programmes for teachers, there are a few examples of `beacons of hope'. The Primary Education Project (PREP) based at the University of Cape Town is one such programme.

As early as 1987, the PREP project had been researching, applying and delivering an in-service programme for junior primary teachers. This process resulted in the development of an in-service model for junior primary teachers. By enabling teachers to reflect upon and critically evaluate their own practice, the model aimed to improve the quality of teaching in the classrooms.

The model is a multimedia distance education programme which consists of four interrelated core courses:

- the language and learning course;
- the education course;
- the mathematics course; and
- the junior primary studies course.

---

[11]Morojele, M. 1997, Professional Development of Teachers in Gauteng: Eight Focus Groups, Johannesburg, Gauteng TSUD Project team.
[12] Ibid. p.6
[13] Ibid. p.7

The course materials, designed to encourage critical self reflection, comprise printed study materials, video cassettes and audio cassettes. Study guides include activities that are aimed at improving teachers' understanding and classroom practice. [14] The course materials were designed by a team of experts with experience in pre-primary and junior primary education.

The programme was piloted in collaboration with the Natal College of Education and Vista University Distance Education Campus. Course materials include ongoing support for teachers in the form of meetings at designated centres and school visits by the facilitators. The facilitator's role is a mixture of

- monitoring (classroom practice and course progress);
- assessing (lessons, assignments, and examinations, and study guide activities);
- tutoring and mediating (course content and video and audio programmes); and
- pastoral care (usually telephonically). [15]

Classroom visits include the observation and monitoring of intended change in the classroom, the encouragement of teachers to reflect on their own practice with the view to improving it and the assistance of teachers in the organization of their classrooms. The PREP report notes that facilitation of classroom practice was `...the most difficult aspect of the work and took most of the facilitator's time'. [16] The facilitation proved difficult for both the facilitators and the teachers. The report states that initially, teachers seemed uneasy about classroom visits. However, once their confidence was won, some requested further visits and support. The report concludes that `the more innovative the course is in its understandings of good classroom practice the more demanding it is for the student teacher and, concomitantly, the more assistance in classroom performance that teacher will require'. [17]

The evaluation report also concluded that there is strong evidence to suggest that the PREP programme `...is leading teachers to think and act in different ways...[18]

LESSONS ABOUT EFFECTIVE TEACHER EDUCATION AT A DISTANCE

Given the fact that distance education could have a distinct role to play in the development of teachers, it is important to draw out from national and international experience positive lessons about effective teacher education at a distance. This will inform the way in which the selected programme will be investigated in this research.

Lesson One. It is important to integrate school-based activities into teacher development.

Worldwide there is a growing realization that the separation of the school as a site for learning from teacher education programmes `...can severely restrict the impact of

[14] *Reeves, C. 1997, An evaluation of the impact of the PREP language and learning course on teachers'ttttderstanding and classroom practice: Report no. S. Cape Town: UCTIPPREP.*
[15] *Flanagan, W. 1997, Evaluating the role offacilitation in the PREP model for distance education for teachers: Report no. l l. Cape Town: UCTIPPREP.*
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid. p. 14*
[18] *Ibid, p. 57*

such programmes on classroom practice [19] and South Africa is no exception. The discussion document on *Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, Training and Development* advocates a `...system of teacher development in which lifelong learning becomes the norm. ...' [20] The discussion document suggests that teacher education must be school focused and `... provide teachers with the *depth of knowledge,* and the *appropriate practice,* so that teachers can use this knowledge to understand and improve their teaching'. [21]

The Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) of the Open University in Britain, puts great emphasis on school based experience as an integral part of teacher development. The programme contends, `...in teacher education the design of `school based' activities that are central to the purposes of the course of study offers important opportunities for changing practice' [22] No activity, reading or observation could be set that did not directly relate to experience in the school. Through its mentorship programme the school plays an important role in supporting and assessing students.

The integration of school based activities into teacher development is also a powerful recognition of teachers as intellectuals who can construct new knowledge in practice .[23] In that process of transformation of practice, teachers can change and be changed by their own workplaces. [24]

Leach identifies three interrelated phases of transformation of practice. [25] The *context of criticism* which requires teachers to critically examine `familiar ways of working'. The process could take place through structured forums for enquiry such as tutorials and peer support. In the *context of discovery,* `... learners ... must design a way out of the practice under criticism, find a new model for their activity'. [26] The *context of practical and social application* demands an implementation of the new expanded object of learning. This is a view shared by the discussion document on the *Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, Training and Development* which recognizes

[19] Moon, B. et al, 1997, *Open and Distance Learning and the Future of Teacher Education,* presentations made from staff of the Centre for Research in Teacher education, School of Education, The Open University (UK), and The Open Society Foundation (Albania), Undated. p. 4

[20] Department of Education, 1997, *Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, Training and Development.* A discussion document prepared by the Technical Committee on the Revision of Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, Pretoria. p. 125

[21] Ibid. p. 126

[22] Moon, B. et al, 1997, *Open and Distance Learning and the Future of Teacher Education,* presentations made from staff of the Centre for Research in Teacher education, School of Education, The Open University (UK), and Thee Open Society Foundation (Albania), Undated. p. 4.

[23] Carr, W. & Kemmis, S. 1986, *Becoming Critical: Education Knowledge and Action Research,* London: The Falmer Press.

[24] Musi, M. 1989, *Teacher Educators' Perspectives on Development Studies: A Qualitative Analysis of Factors Affecting Implementation of a Teacher Preparation Programme,* Master's Dissertation, Unpublished thesis.

[25] Leach, J.1996, Learning in Practice: Support for Professional Development, in: Tait A. & Mills, R. (eds.), *Supporting the Learner in Open and Distance Learning,* London: Pitman Publishing.

[26] Ibid. p. 5

professional practice as dynamic in nature and that which must develop teachers who can `... think, adapt, innovate and implement...'. [27]

Lesson Two: Course materials should be complemented with peer and school-based interaction.

It is widely accepted that in distance education, the course takes the place of the educator in providing an appropriate learning environment. An important element of the course is support for learners. The support provided can be within or outside text. The Audit notes that `... a well functioning [distance education] system, will integrate various types of support (including carefully planned contact tutorials, telephone tutoring, vacation schools, and other forms of support) with course materials to create a system which supports and deepens students' learning' . [28]

Robinson in her study of a number of case studies of primary teacher training programmes in developing countries, observes that self-study materials in themselves are not enough in changing classroom practice. [29] A point also made by the Audit. She notes that, `interaction with others (peers, head-teachers and tutors) is needed for support, exchange of experience, motivation and problem solving'. She cautions that, '…change in classroom practice may be constrained by other external factors: lack of teaching resources, poor school management, low morale resulting from teachers' conditions of work'. [30]

The evaluation of the PREP project also indicates that, although teachers were satisfied with multimedia materials, face to face contact was a preferred method for promoting the ideas and methods in PREP and supporting teachers in trying to understand those ideas and methods.

In Albania, a teacher development programme known as `Kualida' has adopted an open and distance teaching strategy using expertise from the Open University in Britain. The development of the programme is wholly based in Albania. The programme whose aim it is to provide quality distance and open teaming support for teachers in selected disciplines, also embraces notions of the involvement of people with direct school experience in the design and development of the course, local support structures and school based activities.

Lesson Three: Courses, activities and assessment must be linked with classroom practice.

The national Teacher Education Audit [31] observes that the assessment in most courses does not take into account the professional and social contexts of teachers. The Audit

[27] Department *of* Education, 1997, *Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, Training and Development,* A discussion document prepared by the Technical Committee on tire Revision *of* Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, Pretoria. p. 125

[28] SAIDE, 1995. *Teacher Education offered at a distance in South Africa,* Braamfontein: SAIDE, p. 73

[29] Robinson, 13,1997, 'Distance Education for Primary Teacher Training in Developing Countries,' *Paper presented at Distance Education for Teacher Development, A colloquium at the Global Knowledge 97 Conference,* Toronto, Canada, 22 June-25 June 1997.

[30] Ibid. p. 9.

[31] SAIDE, 1995, *Teacher Education offered at a distance in South Africa,* Braamfontein: SAIDE.

notes that assessment is used mainly to test whether or not a student has passed the course rather than support the learner to learn. The Audit also suggests some of the ways in which the improvement of practice can be achieved through distance education courses. First, it acknowledges the difficulties of improving classroom practice through print alone. [32] It then suggests that classroom practice can be improved if institutions:

- design courses that guide teachers in their practice;
- provide strong and constant feedback on activities specified in the course; and
- back all this tip by recognizing the description and analysis of practice in assessment procedures. [33]

Lesson Four: The integration of theory and practice.

Leach sees as fundamental the purpose of professional development to `... question, challenge and develop individual teachers and .... to advance the quality of teaching and learning for young people in schools'. [34] One of the key concerns with teacher education programmes, in particular, those offered through distance education methods, is a `...propensity to use text resource solely in theoretical mode...' [35] and thus resulting in an artificial division between theory and practice. In his examination of distance education programmes for teachers, Perraton confirms that the majority of programmes `...did not generally teach classroom practice - as opposed to academic subjects and educational theory - at a distance'. [36] The national Teacher Education Audit also recognizes the need to put more emphasis on improving teachers' understanding and capacities in practice rather than developing `theorists of education'. [37] The Audit suggests that viewing education as a lifelong process opens up opportunities for the integration of initial teacher preparation (often associated with teaching theory) and ongoing professional development of teachers (often associated with the practice of teaching) in a continuum of learning. The school therefore, becomes an important site where the `...practical applications of theory learned through teacher education courses' can be implemented. [38] This will make it possible for teachers to think about the dynamic nature of relationships between their own contexts and practices, make adaptations and innovations and implement new discoveries.

---

[32] Ibid. p.66

[33] Ibid, p.65

[34] Leach, J.1996, Learning in Practice: Support for Professional Development, in: Tait A. & Mills, R. (eds.), *Supporting the Learner in Open and Distance Learning,* London: Pitman Publishing.p.2

[35] Moon, B. et al. 1997, *Towards a New Generation of Open Learning Programmes in Teacher Education.* A Paper Presented at the Distance Education for Teacher Development Colloquium, June 23-24, Toronto.

[36] Perraton, H. (ed.), 1993, *Distance Education for Teacher Training,* London: Routledge, p. [37] SAIDE, 1995, *Teacher Education offered at a distance in South Africa,* Braamfontein: SAIDE

[37] Ibid p 17

PURPOSE, RATIONALE, SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

PURPOSE

The research aims to identify, on the basis of an in-depth case study analysis of the teaching and learning practices in the Further Diploma in Education (English Teaching) programme at the University of the Witwatersrand, strategies for teacher education offered at a distance that could lead to improved teaching in the classroom.

RATIONALE AND SCOPE Or THE RESEARCH

The national Teacher Audit has established a general picture of teacher education offered at a distance in South Africa. A process of updating the data in the national Teacher Audit is underway at SAIDE. It seemed appropriate to do what general audits cannot do, that is, look in depth at the texture of the teaching and learning practices in a single programme. National audits inevitably concentrate on presenting general trends, and when the general trends are negative, the excellence to be found in individual initiatives is lost. In addition, there is a limit to what practitioners can learn about the details of implementation of good practice from broad brush stroke research, however important this may be for strategic planners.

The choice of the Further Diploma in Education (English Teaching) offered at a distance at the University of the Witwatersrand was made for a number of reasons. Firstly, the programme goals (see a fuller analysis of the programme goals in the next chapter) reflect a commitment to all four of the lessons about teacher development drawn from national and international experience - integration of school-based activities, complementing course materials with peer interaction, linking course materials, activities and assessment with classroom practice and integration of theory and practice. Secondly, the programme is relatively new (the first cohort of students was taken in 1996), so the benefits of the Audit findings would presumably be felt in the way the programme was designed. Thirdly, the students on the programme are from a wide range of backgrounds, contexts and schools in a number of different provinces, and so their reaction to the programme could be generalizable to other students in South Africa. Finally, the researchers were aware of the commitment of the programme staff to finding solutions to the educational problems of South Africa, and their efforts to do so would be worth sharing.

In view of the limited time and resources available for the research and the importance of in-depth investigation, it was decided to focus on only one of the further diploma programmes offered by the University of the Witwatersrand, the specialization in English Teaching. Within this programme, particular attention is given to the core course - the Theory and Practice of English Teaching, which is central to the improvement of teachers' classroom practice (although all the courses in the programme are related to and embedded in school and classroom experience).

Within this single programme, it was decided that attention would be focused on a sample of six students from the second cohort (1997 to 1998), so that their experience

and opinion of the programme could be captured with a sense of immediacy. These students have completed the central course - Theory and Practice of English Teaching - and the effects of this course on their teaching can be gauged.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This study was constrained by both budget and time. The period for the research was March to September 1998. However, within these constraints, the research team decided to have an in-depth study of one component of the Wits Further Diploma in Education programme - the English Language Teaching programme. The following limitations were noted:

- It would have been better to extend this study to other programmes, rather than to concentrate on a single programme. This would have made comparisons possible.
- In an investigation of teaching and learning practices which will presumably be helpful to other programmes and practitioners, there should be an analysis of the cost implications of the various practices.
- Finally, the management and administration of distance education programmes is crucial. Excellent teaching and learning can be completely undermined by inefficient or simply inappropriate management and administration. Particularly difficult is the situation of distance education programmes attempting to run in institutions whose administrative systems are geared towards conventional face-to-face education. Although the research into this programme did uncover some of these frustrations (for example, with the registration procedures), there was not enough time to go into this in depth.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS

The choice of research methods is guided by the research question. The purpose of the research is to uncover the kinds of teaching and learning practices in distance education programmes for teachers that could lead to improved teaching in the classroom. The research question positions teachers and their workplaces as important players in the research. The methodology should acknowledge that teachers are subjects of their own realities, who are capable of constructing and analyzing those realities. This acknowledges that human agency is important in the process of change. Therefore, the research methods must give primacy to the feelings, narratives and understandings of the participants and it is important that these are seen from the teachers' perspective. [39] As Musi notes, the relations in which teachers' experiences are embedded are important. [40] She contends that `the methodology must create space for teachers to speak for themselves and about themselves in relation to their own realities as they have experienced them'. [41] Teachers' narratives provide a basis for change. The narratives are not `simply narrations of experiences' rather they derive meaning from the context in which they occur. The research methods must therefore allow for the data to emerge from the setting without imposing any preconceived structures on it.

---

[39] McKernan, J. 1997, *Curriculum* Action *Research: A Handbook of Methods and Resources,fbr the Reflective Practitioner.* 2"° Ed. London: Kogan Page, 1991.
[40] Musi, M. 1989, *Teacher Educators' Perspectives on Development Studies: A Qualitative* Analysis of Factors *Affecting Implementation* of *rt Teacher Preparation Programme,* Master's Disseration, Unpublished thesis.
[41] lbid. p.6

This implies an `equality of both insiders and outsiders in the process of inquiry ...' [42] as opposed to researchers defining problems in their own terms. Increasingly, the notion of the teacher as a researcher is being used as a means for the effective ongoing professional development of teachers and initial teacher preparation.

A CASE STUDY

The research focuses on one component of the Further Diploma in Education programme. An in-depth study of the Theory and Practice course through a number of research methods could qualify as a case study. A case study denotes a study of a single case. This however, raises questions about generalizability. More often than not, the essence of conducting research is to generate knowledge that can be used widely. The Open University argues that it is possible to make generalizations from a case study because `... a case studied may be added to earlier work in a collective scholarly movement toward eventual general conclusions'. [43] Selikow says while case studies cannot claim to be representative, they can generate rich and detailed information and are useful in generating typologies or general categories which can then be used in further research. [44]

The case study tries to `...bring into focus the in-depth features and characteristics of the case being studied ....'. [45] It is rich in `descriptions, interpretation, and narrative, working more for understanding than prediction and control of settings'. While case studies have tended to employ qualitative methods, it is possible to use a range of techniques, including quantitative ones, that can be used to study the case.

Stage one of the research process involved selecting the sample, stage two involved collecting the live data, and stage three involved analysis and reporting. The concluding chapter of the report draws from the preceding analysis strategies for the design and delivery of teacher education at a distance which could lead to improved classroom practice.

STAGE ONE: SELECTION OF SAMPLE

Since an in-depth analysis of this programme was required, it was decided that rather than trying to get sketchy information from all or many of the students, the opinions and experiences and classroom practice of a small sample of students would be examined in depth.

With the assistance of the English course coordinator, six second year students, who have participated actively in the Theory and Practice of English Language Teaching course were selected to take part in the research.

---

[42] McKernan, J. 1997, Curriculum *Action Research: A Handbook of Methods and Resources for the Reflective Practitioner. 2"* Ed. London: Kogan Page, p.77

[43] Open University. 1988, *Educational Evaluation. Study Guide E811,* Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, p. 40.

[44] Selikow. 1996, *They've still got the blues,* Education, Training and Development in the South African Police Service, Unpublished Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand.

[45] Open University. 1988, *Educational Evaluation: Study Guide E811,* Milton Keynes: The Open University Press. n. 40.

The selection of the sample was done in two stages. First the course coordinator identified for the researchers a number of students who it would be worth focusing on in this research. The guideline provided by the researchers was that they should be students who have in some way shown an engagement with the course and could talk about the effect of the programme on their classroom practice. This was judged primarily on the quality reflective comments which these students submitted with their portfolio of assignments for the Theory and Practice course at the end of 1997. Fifteen out of sixty three students were identified by the course coordinator for consideration by the researchers. The selection was not based on academic excellence, rather on issues students felt were pertinent to improving their own classroom practice.

The second stage of the selection was carried out by the researchers. A detailed review of the students' reflections was carried out. Six students were selected. The following excerpts from students' reflections illustrate some of the contributions the course is making towards the improvement of classroom practice. One student said,

> What has been gratifying has been the realization that one is able to rise to the challenges through the positive feedbacks on the assignments.

Another said,

> My teaching has improved tremendously since I practiced the ideas set out in the course materials. The learners are enjoying working in groups and their writing skills have improved ...

and another said,

> I would like to improve the methods of teaching and try and involve the pupils in learning. The slow learners should also have a chance to participate and the chance to talk in the classroom.

The selection process also took into account gender balance, the level taught, that is, primary or secondary school level, whether or not students have study partners and the cost implications for visiting schools. There are three female and three male teachers in the sample. Two females and one male are primary school teachers and two males and one female are secondary school teachers. Students are encouraged to register with a study partner to encourage collaborative learning. A study partner could be a teacher in the same school or a nearby school. Two male teachers do not have study partners. Due to budget and time constraints, the selection of the sample was restricted to schools which are relatively easily accessible.

The table below provides a summary of the sample.

Student	Level teach		Study partner	Gender		Location	1997 End of year marks *	
	Primary	Secondary		m	f		for T & P course	for Grammar
Student A		✓	no	✓		Daveyton	78%	74%
Student B	✓		no	✓		Hammans-kraal	66%	60%
Student C		✓	yes	✓		Pietersburg	75%	87%
Student D		✓	yes		✓	Pietersburg	68%	71%
Student E	✓		yes		✓	Phalaborwa	55%	54%
Student F	✓		yes		✓	Phalaborwa	63%	58%

M The marks were drawn from both the Theory and Practice course and the Grammar course because they provide an overall sense of the academic achievement of the students in their English courses in 1997. It is clear from these marks that Student E is borderline, and Student F experiences some difficulty with the more academic course (the Grammar course); Students B and D manage comfortably but not brilliantly; and Students A and C are achieving very well academically.

STAGE TWO: COLLECTION OF DATA

Interviews with course coordinators for English and Education Studies

After examining available documentation about the programme for example, the Introductory Booklet to the Further Diplomas in Education, the programme for the residentials, and the record of an earlier interview with the programme director, the researchers interviewed the English course coordinator with a view to drawing up an accurate description of the programme in terms of content, assessment, feedback on assessment, support in schools, residential sessions/mid-cycle workshops, and administrative support (see Appendix A for interview questions). The course coordinators' opinion of issues that should be pursued in the observation of contact sessions, interviews with students, review of assessment, and classroom observation was also solicited.

Similar questions were addressed to the Education course coordinator (see Appendix A) and interesting differences between the subjects emerged - particularly with regard to processes of assessment.

A description of the programme was drawn up, verified as accurate and used as a basis for further research. Some, but not all the information from the course coordinators has been incorporated under the relevant sections in this report. Observation of selected sessions at the April 1998 Residential School

From the interviews with the course coordinators it was clear that the curriculum developers for the Wits FDE programme decided that it was important to incorporate a considerable degree of contact into the programme. This was based on an understanding of the need for learners to be supported in their study, as well as an understanding that residential sessions can be used to model the kinds of teaching practices being promoted by the programme.

It was important to observe the sessions at the residential school in order to establish their effectiveness as a means of support for the students as well as in modelling good practice.

Classroom observations

Observing classroom interactions offers the researcher direct access to a wide range of participants' behaviour. The researcher can then reconstruct an overall picture of events and practices. Observations can be participant or non-participant. McKeman states that, `in non-participant observation, the researcher is unobtrusive and does not engage in the roles and work of the groups.' He contends that the researcher is `... more concerned with participants' behaviour than gaining meaning through personal participation'. [46] However, it could be argued that the presence of an outsider is in itself obtrusive because it alters in some way or other, the normal dynamics of the class.

The Open University notes that in an observation, an outsider essentially reports on the behaviour of insiders and this begs many questions concerning the interpretation of events. [47]

The use of both interviews and observations may address this concern. From the description of the programme, observations of residential sessions, and the review of course materials, it was possible to draw out elements the main elements in the kinds of practices in English teaching being promoted by the programme. These were organized around design, implementation, reflection, attitudes and values and informed the design of a classroom observation schedule for the collection of data about the classroom practice of the students. A copy of this schedule appears in Appendix B. The observation schedule consists of a pre-observation interview, a schedule for analyzing the lesson, a post-observation interview, and a school profile. The six students were observed twice - once in May and once in August. Only one of the students was observed by the same researcher twice. It was considered important for more than one researcher to see each student.

Interviews with Students

Interviews are used mainly to generate and gather information. They provide immediate and potentially detailed and responsive insider account of events. They may be done face to face or conducted over a telephone. To get an accurate account of the interview, a tape recorder may be used with the permission of the respondents. Semi-structured interviews recognize respondents as active participants in the interview and not simply as respondents who must provide responses. While semistructured interviews comprise key questions that can be asked of all interviewees, `they also allow the respondents to raise issues and questions...' [48] in their own words

[46] McKernan, J. 1997, *Curriculum Action Research: A Handbook of Methods and Resources for the Reflective Practitioner. 2"'* Ed. London: Kogan Page, 1991.p. 61
[47] Open University. 1988, *Educational Evaluation: Study Guide ESII.* Milton Keynes: The Open University Press.
[48] McKernan, J. 1997, *Curriculum Action Research: A Handbook of' Methods and Resources for the Reflective Practitioner.* 2nd Ed. London: Kogan Page, 1991.p. 129

and give meaning to events and activities which might be difficult for an outsider to understand. The respondents' questions are not `separated' from the interview but are integrated throughout the course of the interview. However, the power relations between the interviewer and the interviewee have to be negotiated in order to get as penetrating an interview as possible.

One shortcoming of interviews noted by the Open University is that they leave `...data at the level of reported action and interpretation and it may be that more direct observation of behaviour is required'. [49]

Two interviews were carried out with the students. The first was after the May observation and was designed to ascertain student opinion on what the impact of the Theory and Practice course might be on classroom practice. These were recorded on tape. A copy of this interview schedule is in Appendix C.

The second was after the August observation and was designed to uncover more detailed information about student use of the materials and approach to and opinion of the assessment than could be provided in the Survey of Student Opinion of the Programme (described below).

Survey of Student Opinion of the Programme

A questionnaire may be used as `... an investigatory tool within a case study.....or complement to a case study'. [50] A commonly used approach to data gathering whereby the interviewer is generally removed from face to face contact with the respondents. Face to face contact occurs where questionnaires are mediated by the researcher. Questions may be closed or open ended and they should be free from ambiguities and the purpose of each question must be clear. Usually, considerable time is put into setting the questions and ensuring that the lay-out of the questionnaire is user-friendly. Where questionnaires are sent out, there is always the risk of some of them not being returned. Administering a questionnaire or mediating the questionnaire may go a long way in solving this problem.

It was decided that, although it was important to get textured information from individual students about their experience of the programme, it was also important to get a sense of general trends in student opinion of the programme. The best mechanism for this is a survey. Questions on programme goals, usefulness of the Theory and Practice course, helpfulness of support structures, assessment and the course as a whole were asked.

The survey was administered during the July Residential to forty-three students in the same cohort as the six students in the sample. Although questions were asked about the Education courses as well as the English courses, it was decided to use only the information about the English courses in the body of this research, as there is not enough supporting evidence about the Education courses to supplement the responses

---

[49] Open University. 1988, *Educational Evaluation: Study Guide E811,* Milton Keynes: The Open University Press. p. 55
[50] Ibid. p. 57

given in the survey. However, since it might be interesting for readers to see a summary of the responses all in one place the analysis of survey appears in Appendix E.

STAGE THREE: ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

In this stage, each of the major components of the teaching and learning approach in the programme were analyzed - the course materials, the residential sessions as an extension of the teaching in the course materials, assessment and student support. *Programme Design (Chapter Two)*

A description of the programme design was compiled following the examination of available documentation about the programme, a record of an earlier interview with the programme director and the researchers' interviews with course coordinators for English and Education Studies. The description provides information about programme goals, course content, course materials, assessment, and student support and also some indication of the ways in which the various elements were investigated.

Course Materials (Chapter Three)

The first phase in determining the teaching effectiveness and content relevance of the course materials was expert review in terms of standard criteria outlined in Chapter Two. The Theory and Practice course was the main course reviewed, but the other courses - Grammar in the Language Classroom, Literature in the Language Classroom, Reading and Writing for Personal and Professional Growth, Researching our Language Classrooms and Developing English Teaching and Learning Materials were also looked at.

The expert review was complemented by interview and survey described above.

Teaching in Residential Sessions (Chapter Four)

The chief purpose of the observation of residential sessions was to explore the varieties of ways in which the English lecturers/tutors were modelling and developing the notions of good teaching practice described in the materials.

The residential sessions were therefore analyzed as extensions of the kind of teaching done through the materials.

Assessment Design, Support and Quality Assurance (Chapter Five)

It could be argued that unless an effective assessment strategy is in place, good course materials and successful teaching on residential sessions could have next to no impact on student learning. An assessment strategy consists of design, support and quality assurance. Chapter Five deals with the review of the assessment strategy.

Many sources of evidence were used to conduct this review - information from the courses coordinators, analysis of the assignments in the Theory and Practice course as well as in some of the other English courses, the survey Of student opinion, interviews with students on their opinion and experience of the programme, review of

the reports of the external examiner for the Further Diploma (English Teaching), and the Theory and Practice portfolios of the six students in the sample.

Student Support (Chapter Six)

The aim of the investigation into student support provided in the programme was to see how the various forms of support meet the needs of individual students and contribute towards meeting the programme goals and aims.

Several methods were used - the interviews with the course coordinators, the survey, questions to the six students. In addition, however, the English course coordinator was asked to review each form of support she provides for the students and record the time spent on support during a given month. Her full report on this appears in Appendix F.

Effect of *the Programme on Students (Chapter Seven)*

Analysis of the different teaching and learning practices is incomplete without an attempt to assess the effects of these practices on student learning, and in particular, on classroom practice.

The effects are judged in terms of a framework for analysis which embodies the abilities, knowledge and values and attitudes being promoted by the FDE programme. The analytical framework was developed by reviewing course materials, assessment, key documents about the programme, interviews with the course coordinators and observing selected contact sessions. The evidence presented in this chapter on whether or not students can demonstrate the desired abilities, knowledge and values and attitudes is derived from classroom observations and interviews with students and the student opinion survey.

Strategies for Programme Design and Delivery (Chapter Eight)

This chapter summarizes the preceding chapters in an effort to draw out helpful strategies for the design and delivery of effective teacher development programmes using distance education methods. These strategies could be used by institutions which are planning to introduce distance education programmes for teachers or those that are in the process of redesigning existing programmes so that they can improve classroom practice. At a broader level, the strategies could inform the work of the Teacher Development Centre regarding interventions in educator development in a context of whole school development.

Chapter Two

Programme Design

The University of the Witwatersrand offers a Further Diploma in Education for teachers specializing in Mathematics, Science or English Language Teaching. The programme was launched with one hundred and forty one students in February 1996. Within the programme, there is a chronological sequencing of courses, designed to be completed over two years. In addition to materials and `homestudy' sessions, there are four compulsory residential sessions of four days each in the first year and three sessions in the second. There are also two one-day mid-cycle workshops during the two-year period, in May and February respectively. Because of the amount of face-to-face teaching offered, the programme is described as a `mixed mode' rather than a distance education programme.

The programme is aimed at secondary and senior primary teachers teaching in schools with matriculation and a three year teaching qualification (M+3). After the Diploma, students who have done well can move into a Bachelor of Education, without first having to complete a degree.

Research and evaluation were structured into the programme from its inception. The Foundation for Research and Development is funding the Department of Education at the University to conduct research into the impact of the Further Diploma - change over time in teachers' knowledge bases, classroom practices and practical and reflective competence.

Design of courses within programmes consists not only of design of materials, but `the structure of learning that is designed into the material[1] and this includes:

- content (knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes/values) in terms of overall programme/course goals/aims/outcomes;
- summative and formative assessment;
- the various teaching and learning strategies used (for example, in the materials, through the use of a variety of media, through various forms of contact such as tutorial sessions and workshops).

In addition to this, learner support of a range of kinds needs to be considered as an integral element of the course, rather than as an optional extra. As Ted Nunan points out, Because the needs of students are inextricably linked with all components of educational systems, student support is seen as the totality of arrangements which, in their combined effect, meet the needs of individual learners.[2]

[5] SAIDE, 1994, *Well Functioning Distance Education,* an unpublished Workshop Paper.
[6] Nunan, T. 1992, *Student Support as a Factor Affecting the Quality of Australian Distance Education: Findings* of *the Project to Investigate Quality and Standards in Distance Education,* paper presented at a workshop on student support, Distance Education Centre, University of South Australia, 17 November 1992.

These elements:

- programme goals and aims,
- content, mainly conveyed through course materials,
- assessment, and
- student support

are the teaching and learning practices which will be investigated in this research.

This diagram gives an indication of the centrality of the programme goals in the programme design, and the importance of processes of evaluation and review both of curricular issues and of the impact of the programme.

The Wits Further Diploma in Education (English Teaching)

Processes of review and evaluation

Course materials

1 Content
2 Teaching approach
3 Language and
   layout

Programme goals

Student Support

1 Residential sessions
2 Peer support
3 Individual support

Assessment

1 Assessment design
2 Support through
   feedback
3 Quality assurance
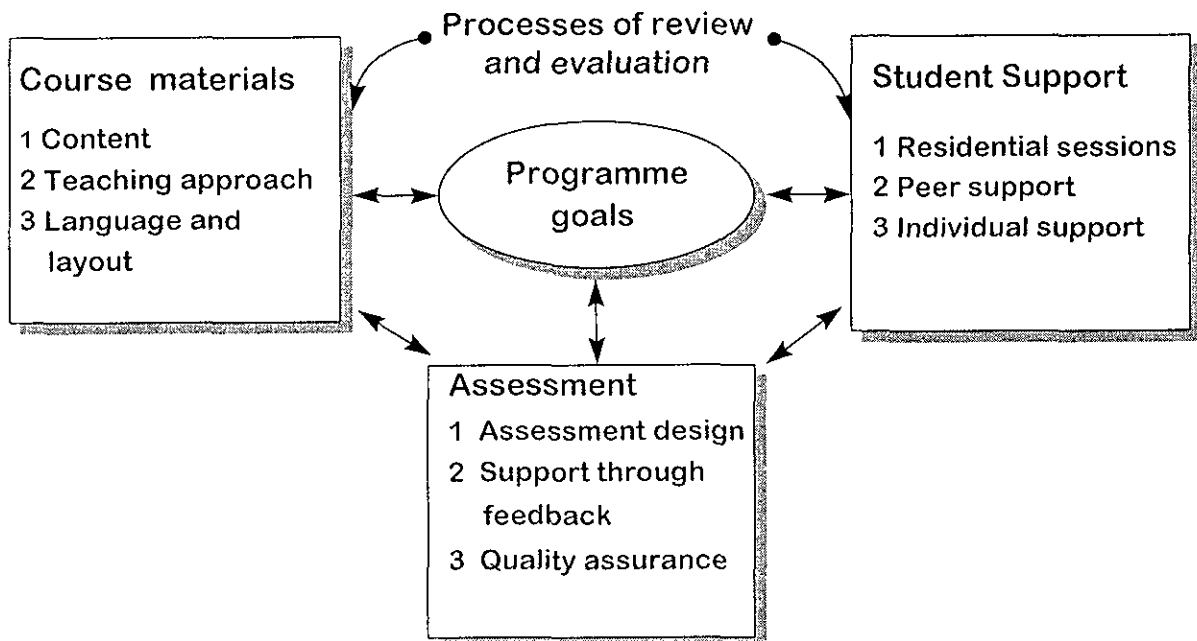
The goals of *the programme are as follows:*

- the development in schools of quality learning and teaching relevant to a changing South Africa;
- the extension of teachers' educational knowledge, subject knowledge, and subject teaching knowledge and skills
  - the development of teachers as competent, reflective professionals within their community;
- the provision of opportunities for teachers to engage in classroom and school-based research;
- the enabling and fostering of collegial and co-operative ways of working among teachers;
- the opening of career paths for teacher through professional development and possible access to further degrees and diplomas.

All three diplomas aim to. -

- offer [teachers] .. a range of teaching strategies which [they] can critically evaluate and adapt for use in the [their] own classrooms;
- promote active participation in the learning of both subject and pedagogical knowledge;
- provide for dialogue with and among teachers;
- develop an integrative approach to knowledge and teaching. [3]

In addition to these general goals and aims, there is an approach to the teaching and learning which the course teams in English, Mathematics, Science and Education have agreed should permeate their courses:

- recognition of what the teachers already know as a result of their previous experiences as students and from their experiences as teachers, family members and members of communities.
- facilitating reflection on this experience, and
- offering extensions or alternatives to established subject knowledge and patterns of classroom practice. [4]

The goals for the programme as a whole were developed jointly over a period of a month or two in 1995, and all the course coordinators work within them, although with slightly different emphases. Periodically (at the beginning every two weeks but now at least five times a year) there are workshops where curriculum issues are discussed with reference to the programme goals.

What these goals/aims/approach represent is that the ME takes seriously all three possible dimensions of study at a university - equipping teachers with increased subject and pedagogical knowledge, increased professional expertise, and increased ability to succeed in academic settings (hence the emphasis on research). This concern with both

---

[3] Faculty of Education, University of the Witwatersrand, Further Diploma in Education, Introduction to Courses, Undated.p. 2

[4] Reed, Y. 1996, Thinking Voices. In: *NAETEJournal, vol. 11,* no l, p.25.

professional expertise, development of both pedagogical subject knowledge and skills, and development of generic academic skills is in line both with emerging norms and standards for teacher education, the integrating critical outcomes of the National Qualifications Framework, and the movement both abroad and in this country to describe and develop key skills for higher education. It also reflects that this programme aims to take the negative lessons of the teacher audit very seriously.

The English Language Teaching specialization does not have its own set of identified aims and outcomes, but through the content selected and the approaches adopted contextualizes for English language teaching the goals, aims and approach outlined above.

CURRICULUM CONTENT

Students are required to do the following five compulsory courses:

1.   Contexts of English teaching in South Africa (1/2 course)

Course focus: Social, political and historical contexts of teaching in South Africa as constraining and enabling classroom practice.

2.   Curriculum, learning and teaching

Course focus: Curriculum, learning and teaching as they relate to each other in the classroom. General questions of curriculum are discussed and related to Curriculum *2005*. What makes for successful learning, learner centredness, constructivism as a learning theory, and the notion of scaffolding are the central issues in the units on learning and teaching.

3. Evaluation and assessment in English teaching (1/2 course)

Course focus: Purposes of assessment; types of assessment; modes of assessment; reporting assessment.

4.   Theory and practice of English teaching;

Course focus: Comparing theories of language learning and teaching; teachers' and learners' roles; teaching and learning activities and materials.

5.   Grammar in the language classroom;

Course focus: Understanding grammar, grammar and meaning making, debating the significance of grammar in language learning; examining approaches to teaching grammar.

In addition, students are required to do:

• *A choice between* Literature in the language classroom *or* Reading/writing for personal and professional growth (1/2 course); and

• *A choice between* Researching our language classrooms *or* Developing English teaching and learning materials (1/2 course).

The curriculum framework for the English courses was developed in `consultation with teachers in urban and rural texts, NGO workers in the field of language teacher development and language teacher educators. [5] According to the course coordinator for the English courses, the stakeholders felt that teachers on the FDE would need development in the four language skills as well as an understanding of grammar and how to teach it. The literature, personal and professional writing, materials development and research options in the second year also arose from stakeholder requests. The goals of the programme clearly also involve grasp of theory for two reasons - that reflective practice is not fully possible without an ability to theorize, and, in addition, students who move straight on to the BEd. need a grasp of theory.

COURSE MATERIALS

For each of the above courses, the course coordinators (or writers appointed by them) prepared interactive learning guides which contain not only the content of the courses but also activities which help the students interact with the content. Generally, the course materials consist of a single learning guide per course. For the Theory and Practice course, as well as the Grammar course, additional texts are prescribed. For the Curriculum and Classrooms course, there is a reader as well as a learning guide.

It is clear even from this brief description that, although the programme is mixed mode rather than distance education, the course materials are the main means whereby the curriculum is communicated. As will emerge in the relevant chapters, the residentials assist students to understand the concepts and processes described in the materials, and also provide an opportunity for the modelling of good face-to-face teaching practice advocated in the course materials. If the programme is to have an impact on classroom practice, it is therefore essential that the teaching in the course materials is sound and the content likely to inspire good classroom practice and reflection on classroom experience.

Although it would have been desirable to review all the course materials in the programme, it was decided that the focus should be on the English courses, particularly the Theory and Practice course. The issue of coherence between the English courses and the Education courses was also investigated, as it is important to establish the extent to which the different courses in a programme are `speaking the same language'.

The following aspects, drawn from literature on the evaluation of distance education course materials, provided the framework for the review:

- orientation of students to programme;
- introductions to courses;
- aims & learning outcomes;
- selection and coherence of content;
- presentation of content;

- view of knowledge and use of students' experience;
- activities and feedback;
- language;
- layout and accessibility;
- student opinion of `difficulty' of materials;
- student use of the materials; and
- student use of the content of the course materials in the classroom.

THE TEACHING IN THE RESIDENTIAL SESSIONS

In a mixed mode programme, the teaching in the residential sessions complements the teaching through the course materials. Therefore it is important to look at the extent to which the residential sessions model the approaches and attitudes described in the course materials. Both the English and Education sessions were observed during the April Residential block.

The following list of foci for observation was drawn up from the review of the course materials (content as well as teaching approaches) as well as the researchers' understanding of issues to consider in observation of classroom practice:

- organization of physical environment (emphasized in course materials mainly in relation to classroom communication and the use of group work);
- use of visual aids and equipment (dealt with particularly in the materials development course);
- objectives, purpose and structure of sessions (a major focus running through the assignments which require lesson planning and reflection on lessons);
- interaction, questioning, student participation and classroom atmosphere (dealt with throughout, but particularly in the Theory and Practice course);
- language (issues of exploratory talk, of multilingualism and multicultural approaches are foregrounded throughout the materials);
- extension of student's theoretical content knowledge and its relation to practice (this is clearly related to the goals of the programme and is a concern in all the courses);
- links with experience, with work in the other English courses, and future classroom practice (an integrated, experience-based and reflective approach to language teaching is a key feature in all the course materials);
- links between English and Education Studies courses (coherence across subjects in the programme can only lead to increased impact of each subject individually).

ASSESSMENT

Assessment design, support and quality assurance were selected as key aspects of assessment to consider. The rationale for this was as follows:

If you do not design assessment properly, students will not achieve what you want them to achieve. If you do not support students adequately, they will not achieve what you want them to achieve. If you do not have effective quality assurance procedures in assignment marking and management, some students will achieve what you want them to achieve, and some will not.

The research focused on the assessment design and support in the English courses. With regard to quality assurance, the approach adopted in the Education courses was discussed.

In terms of this programme which aims `to develop in schools quality learning and teaching relevant to a changing South Africa' and `to extend students' subject teaching knowledge and skills', it is clear that there should be some assessment of the performance of students and their learners in schools. However, this is not feasible for the programme at the moment, even though there is a vision for it. What is interesting is to see how the assessment in this programme has been designed to achieve the classroom and school-based goals even though the lecturers/tutors do not actually visit their students in the schools.

The following questions were asked about assessment on this programme:
- Is the assessment *designed* in such a way that it contributes to the achievement of the programme goals, mastery of the course content, and development of broad abilities both in terms of the product expected and in terms of the process students go through to achieve that product?
- Are the students supported to achieve assessment requirements through clear instructions and criteria, and scaffolding and support in the achievement of the tasks?
- Is the *commenting on assignments* an effective means of extending the teaching on the course and providing supportive formative feedback?
- Do the *quality assurance processes* ensure that the marking is fair and reliable? Are there mechanisms in place to ensure that the turnaround time on assignments is kept to a minimum?

STUDENT SUPPORT

Effective student support is critical for the success of an educational programme, particularly one where there is considerable work done by students independently at a distance. The Wits Further Diploma is designed as a mixed mode programme with seven residential sessions over the two years because there is a recognition that students need considerable support and cannot be expected simply to engage with the course materials and assessment on their own.

Support should motivate and encourage learners as well as help to combat feelings of isolation. The main structures provided for student support in the FDE are:

- compulsory residential blocks;
- peer support;
- voluntary mid-cycle workshops;
- telephone support;
- individual face-to-face consultation with lecturers and tutors;
- feedback on assignments (dealt with under assessment).

Each of these is investigated in the research in terms of the extent to which the students make use of it, as well as in terms of how they value it.

A further dimension of support that should ideally be in place in a teacher

A further dimension of support that should ideally be in place in a teacher development programme is support for teachers in their own schools. Although this programme has a plan for providing support in schools, it has not been possible to implement it because of financial constraints.

Chapter Three

Course Materials

INTRODUCTION

Although the Wits Further Diploma in Education programme is mixed mode rather than distance education, the course materials are the main means whereby the curriculum is communicated. If the programme is to have an impact on classroom practice, it is essential that the teaching in the course materials is sound and the content likely to inspire good classroom practice and reflection on classroom experience. However, although necessary, this is not sufficient. To ensure impact, the students need to be motivated to study the materials, see the relevance of the content to how they teach and think about teaching, and use the approaches either directly or indirectly in their classrooms. The materials have therefore been examined in three ways:

- expert review to determine teaching effectiveness and content relevance;
- survey of student opinion and extent of use of materials directed to some extent by the findings of expert review;
- interviews of the sample of six students to provide more detailed information about the trends in student opinion and use of materials discovered through the survey.

This chapter will look mainly at the course materials for the Theory and Practice Course, with some reference to the other English course materials, as well as the extent to which the course materials are aligned with the programme goals.

The Theory and Practice of English Language Teaching course is regarded as central as it provides the theoretical and practical framework for the improvement of English teaching classroom practice which is the focus of our research into this particular programme.

EXPERT REVIEW

The categories for review were drawn from a variety of distance education sources. One of the main sources consulted was *Criteria for Judging Open and Distance Learning in Teacher Education,* a section in the Teacher Audit[1] in which criteria originally drawn up by Bob Moon of the Open University were amended by the team of course reviewers employed by SAIDE.

---

[1] SAIDE, 1995, *Teacher Education Offered at a Distance in South Africa,* Braamfontein: SAIDE, p. 407

The main categories for these criteria were: clarity of purpose, objectives within overall purpose, exploiting student knowledge and experience of schools and teaching, accuracy of text and up-to-date citation of contemporary research/ scholarship, course use of students' entry competence in subject matter, text style, instructional design, materials design, activities, assessment strategy, appropriate use of audio-visual media.

The second major source was a Self-instructional Course Materials Evaluation Sheet initially prepared by SAIDE in 1994 from a variety of international references, and revised at least three times by participants in SAIDE's regular materials development workshops. The major categories in this evaluation sheet are: introduction to the unit/section, learning outcomes, assessment, presentation of content, activities, feedback to learners, learning skills, language level, access devices, visual aids.

What follows is a description of the kinds of features that were looked for in the English course materials.

Orientation to programme, introductions, aims & learning outcomes

This category for review is about the way that clear and relevant information can motivate and direct students effectively in their study. Students need to understand from the outset the requirements of the various courses in the programme. As adult learners, they need to be motivated by relevant introductions and overviews within each individual course. They also need to be clear about what they have to achieve in each unit and these aims and learning outcomes should be consistent with the goals of the programme.

Selection and coherence of content

What is at issue here is rigour, interest and relevance. The content should be well-researched, up-to-date and relevant to the South African context. The students should also be able to see how the content is related to the learning outcomes and goals of the programme. Coherence is also important. If the courses in a programme are contradictory or unrelated to each other, the impact of the programme will be considerably lessened.

Presentation of content

This is to do with how the content is taught. There is no one `right' way to teach content - it will vary according to the subject and the audience. However, there are certain pointers for a reviewer. These include, clear explanation of concepts and a range of examples, as well as sufficient and appropriate ways for students to process new concepts, rather than merely learn them off by heart.

View of knowledge and use of students' experience

In the South African context, where rote learning and authoritarian views of knowledge have been the norm, particular attention needs to be paid to the way knowledge is presented. The perspective of this reviewer is that knowledge should be presented as open and constructed in contexts, rather than merely received in a fixed form from authorities. Students should be given opportunities to interrogate what they

read, and their prior knowledge and experience should be valued and used in the development of new ideas and practices. Frequent opportunities and motivation for application of knowledge and skills in the classroom should be provided, but this should be done in a reflective rather than mechanical way.

Activities and Feedback

A major strategy for effective teaching in course materials is the provision of a range of activities and strategies to encourage students to engage with the content. If feedback or commentary on these activities is provided by the course writer, then students will be able to have a written version of the experience of discussion that takes place in lively classrooms. Furthermore, because students work through the materials on their own, they need some means of assessing their own progress. Comments on the activities in the materials can help to do this.

Language

Aside from the obvious importance of clear, coherent language at an appropriate level for the students, the kind of style that is used is crucial. The style can alienate or patronize the reader, or it can help to create a constructive learning relationship with the reader. Style needs to be judged in terms of specific audience and purpose, and so a standard set of criteria is not useful. However, it is always helpful if new concepts and terms are explained and jargon is kept to a minimum.

Layout and accessibility

Effective layout maintains a creative tension between consistency and variety. It is important that students are able to find their way through the various units and sections by the provision of contents pages, concept maps, heading, subheadings, statements of aims and learning outcomes, and other access devices. The text also needs to be broken up into reasonable chunks, and the layout should assist the logical flow of ideas. At the same time, a very predictable format can lead to boredom. A good way of introducing variety is through the use of visual material such as concept maps, pictures and diagrams. This has the added advantage of catering for learners who learn best through visual representations of ideas. Where appropriate, concept maps, pictures and diagrams should be included.

What follows is a review of the effectiveness of the English course materials in terms of the above categories.

ORIENTATION TO THE PROGRAMME, INTRODUCTIONS, AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Orientation of the students to the programme as a whole before the first residential sessions is by means of the booklet `An Introduction to the Further Diploma in Education' which contains clearly written orientation material for both the specialization and Education courses in the Diploma. An important feature of this orientation is that it requires the students to do an assignment in both the Education and specialist courses. This is useful in that it engages the students immediately with the approach and requirements of the courses in the programme, provides them with formative feedback so that they can assess early on without wasting time what they need to do to succeed in the programme, and also provides the course coordinators

valuable information about the level, capacity, and backgrounds of the students on the programme.

As far as the individual English courses are concerned, care is taken in the general introductions to the courses that the students understand the approach that they need to take to studying the courses, and not merely the kind of content that they need to master. For example, in the Theory and Practice course, the course writer advises keeping a personal/professional journal, and in Reading and Writing for Personal and Professional Growth course, there are `suggestions to guide you through this unit' which include for example, `practice', `working with a study partner', `activities', `reading and writing', `keep a notebook or a journal' as well as an outline of assessment requirements. In other of the English courses, an introduction to the content is regarded as most important, either in the form of an introduction to key terms or to the approach to the content.

Course goals/aims are also present in the general introductions to the courses - with the notable exception of the Theory and Practice course (where it would seem to be most important as it is the introductory and fundamental course). The course goals are clearly related to the overall programme goals - they refer to improving students' knowledge and use of English as a language, theory and practice of language teaching, as well as improvement of students' teaching skills. In various ways they relate to goals of developing reflective practitioners, encouraging classroom and school-based research, enabling and fostering collegial and co-operative ways of working amongst teachers. Examples include:

• `explore and develop your creative writing skills' (improving knowledge and use of English as a language in the Reading and Writing for Personal and Professional Growth course);

• `supporting you through the various stages of a small scale research project'; (encouraging classroom and school-based research in the Researching our Language Classrooms course);

• `develop strategies for meeting the syllabus requirement of teaching grammar `in context' (improvement of students' teaching skills in the Grammar course).

What is missing in the general introductions to the courses is a clear sense of the outcomes that learners need to be able to demonstrate by the end of the course. Many of the goals are easily translatable into learning outcomes, but in some cases (for example, the Reading and Writing for Personal and Professional Growth course) they would amount to a `wish list', rather than a statement of the necessary on the basis of which summative assessment will be designed.

The courses are all extremely rich and broad - particularly the Theory and Practice course - and so students do need guidance as to how they are being expected to develop through the course, and on the basis of what learning outcomes they will be assessed. The phrasing of some of the statements of goals (`The goal of the course is *to provide you with opportunities* to extend your knowledge and skills as/in:) should

not be lost. It is an open invitation to development. But more general goal statements need to be supplemented with more precise learning outcome statements. [2]

A related issue is that the English courses do not provide any indications to students as to how much time it will take to meet the requirements of the course, or even to work through the materials. This is a particular strength of the Education courses in the programme, and perhaps there should be some sharing of the methodology for determining learner workload.

At the micro level, one of the most important purposes of a good introduction to a section is to provide the learner with a motivation to engage with the material presented. From the introduction to a unit or section, the distance learner should be able to answer the question `Why do I want to know about/learn this?' in ways that make sense for a person who is very busy working at the same time as studying. The English course materials have a clear practical focus, and students can usually see their relevance immediately, but in certain circumstances there is need for motivation to read a particular section. For example, when the theories of language learning and acquisition are dealt with in Unit One of the Theory and Practice course, the students are motivated by the clear link created between introductory assignment and the goal to establish `possible relationships between these theories and approaches and your classroom teaching and learning situations'. However, in Unit Three, the reason for inclusion of much of the material is not immediately clear to the student. She may well ask why must she as a teacher should worry about literacy in home and the community as well as the school, or why she as a secondary school teacher should worry about literacy, which presumably must have been dealt with in primary school? The Unit plunges straight from goals into a discussion of meanings of literacy, a fairly abstract set of ideas.

SELECTION AND COHERENCE OF CONTENT

The titles of the English courses provided in the programme description give an indication that they are designed to fulfil the programme goals of equipping teachers with increased subject and pedagogical knowledge, increased professional expertise, and increased ability to succeed in academic settings (hence the emphasis on research). This concern with both professional expertise, development of both pedagogical subject knowledge and skills, and development of generic academic skills is in line both with emerging norms and standards for teacher education, the integrating critical outcomes of the NQF, and the movement both abroad and in this country to describe and develop key skills for higher education.

---

[2]The University of Natal definition of learning outcome is particularly useful:

> A learning outcome is the end product of a learning process - the learning result that one intends to achieve by the end of the learning process. A learning outcome is therefore a clear statement of what the learner will be able to:
> - know and understand (content knowledge - knowing that, concepts and theories - knowing why)
> - do (skills and competencies - knowing how)
> - and what attitudes and values he/she may hold
>
> *(Guidelines for Programme Design, Specification, Approval and 2egisiration,* University of Natal, 1998)

Compulsory courses:

1. Theory and practice of English teaching,

Course focus: Comparing theories of language learning and teaching; teachers' and learners' roles; teaching and learning activities and materials.

2. Grammar in the language classroom;

Course focus: Understanding grammar, grammar and meaning making, debating the significance of grammar in language learning; examining approaches to teaching grammar.

Electives:

1. A choice between Literature In The Language Classroom *or* Reading And Writing For Personal And Professional Growth
2. A choice between Researching Our Language Classrooms *or* Developing English Teaching And Learning Materials.

The content has been well-researched, and is up-to-date as well as contextualized. A thorough and comprehensive list of references appears at the end of each Unit, and the references have actually been used in the Unit.

The 'up-to-dateness' can be illustrated by reference to Unit Three of the Theory and Practice course entitled `Literacy Practices inside and Outside the Classroom'. This chapter draws on recent work of researchers in Britain (eg David Barton and Brian Street), Australia (e.g. Janet Maybin and B. Derewianka), the United States (Shirley Bryce Heath), and South Africa (e.g. Hilary Janks and Carol Macdonald) and contextualizes it for teachers with African and South African examples (eg by South African `literacy' photographs produced by the READ organization, and by South African case studies of literacy practices). Moreover, students are asked to contribute to the contextualization of the chapter by an assignment which requires them to write an autobiography of their own literacy practices, as well as do research on the literacy practices of the students in their classes.

The range of sources listed at the end of each unit provides a who's who of progressive language education in South Africa as well as internationally. Progressive work of South African NGOs is not only acknowledged and used alongside that of academics, but allowed to inform the very fabric of the course. Examples are:

•   the use of stories as a method not only of learning language but of engaging with principles, approaches, and ideas (see the many stories used in the Researching Our Language Classrooms course, as well as the space given to the `Tell an Old Story' project, and to the workshopping process that led to Patricia Watson's graphic story Heart to Heart developed by the Storyteller Group);
• the importance of an awareness and use of the rich language resources in multilingual classes (see the work of the language teaching NGO, Eltic, and the use as a textbook in the Theory and Practice Course a book produced by Eltic called Diteme Tsa Thuto: Activities for Multilingual Classrooms);
•   the importance not only of teachers developing their own materials but also of learners making resources from which they can learn (see the materials development work of the NGOs ELET, as well as READ's `Big Book' approach)

- the integration of visual literacy into language teaching (see the emphasis on this in Level Best by Pippa Stein and Emilia Potenza, the textbook set for the Theory and Practice course);
- the importance not only of knowledge of English grammar, but also of critical language awareness (see the work of Hilary Janks in the Critical Language Awareness Series).

An important concern with regard to content is the extent of coherence within and between courses in the programme. The potential impact of one particular course on classroom practice will be considerably strengthened if the outcomes, content and assessment in the other courses in the programme support the same approaches and develop them in different ways.

Coherence across the English courses is achieved by the establishment of the first course, Theory and Practice of English Language Teaching, as the central course. It provides an introduction to all the major issues in language teaching which the other courses take up in greater depth. For example, the Theory and Practice course introduces the idea through activities and assignments of reflective practice - not only designing and implementing a learning experience, but reflecting on its success to influence future designs. This approach is addressed much more thoroughly in the course on Researching Our Language Classrooms. Similarly, in the Theory and Practice course the principle of getting learners actively involved in the lesson is developed a lot further in the course on Developing English Teaching and Learning Materials. In the course on Reading and Writing for Personal and Professional Growth students acquire an in depth understanding of reading and writing which has been dealt with one of the units in Theory and Practice. The course coordinator worked with the materials writer to reshape a reading and writing course developed by the Teachers' English Language Improvement Project (TELIP) for in-service purposes. Finally, throughout the Literature in the Language Classroom course there are explicit links made with the Theory and Practice course, because the writer had both the Theory and Practice and the Grammar course to consult and to make reference to.

Not only is there coherence between the various English courses, there is also coherence between the English and Education courses. There has been an effort to allow particularly the Curriculum Course in Education to provide much of the theory about learner-centred education and constructivist methods on which the Theory and Practice courses in the specializations of Maths, Science and English can build. [3] The English course coordinator was therefore able to focus on English specific work and leave the general work to the education course. For example, the English Theory and Practice course starts off with theories of English language learning, and it deals with behaviourism, innatist theories and interactionist theories of language learning. The Curriculum course deals more generally with behaviourism and constructivism. However, in the opinion of the Education Course Coordinator, even *though* links have been written in by both Education and English writers, this could be done more systematically.

[3] Interview with Karin Brodie, April 1998

PRESENTATION OF CONTENT

Presentation of content could also be termed `teaching approach'. It is important that ways are found to encourage students to engage with the material actively, rather than merely reading it passively. Ways of presenting the content are slightly different for each of the individual units and courses, because each course has slightly different requirements. However, common strengths are:

Use of a range of rich examples, both to help students understand the concepts and to provide activities for them to try out in the classroom.

The examples come from many different sources, and the inclusion of these different `voices' allows students to understand the issues from more than one point of view and in more than one way. For example, Unit Two of the Theory and Practice Course does not only define Allwright's five aspects of classroom interaction management; it provides a description of each aspect as it relates to a transcript of a lesson. In order to help students deepen their understanding of classroom interaction the writer provides two further transcripts and a summary.

The examples are not only there to help students understand concepts. There are also examples of related activities for students to try out in their classrooms. In Unit Two of the Theory and Practice course, for example, there are three sample group work lessons, a classroom activity focussing on questioning, a classroom activity to encourage talk, and then nearly 50 pages of examples of lessons from a variety of sources which encourage the development of listening and speaking skills. The list of sources at the end of Unit Two has 21 entries.

The telling of stories as a way of presenting and illustrating theory.

The telling of stories is not only a theme which runs through all the courses but also a method by which ideas are communicated. Students are encouraged to use stories in the classroom because, for example:

> they can teach people how to communicate, how to make themselves clear;
> they can teach people to respect those who think and behave differently from
> the way they behave. (Unit Four, Theory and Practice, p.283)

In the course materials, the writers, where appropriate, take their own advice, and use stories for teaching purposes.

This is noticeable in the course on Developing English Teaching and Learning Materials where the entire introductory section dealing with criteria for approaches to materials development is done by means of four interviews with materials developers. Activities help students engage with central issues in these interviews and relate them to their own contexts and experience, and when technical aspects of materials development are referred to later in the course, there is frequent reference back to these `stories'.

A recursive, process approach to the development of the ideas in a course.

Often writers of distance materials present content in a linear way, and assume that students can come to grips with difficult concepts one by one and then write them off. The writers of these materials help students understand by returning to the same ideas many times in different ways. They encourage students to interact with case studies, to

talk to each other and work cooperatively, to do activities which help them analyze concepts and apply them to their own experience or practice.

In the Researching Our Language Classrooms course, for example, action research is dealt with initially in story form (examples of action research projects), then in terms of definition, then in terms of process, then in terms of techniques, and then in terms of reporting. Each different angle on action research provided students with additional opportunities to understand the topic more deeply.

Building of essential skills.

In recognition of the fact that success with distance education courses relies to a very large extent on ability to read, the writers of the English course materials devote a lot of time to helping students develop critical reading skills. (This is done even more extensively in the Education Studies courses).

For example, on p 72 of the Theory and Practice course there is an activity which encourages students to,

put a tick (,/) next to the points that you agree with; a cross (X) next to any that you disagree with: a questions mark (?) next to any that you are uncertain about or don't fully understand. When you meet with your study partner, discuss all the points you have marked.

VIEW OF KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE

One of the strengths of these course materials is the understanding they reflect of the contexts and capabilities of the students for whom they are intended, and the respect with which the students' personal and professional experience is treated. From the first assignment, it is clear that the stories the students have to tell are important and form the basis for the development of their understanding of the course content.

Throughout the course materials, activities require students not only to draw on previous knowledge and experience but to create and reflect on new experiences. Students are asked to describe their own experience (for example their language biographies) as a basis for theoretical discussions (for example on theories of language learning and acquisition). Students are asked discuss how their own experience can be explained in terns of theory (for example, `Use your own experiences of developing language knowledge and teaching languages to give examples of learning and of acquisition as these terms are used by Krashen'). They are told stories that could reflect their own contexts and experiences as a trigger to finding ways to think about their own experience (as in Researching Our Language Classrooms when stories are told of problems other English teachers researched). They are asked to share understanding and experience with their study partner. They are asked to observe each other's lessons, so that they have a common experience on which to reflect together. They are asked to assess sample activities in the light of their experience of the level and interests of their own class (as in the Developing English Teaching and Learning Materials course). In other words experience is not seen as a static thing - something you have had - but something you are continually having and need to be thinking about in new ways all the time.

The range of sources and the range of voices used facilitates the students' understanding

The range of sources and the range of voices used facilitates the students' understanding that knowledge is open and constructed in contexts, rather than merely received in a fixed form from authorities. In addition, different theories are presented in terms of their strengths and weaknesses in representing reality, rather than as either wrong or right. For example, instead of a condemnation of behaviourist theories of language learning, the aspects of language learning that they do account for (for example, routine aspects such as greetings) are illustrated. This encourages students not to develop stereotypes, or to slip into the polarization of traditional practice and `O.B.E.' which is so common in the mass teacher development efforts around Curriculum 2005 at the moment.

In addition, instead of being presented with different views and then being asked to decide between them, much more nuanced activities are set. For example, students are asked first to think about their own language learning experience in childhood in a structured way with their Study partners before being asked,

On the basis of your answers to these questions do you agree or disagree with the theorists who stress the importance of caretaker talk and of interaction between caretaker and young child? (Theory and Practice, p. 12)

In other words, interrogation o£ theory is required, but on the basis of something concrete, rather than merely as an academic exercise which could be learned by rote.

An interesting perspective on the issue of presenting knowledge in an open way was revealed in the interview with the English coordinator. One of the aims of higher education is that students should learn to be critical and develop their own views on the issues they learn about. At the same time, the course writers need to push the students to consider limitations in their traditional practice and to explore new ideas. This often involves deliberately positioning the students, rather than allowing them to position themselves. On selected issues - such as that of code-switching - the English course writer made a strenuous effort to help students develop their own position, but in some of the less apparently debatable issues this proved more difficult. What is difficult in materials is often easier face-to-face, and increasingly as the year proceeded the course coordinator used the residential sessions to signal to students that it is acceptable and even desirable to have different positions on a topic.

ACTIVITIES AND FEEDBACK

As has already been discussed, the range of activities in the materials is extremely wide and the activities help the students engage with the content, rather than merely passively letting it flow over them.

Some activities require individual work, but many encourage consultation with the students' study partner. This appears to be a mechanism used by writers to help students develop a way of working through the material collaboratively, and overcoming some of the isolation of distance study. For example,

Either on your own or with your study partner, try to develop a table similar to the one above, in which you write your own examples of lower, middle and higher order questions and of closed and open questions. (p. 86 Theory and Practice)

The peer support system is discussed at length in the chapter on student support.

However, there is a query about whether or not students will actually take the time to do

However, there is a query about whether or not students will actually take the time to do a fairly complicated exercise like this (especially since they will not be certain whether or not they are `getting it right'). Writers of distance education materials need to develop strategies to encourage students to engage with the activities.

In the courses developed subsequent to the Theory and Practice course, deliberate strategies are adopted to encourage students to work through the activities. In the Developing English Teaching and Learning Materials course, the first assignment requires students to work through a series of questions in the activities related to four interviews with materials developers. This compels students to acquire an overview of the theory and practice of materials development and relate it to their own experience, before going into the detail of the subsequent units. A similar approach is adopted in the Researching Our Language Classrooms course. In Reading and Writing for Personal and Professional Growth, students are required to hand in a portfolio of the writing done during the year as an examination equivalent assignment. The students are motivated to do the activities, because many of the activities are for portfolio, and those that are not for direct inclusion are related to portfolio activities in some way - for example, editing for content, structure and grammar.

Generally students are supported in the cumulative development of the required competence and the performance of assessment tasks through the kinds of activities that are set. A particularly good example is in the Researching Our Language Classrooms activities, which move from engagement with Action Research stories in the first assignment (ten activity questions), to a series of activities designed to encourage students to select the research they would like to do for the assignment, the methods they would use to collect and analyze data. This leads to the research assignment on which oral reporting is required at the Residential workshop, which in turn this leads to activities relating to writing a final report, followed by the submission of the research report as the examination equivalent assignment. It is quite clearly a cumulative developmental process, with opportunity for peer and tutor feedback.

It is not only activities that play an important part in ensuring active engagement with distance learning materials: it is also the feedback that students receive on their attempts to work through the activities. The purpose of activities and feedback is to create a sense of the to and fro of classroom interaction and face-to-face discussion even when students are reading on their own. If feedback is missing, then it is as if student comments or responses are unacknowledged and left hanging. It is also important that students learn through the materials to assess their own progress: the ability to do this is essential for independent learning.

In these courses there is generally no written feedback provided on activities within the materials (the exception being certain of the activities in the Reading and Writing for Personal and Professional Growth course). Furthermore, there are no self assessment questions or tests, and beyond reading the summaries at the end of the units there does not seem to be any way *within the materials themselves* that students can assess their own progress. The encouragement to work with each other on activities and assignments is a strategy for getting feedback, but this has its limitations

particularly if a student happens to have a partner who cannot engage at a very deep level.

particularly if a student happens to have a partner who cannot engage at a very deep level. Of course, some of the activities are incorporated into the assignments, and these receive extensive feedback from tutors. However, tutor-marked assignments do not adequately develop the ability of the students to assess themselves. It is recommended that the course writers think of further ways in which students can reflect on and assess their own progress in getting to grips with the ideas in the materials.

LANGUAGE

The assessment of language level in course materials is a complex task, and this review will not go into the technical complexities of syntax, cohesion, coherence and text structure. However, reference will merely be made later in this chapter to the students' perceptions of the appropriateness of the language level.

One issue that needs special mentioning is the way `difficult vocabulary' has been treated. These course materials appear to have a coordinated and effective way of dealing with vocabulary. The number of technical terms is kept to a minimum, so that really interesting distinctions (such as the difference between materials and resources, and between activity sheets and worksheets) can be explored thoroughly. There is not simply a reliance on glossary (although that is present in some units), there is also

- in-text unpacking of concepts;
- a `guess before you read' approach to unfamiliar terminology; and
- brief indications of the meanings of unfamiliar words in brackets so that learners do not have to interrupt the flow of their reading to remind themselves what certain words mean.

Another important aspect in writing for distance learners is how language is used to create a relationship with the learner. The language used needs to be friendly, informal and welcoming, but the students should not patronized or `talked down to'. As has been pointed out and will be pointed out in most of the chapters of this report, one of the strengths of this programme is the enormous respect with which the students are treated. Right from the beginning in the introduction to Unit One of the Theory and Practice course, students are credited with knowledge and understanding,

> As you will know from your previous experiences of studying and from discussing the subject with colleagues and with your students, there are several different ways in which students can work through a course of study. ...(p. 1 Theory and Practice)

The tone is informal - personal pronouns are used - but professionalism is maintained - reference to colleagues and students. Furthermore it is not assumed that students will automatically benefit from every strategy that is offered, or have the same difficulties as each other (my italics):

- You may find that you gain a greater understanding ... p.2
- In what ways, *if any,* do the two words ... [my italics] ... p.6
- Make a few notes on what *(if anything)* was difficult for you ... p.225
- While you are reading the descriptions [of traditional instruction and communicative

- While you are reading the descriptions [of traditional instruction and communicative language teaching], think about which parts of the descriptions apply to your classroom. You *may fend that yours is a `mixture' of the two types'*. .. p. 15
- If as a teacher you work with students in only one of the four phases, you *may not be* familiar with the requirements of other phases of the syllabus .. p. 52

The writers include themselves as colleagues in the language teaching profession, and do not write in a way that insists that the students regard them as superior authorities. One particularly good example is a preface to a short reading consisting of the extracts from three writers on literacy - Barton, Ivanic and Hamilton,

> Some of Barton's points are followed by my continents or interpretations. This means that you are reading a text which includes ideas, interpretations and commentaries from four writers: Ros Ivanic, Mary Hamilton, David Barton and Yvonne Reed (though I hasten to add that I am not a published author and have not conducted extensive research into literacy practices a rave the first three writers). While you are reading I invite you to write your o n ideas, interpretations and commentaries on some of all of the points made. When you do this, you will become the fifth writer! (p. 174 Theory and Practice).

The sensitivity to learners also extends into choice of terminology. The terms `main language', `additional language', `language of choice' and `target language' are chosen instead of `first language', `second language', `home language', `mother tongue' and `native language' because the latter set of terms was devised by writers based in a context in which most people are monolingual or at best, bilingual. The writers of this course want to acknowledge and value the multilingual language ability of their students. They do not wish to imply that they are second best, second rate *second* language learners who could not ever become as proficient in English as *first* language learners.

LAYOUT AND ACCESSIBILITY

The many references, the many different sources used, and the many examples in these materials make it imperative that appropriate layout and access devices are used to ensure readability of the text. Use of language at the appropriate level is insufficient if students cannot get an overview of the text, cannot find which sections of the text they need for particular purposes, and cannot refer back and forward easily. There are a number of devices that help to make the content and structure of a text more accessible to students who are studying independently. Words in a text do not necessarily have to be read one at a time in a certain order. Access devices can help individual students escape from what Fred Lockwood calls `the constraining linearity of text', and approach the same text with different purposes on different occasions - to preview, to skim-read, to use for revision, to refer to for a specific point.

There can be excellent activities, wonderful use of students' experience, excellent examples of lessons they could try out in the classroom, a logical development of ideas with a range of examples to help students get to grips with concepts. But if they are presented in an inaccessible way, students will find it difficult to make sense of how they fit together, and could end up with a somewhat lopsided or fragmented notion of what is in the text. Then the students will have to rely on the residential

sessions to get a sense of the direction of the course, and will tend to engage with the

sessions to get a sense of the direction of the course, and will tend to engage with the content only as it relates to the assessment. Even then, weaker students will not discover all there is in the text that could help them engage with the assessment. Accessibility includes the use of various access devices such as contents pages, headings, icons, etc) and the layout - the way the text (of whatever kind whether visual or verbal) is arranged on the page.

Features in the course materials which enhance accessibility:

• There are contents pages for each course with numbered sections (although the numbering of the first unit of the Theory and Practice course is not consistent with the rest).
• Extracts from other sources are boxed, shaded and clearly referenced.
• Activities are boxed and indicated by means of heading and icon (although differentiation between icon signalling individual activity and icon signifying work with partner is not particularly useful).
• The text is broken up into reasonable pieces with plenty of variety in approach (with the exception of Unit Three in the Theory and Practice course, where students in one place are asked to work through nearly five pages of text p.174 - 179 without a break for an activity or diagram)
• There are summaries, references and assignments at the end of each Unit (but the positioning of these elements semis irregular and it is often difficult to find the summary which seems to be lost in the rest of the information).

Features which hinder accessibility are mostly found in the first course, Theory and Practice. Many of the points mentioned below have been remedied in the later courses.

• Headings are very inconsistent within courses and even within individual units and are not helpful in distinguishing different sections. They are often too similar to each other and to other bold parts of the text which are not headings. Some examples are: in Unit Three of Theory and Practice a bold 12 point sanserif is used for second level headings, for bullet point listing within sections, for headings of various extracts from other books within sections, for the text of activities, and also for in text emphasis of words and phrases; in Unit Two first level headings are in bold upper case, but one or two second level headings are also in bold upper case, while others are in sentence case; in Unit Two the heading for assignments is at least 2 points larger than the first level headings.

• Sometimes the headings are not very informative. What the headings should do is provide a kind of summary of the content of the unit, and in this way act as an access device to the content. Whereas Unit 3 is a good example (particularly 3.6 which has headings such as Attempting to define what reading is; Learning to read - a lifelong process; Beginning to read'; Stimulating and supporting beginner

readers; Learning to read in an additional language; From learning to read to reading to

readers; Learning to read in an additional language; From learning to read to reading to learn), sections of some of the other units need attention badly. (For example, section 5 in Unit One `Working with transcripts' has the following headings: Transcript One, Transcript Two, Transcript Three, Code Switching and code mixing in the classroom, Transcript Four, Transcript Five, arguments for and against code switching, Contexts of additional/target language teaching.)

- The numbering in the activities is inconsistent - sometimes a, b and c is used, sometimes bullet points, sometimes numbering, sometimes nothing.
- There are apparently unmotivated changes in font (quotations in boxes sometime appear in sanserif bold, sometimes in sanserif italic bold, sometimes in serif bold, sometimes in a mixture of serif bold and normal).
- There is lack of consistency in the way that assignments are placed in the units - in the worst case they appear as various choices throughout Unit Two (although there is a summary with page references at the end of Unit Two, and the assignments are listed in the contents page as well).
- In some cases (e.g. Theory and Practice), there is a lack of orientation to the overall assessment for the course in the general introduction. The appearance of individual assignments within the units is therefore unmotivated.
- There are puzzling features like dotted boxes (for the glossary at the end of Unit One) which appear for other purposes later on in the course (to advertise the contact details of the Tell An Old Story Project; to contain copy of Interim Core Syllabus which is elsewhere in a shaded box).
- Original pages (e.g. of classroom activities) from a variety of sources are included with insufficient standardization of borders and sizes, so that the pages look inconsistent and messy and   interfere seriously with the flow of the surrounding text.
- The margins are inconsistent - sometimes they are broad enough, sometimes they are not, and there does not seem to be a policy for how they will be used aside from positioning the icons. When original pages from other sources are scanned in there is no regard for the margins at all.

One of the points about accessibility of the materials that is raised in the quote from Fred Lockwood at the beginning of this section is that access devices are necessary to help students get an overview of what they are learning. In addition, however, the point must be made that while some students learn best from the words on the page, others learn best through pictures and diagrams. Pippa Stein, in the interview recorded with her in the *Developing English Learning and Teaching Materials* Course, makes some good points about the importance of making materials visual:

I think the use of visuals and the teaching of visual communication are essential. All learning materials should be visual. They should include photos, drawings, cartoons or images because we live in a highly visual world and are becoming more and more sophisticated at reading and making images. (p.9)

The writers of the English course materials have, through the inclusion of many visually

The writers of the English course materials have, through the inclusion of many visually appealing examples from different sources, to some extent made possible visual learning. There are also a few diagrams and photographs included to assist the learners in understanding concepts (see the Verb Wheel in the Grammar course, the attempt at drawing a concept map in the Reading and Writing for Personal and Professional Growth course, and the literacy photographs in the Theory and Practice course). But the dominant mode in the materials is the verbal. Much more creative attention needs to be paid to how ideas can be conveyed visually, and how the visual and complement the verbal.

A final point needs to be made about layout and accessibility as this relates to the packaging of the materials. This reviewer found it extremely frustrating to work with a cumbersome file (for the Theory and Practice and Grammar Courses), in which the ring binder inevitably starts to give trouble, and pages start falling out. The bound single booklets of the later courses are much more manageable.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

It would appear that the major areas of strength in the materials are:

- up-to-date, contextualized content at the correct level for the students, and coherence across the different courses in the programme;
- explanation of concepts in accessible ways, with plenty of examples provided;
- an open view of knowledge, encouragement of debate, and use of students' experience;
- range of relevant activities used;
- accessible language and good relationship created with the reader. The areas which need some attention are:

1. making learning outcomes clear for the students so that their attention is focused on what they need to achieve in each unit;
2. provision of notional learning hours;
3. developing strategies across all the courses to motivate the students to complete the activities;
4. provision of feedback on activities and ways to help students to assess their own progress in getting to grips with the materials;
5. accessibility of the materials so that students can get an overview of what each unit contains and can find their way easily through the materials;
6. increased emphasis on visual ways of communicating ideas;
7. packaging of material in more user-friendly ways.

STUDENT OPINION AND EXPERIENCE

In eliciting student opinion and experience of the materials, it was necessary first of all to establish the amount of the material that students actually read. One cannot draw any conclusions about the success or otherwise of the materials in communicating the curriculum or affecting classroom practice without knowing the extent of use of materials. A related issue is whether or not the students actually do the activities designed to help them interact with the text.

Secondly it was important to see whether the kinds of problems highlighted by the

Secondly it was important to see whether the kinds of problems highlighted by the expert review were problems as far as the students were concerned. Questions were therefore asked (though indirectly) about:
- learning outcomes,
- layout and accessibility,
- opportunity for self-assessment.

The researchers decided not to try to work out how much time students spend studying a particular course. The students completed the Theory and Practice course in November 1997, and it is unlikely that they would be able to indicate reliably how much time they spent on a course they had completed eight months previously.

Thirdly, it was important to try to assess the extent of difficulty the students have in understanding the material - the level, and in particular, the language level. This cannot easily be established by expert review.

Fourthly, the major aim of the research is to establish transfer - the extent to which the ideas and approaches recommended and modelled in the materials are used in the classroom. Therefore, students were asked about their experience of using these ideas and approaches in the classroom.

STUDENT USE OF MATERIALS

Course coordinators' view

The English coordinator reported that although she has no reliable information from the students on the extent to which they use the materials, she can tell to some extent whether students use the materials from what they look like - whether the materials are well-fingered and written in. Students tend not to read the materials if they are not required for the assignments or if they are not required to submit portfolio activities. However, students say that when the course is finished they will go back to the materials and use them in the classroom.

These opinions of the course coordinator were tested in the survey and interviews with students.

Findings of survey of student opinion

In answer to the question, `How much of the Theory and Practice and Grammar course materials did you study?', students responded as follows:

All of it	25
Nearly all of it	7
More than half of it	7
About half of it	1
Less than half of it	0
None of it	0

Naturally, student opinion on this issue cannot be accepted as absolutely valid. However, what the response does indicate is commitment to reading all the materials. It was necessary to verify this by student interviews. Findings from individual interviews

Two methods were used in the interviews - looking at students' files to see how extensively they had been used; and asking students directly about use.

Of the students interviewed, four students had notes, highlighting, and other pencil or pen marks which indicated engagement with the course materials. One student had not brought her course materials for the evaluator to see and one student said that she didn't like to write in her file because she would like to use it later for her masters.

One student's file contained pencil marks on every page. These were either comments or underlining or dates (sometimes several different dates) on which he started or revised a particular section. There were also notes written from contact sessions. He had inserted in the relevant places in the file handouts of extra material provided at residentials and mid-cycle workshops. Some of the corners of the page were turned down, which indicated where he left off of an evening and came back the following day. The numbers of pages read ranged from one to five pages at a time. Everything was read and then revised at least once. Some parts were revised as many as four times. This student when asked to talk about the content under each heading of a particular unit, could describe main points clearly and spontaneously.

The other students had to think and refer to the materials to form an opinion in answer to a question about the content. Responses to the question `What were the best parts of the English courses last year?' demonstrated varying degrees of specificity:

1. Process writing approach and code-switching/code-mixing;
2. Working with transcripts and asking a colleague to observe and code-switching/code-mixing;
3. Reading;
4. Grammar course eg adverbials, pronouns;
5. Theory and Practice course (Grammar difficult) ;
6. No specific part of any of the courses mentioned.

The more engaged students were able to refer to two or three specific parts of a specific course, whereas the less engaged students referred to one of the two courses vaguely, or no specific course at all.

In a report on his experience of the FDE programme at a Teacher Education Seminar held at SAIDE at 24 August, one of the students said that he and other students keep their files with them at school so that they can use the material in them in their classroom. He also said that other teachers in the school want to borrow the files to use some of the lesson ideas.

With regard to whether or not students do the activities in the materials, the following emerged. One student said that he thought about them all, but only actually did an activity if it had a direct bearing on the assignment. Another student said that the assignments are grounded in the activities and classroom practice, therefore it would really be hard for one to write an assignment without having done the activity. This student also said that he tended to ignore the activities that simply say `think about' primarily because there is no way to test whether or not one actually thought about the activity.

Concluding comments

It appears that students read the course materials, but in varying amounts and with varying degrees of thoroughness. It also appears that unless activities are related to assignments, students tend not to do them. Finally, it is encouraging to note that students seem to continue reading the course materials even after the course is complete.

Indirectly, the se findings support the impression gained in the expert review that the materials are interesting, relevant, and likely to engage students.

STUDENT VIEWS OF LEARNING OUTCOMES, LAYOUT AND ACCESSIBILITY (INCLUDING PACKAGING, AND OPPORTUNITY FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT

It is very difficult to get responses on these issues from students. Two methods were chosen - the direct method, in the survey, and a more indirect method, in interviews. Findings of survey contrasted with findings from interviews

The respondents answered in the following ways to the questions relevant to this issue:

	Very	Fairly	Not at all
1. Is it easy to find your way around the English materials?	33	9	1
2. Do the introductions to each section explain clearly what you have to learn in that section?	38	5	0
6. When you have finished working through a section, is it easy for you to measure how successfully you have learnt what was required?	19	20	3

From this response, there appears to be nothing wrong with the accessibility of the materials, and students seem to know what is expected of them in each unit, although there is a little more doubt about whether the students feel that they can assess their own learning in the materials.

This contrasts with the findings not only of the expert review but also in the interviews, where the six students in the sample were asked specific questions about Unit Two of the Theory and Practice course. In the interviews:

- No students were able to find the main sections of the unit, though one student referred to the list of contents and index as well as highlighted passages (which he referred to as key points), and another to the introductions, the headers and footers.

- No students were able to point to a place in the unit which summarized what they had to learn in the unit, although one student pointed to certain highlighted key points dotted across the unit, and two students read excerpts from the Interim Core Syllabus which appears at the beginning of Unit Two.

- No students were able to indicate ways within the materials whereby they could assess how much they had learned in the unit. One student said he does it himself by making summaries and doing the activities, and another says she does it by applying the knowledge in the classroom - `it helps you to assess yourself as well as the learners'. Another student said he is unable to assess what he has learnt but this is made easier when working with a study partner.

Student comment on the packaging was also interesting. One student liked the file, because it was durable, easy to turn the pages (although the pages must be reinforced) and also because he was able to put his extra notes in it. Another said that the material was not well packaged. Too may pages had been fitted into the folder making it too bulky and uncomfortable to use. This student said he liked reading in bed but he couldn't read these course materials in bed because the folder was too big and `one get tired of holding it up'.

Concluding comment

On the one hand the evidence cited above points to lack of student expertise in handling course material, and on the other, it points to œrtain deficiencies in the materials themselves.

Students do not have sufficient skill in engagement with written course materials. They do not know sufficiently well how to look for what they must learn in the materials, and they do not use the full range of strategies at their disposal to find their way around the materials. Even though they claim to be able to find their way around the materials easily, when actually asked to do so, they tend to fumble.

As far as the materials themselves are concerned, they clearly do not provide students with opportunities to assess themselves. They have to find means outside of the materials of assessing their progress. Secondly, the materials do not provide students with sufficiently accessible information about what they need to learn in each unit. Thirdly, the accessibility of the materials could be improved.

The findings from the student interviews seem to support the expert review in suggesting that the accessibility of the materials needs to be improved, learning outcome need to be stated for each course, and for each unit in the course, and the inclusion self-assessment questions with feedback could help students assess their own progress after working through a unit - rather than relying tutor or peer feedback.

However, it is also clear that students need to be taught how to read and study from materials.

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY OF MATERIALS

Findings from the survey

Two questions in the survey were relevant to this issue.

	Very	Fairly	Not at all
4. Do you find it easy to understand the language used?	32	10	0
5. Are difficult ideas explained clearly?	25	17	0

The responses again reflected positively on the materials. However, they should be taken together with the responses to the final question in the survey: What has been the most negative aspect of this programme?

9/43 respondents indicated that they found the programme highly strenuous. This indicates that the positive responses to level of difficulty of language do not mean that the students find the course easy or unchallenging.

Findings from the interviews

Although no direct question about difficulty of the materials was asked in the interviews, the following points emerged:

•   Three students specifically mentioned that the level of the language was right. One of these added that it was not loaded with academic jargon and he found that he did not need to keep a dictionary nearby while reading the text. The same student said that the unit was captivating in that it was written in a conversational manner: `when you read, it is like you are in conversation with the text'. For this reason there was no need to memorize the concepts and terms.

•   One student said she found the Grammar course difficult, but that it had been helpful in teaching her how to recognize her own language errors.

•   Another student said that a particularly difficult part of the Theory and Practice course had been the unit on literacy. He said he had to read it four times, but when he did the assignment where he was asked to talk about his own experience, everything became clear.

•   Two students said that the residentials were necessary to clarify difficulties in the materials.

Concluding comments

It appears that though students find the course challenging and individual students have particular problems with various sections, the writers have pitched the course material correctly, particularly with regard to the language level. It is important,

however, that students are able to come to residentials to discuss problems they have with the materials.

This concurs with the findings from the expert review. The students appreciate the kind of relationship the writer creates with them through her style, and even though some of them struggle with difficult parts of the courses, the level of language itself is not a barrier.

STUDENT USE OF COURSE MATERIAL CONTENT IN THE CLASSROOM

It is not easy to distinguish between student use of course material, or student use of the content of the course obtained through the residentials and through the assessment. However, as the course materials are main means for communication of the curriculum, it can be assumed that they have been directly used.

Findings from the survey

The survey provided an indication of general trends.

In answer to the general question on this topic, the students responded as follows:

	Most	Some	None
9. Do the materials encourage you to apply what you are studying in your classroom?	32	10	0

A subsequent question in the survey attempted to make this general response more specific to individual units of the Theory and Practice and Grammar courses. The overwhelmingly positive responses indicate that students found that the content was relevant to their situation, increased their knowledge of English as a subject, increased their skills and knowledge in teaching English, were not difficult to use in the classroom, and that students used ideas from the units successfully in their teaching.

The most interesting of the questions for the purposes of this research was the question about successful use of ideas in the materials in the classroom. It seems that the most successful sections in terms of usefulness for the classroom were Unit Two (oral language and the classroom) and the Grammar sections.

Findings from the interviews

The point of the interviews with the six students was to uncover specific examples of how the course materials are used in the classroom.

In answer to a general question about the best parts of the English course, one student highlighted improved knowledge of grammar as having being translated into better lessons in the classroom; another cited the pre-reading, while reading and post reading approach to teaching reading as particularly beneficial; another cited ideas for group work; another said that he had been helped by having a colleague observe his lessons and comment on it.

In answer to specific questions related to the use of Unit Two of the Theory and Practice course in the classroom, students said that they had actually used the following parts of the Unit in the classroom:

- Student 1 (senior primary teacher)
  The activities to do with dramatizing, and the activity which required students to build a picture with words, and the section on group work.
- Student 2 (junior primary teacher)
  The activities to do with tasks with group work and classroom drama.
- Student 3 (secondary school teacher)
  Performance poetry.
- Student 4 (primary school teacher)
  Different group work ideas, use of a range of questions when he set exam papers, the activity about naming at the beginning of the year to get to know the students, debates.
- Student 5 (secondary school teacher) Group work ideas.
- Student 6 (secondary school teacher)

Very difficult to get detailed answers from this student. Concluding comments

It appears that the students have found the course materials useful in their classroom practice. The range of different sections chosen for emphasis indicates that it is not only certain sections of the materials that have proven useful, and also that the materials are relevant to primary school teachers as much as secondary school teachers.

Again, the finding of the expert review about the likelihood of these course materials being used by students directly in their classroom seems to have been confirmed. How effectively the course materials are used in the students' classrooms will be established in the chapter on the effect of the programme on student learning and classroom practice.

CONCLUSIONS

The most important point to be made about these course materials is that the students like them, read them, find them both challenging and relevant to their teaching situations, and use them in their teaching.

What is it that has had this effect? What has been done well that could be used to guide other course materials developers?

The first point that needs to be made is that the programme goals should not only be valid, but should guide each course in a tangible way. The goals of this programme reflect a concern for the development of quality learning and teaching relevant to a changing South Africa, and each course contributes in a different way to the realization of these goals.

The second point is that the *course content* has to be well-researched and up-to-date. But it should also be contextualized: students want to see themselves and their own situations in what they read about. They need to feel that there is plenty to explore, many examples and ideas they can take up, and many things they can do with the materials even when the course is finished. They need to hear many voices speaking in the materials; they need to pick up an excitement about being part of making knowledge.

The third point is that the *teaching approach* used in the materials should help the students engage with the materials actively in a variety of ways. Several features of the teaching approach in these materials need to be specifically mentioned:

- Instead of the presentation of content in a linear way, a recursive process approach to the development of the ideas is adopted. Theory and principles are often presented through stories and interviews rather than merely through abstract text. A range of rich examples are used, both to help students understand the concepts and to provide activities for them to try out in the classroom.

- Activities encourage both understanding of concepts and application in the classroom. The materials encourage critical reflection and adaptation of ideas for specific contexts and classrooms, rather than imitation of model lessons.

- Students' personal and professional experience is acknowledged and respected. They are encouraged to build their own understanding of issues based on their experiences.

- Built into the materials is the understanding that students are not working on their own - they have study partners and colleagues in the schools in which they work. They are encouraged to discuss ideas with each other, to work together, and to develop a community of concerned professionals around them.

- The style used in the materials establishes a friendly collegial relationship with the learners in which they are treated as fellow professionals who have individual experiences and ideas and can contribute as professionals to the creation of knowledge.

From the research, it seems that there are two major areas which would improve the effectiveness of the English course materials as vehicles for independent teaching and learning: increased accessibility from a layout point of view, and increased clarity about learning outcomes with associated self-assessment exercises.

Layout is not simply a matter of making materials attractive, although attractiveness does help. It is about arranging the material in such a way that students can grasp concepts and access ideas and examples without having to move through the text sentence by sentence and page by page. It is about encouraging more effective reading and studying.

Provision of clear *learning outcomes and self-assessment* is a useful way of helping the students focus on what is important, and develop the skills required for independent learning: the ability to assess what one wants to learn, what one is required to learn for certain purposes, and the extent to which one has learnt these things.

There seems to be evidence from this research that even if accessibility were improved and learning outcomes and self-assessment exercises provided, student use of the materials would not necessarily be more efficient. It is important therefore that effective ways of *teaching students to use the materials efficiently and flexibly for independent study* should be built into the programme as a whole.

Chapter Four

The Teaching in the Residential Sessions

INTRODUCTION

As was indicated in the previous chapter, in a distance course, the main means by which the curriculum is communicated is the course materials. However, the curriculum developers for the Wits FDE programme decided that it was important to incorporate a considerable degree of contact into the programme. This was based on an understanding of the need for students to be supported in their study (student support will be dealt with frilly in Chapter Six), as well as an understanding that residential sessions can be used to model the kinds of teaching and learning practices advocated in the materials. The residential sessions therefore are more than merely support - they add to the content of the course by providing examples of the kind of teaching that the course designers are promoting in the course materials.

It is debatable whether or not live modelling of good practice is essential to ensure impact on classroom practice. This research cannot prove it either way. However, it is likely that if the reaching in contact sessions contradicts in content or in method the approaches described in the materials, the impact of the courses will be lessened. A related issue is the extent to which teaching methods in the contact sessions were overtly used as a means to encourage application and adaptation for the teachers' own classroom. There is a better chance of transfer if practices are reflected upon, and an even better chance if opportunities are created for teachers to practice the strategies in the contact session period.

The following sessions were observed:

English

• Theory and Practice of English Teaching - about 50 students (5 April)
• Theory and Practice English Teaching- about 50 students (6 April)
• Developing English Learning and Teaching Materials - about 16 students(6 April)
• Researching our Language Classroom - about 30 students (6 April)
• Literature in the Language Classroom about 12 students (7 April)
• Writing for Personal and Professional Growth - about 40 students (7 April)

Education

• Contextual Problems in SA Education (lecture for about 80 students), followed by observation of two of the three editorial sessions (one of 18 students and one of 36 students) based on the lecture (5 April)
• Curriculum and Classrooms - lecture for about 250 students (6 April)

Although it is the English teaching methods that are the focus of this research, it was considered important to observe the Education contact sessions as well, since the impact of ideas from the Education courses needs to be tracked in the classroom as well. The programme should work in an integrated way to influence the classroom practice of the students. Consequently, the same method of analysis will be applied to the contact sessions for Education as for English.

However, the observations of the contact sessions for the English courses will be presented separately from those for the Education courses for two reasons: firstly, if discussed separately, the extent to which the English lecturers are operating according to the principles explicated in the Education courses will become clear; secondly, the Education contact sessions operate differently from the English ones - in Education, a large group lecture is followed by small group tutorials.

The main purpose of the observation of the sessions was:

To explore the varieties of ways in which the lecturers/tutors were modelling and developing the notions of good teaching practice described in the materials.

This was done according to issues highlighted in the review of the course materials (content as well as teaching approaches) as well as the researchers' understanding of issues to consider in observation of classroom practice. The following list of foci for observation was identified:

- organization of physical environment (emphasized in course materials mainly in relation to classroom communication and the use of group work);
- use of visual aids and equipment (dealt with particularly in the materials development course);
- objectives, purpose and structure of sessions (a major focus running through the assignments which require lesson planning and reflection on lessons)
- interaction, questioning, student participation and classroom atmosphere (dealt with throughout, but particularly in the Theory and Practice course)
- language (issues of exploratory talk, of multilingualism and multicultural approaches are foregrounded throughout the materials)
- extension of student's theoretical content knowledge and its relation to practice (this is clearly related to the goals of the programme and is a concern in all the courses)
- links with experience, with work in the other English courses, and future classroom practice (an integrated, experience-based and reflective approach to language teaching is a key feature in all the course materials)
- links between English and Education Studies courses (coherence across subjects in the programme can only lead to increased impact of each subject individually)

OBSERVATION OF THE ENGLISH SESSIONS

ORGANIZATION OF PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The main issue here the extent to which the facilitators managed the physical environment to ensure maximum communication of a variety of different kinds. A related issue is whether or not the facilities were suitable for the numbers of students. Where possible (not possible in three of the six sessions observed), facilitators arranged desks in a horseshoe shape to enable students to see each other as they engaged in whole group discussion, as well as for ease of pair discussion. Where this was not possible and students were seated in rows, facilitators compensated by circulating in the classroom, and making sure they reached a variety of students during pair and or group work.

USE OF VISUAL AIDS AND EQUIPMENT

The issues here are: use of aids/equipment appropriate to the purpose of lesson, effective use of aids/equipment, awareness of `appropriate technology' issues for the mostly rural classrooms of the teachers balanced with the importance of exposure to a variety of media for learning facilitated by the Wits venue.

Facilitators used the following aids/equipment for the following purposes with the following degree of effectiveness:

1. Videoclips were used effectively in two of the sessions observed for the appropriate purposes of analyzing a sample of teaching, and a poetry presentation by Gcina Mhlope. They were effective in that they presented insights/ opportunities for learning which were accessible to the students, relevant to the focus of the session, and referred to in discussion and through activities throughout the session.

2. Chalkboard and other `universal' resources: some sessions used only the chalkboard and modelled clear and effective use of an aid that is available to most students; some sessions made effective use of newsprint for outlining the session and/or making points which needed to be kept for later documentation; quite extensive and effective use was made of handouts.

3. Deliberately appropriate resources: In the session on materials development, free resources that could be harnessed for teaching (people resources, and print resources such as handbills, adverts, free recipe pamphlets put out by supermarkets for Easter) were both the subject and the method of the lesson. This particular session exemplified the use of a particular teaching method not only for effective teaching in the contact session itself, but in order to draw attention to that teaching method for teachers to adapt for their own classrooms.

OBJECTIVES, PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE OF SESSIONS

The objectives/purpose of a session needs to be clear in the facilitator's planning, should be negotiated to some extent with students (particularly adult students), and the session should be structured to achieve coherence and successful learning.

In all cases, there was a clear structure and purpose in the sessions, communicated to the students through a handout, on newsprint or orally as the session unfolded. In some cases, the students had the opportunity to contribute to or modify the objectives of the lesson. In one introductory session, the opening discussion involved the students in determining their own objectives in doing the particular course. In another, the students' own problems with teaching became the basis of the lesson.

In the sessions where team teaching was involved, there was evidence of careful shared planning of what would be done.

INTERACTION, QUESTIONING, STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE

It is in these aspects of the professional development of educators that contact sessions are most valuable, because desirable patterns of interaction, questioning skills, a variety of methods of encouraging student participation, and the creation of a conducive classroom atmosphere are best communicated through modelling and experience. It is difficult to teach these things through written materials alone.

In all sessions there was ample opportunity for pair and/or group discussion as well as for whole class discussion. Student-to-student interactions were central and facilitated by a variety of clearly designed tasks. Because a variety of types of interaction were encouraged, students who did not feel confident to speak to the whole group, nevertheless had an opportunity to contribute in groups and pairs. In two of the classes, males tended to dominate in the plenary discussion, but the facilitators were aware of this, and in one case deliberately requested female students to respond.

Facilitator questions were at range of levels - descriptive and analytical. Facilitators not only asked questions of the students, but encouraged them to ask questions of each other and of the facilitator. Students were given adequate time to consider the questions. Student generated questions were taken seriously. Facilitators were skilled at getting students to unpack their assertions, to clarify what they meant, and to use their own experience to reflect. Facilitators also used students' questions and comments to build rich discussion.

In sessions where team teaching was involved, there was easy interaction between the two facilitators and clear sharing out of responsibility for various phases of the lesson. In all cases the atmosphere created in the classes was informal and friendly, but professional. Facilitators generally took trouble to refer to students by name, and indicated genuine interest in the contexts in which the students were teaching. Facilitators showed great respect for individual answers to questions and made an effort to hear and understand points made by students even if they were not

immediately clear. Students were credited with being experts in their own contexts, and with their own pupils. Facilitators were at pains to make it clear that the students should be critical of the ideas and material the facilitators themselves presented, and even though the students did not critique much, this attitude created an atmosphere of openness in the lesson. Particularly in the second year classes, the level of student response in the lesson was extremely high.

LANGUAGE

The issues considered under this heading were the extent to which facilitators allowed the use of exploratory talk by students as a way of getting to grips with concepts, as well as the extent to which they referred to and encouraged discussion of the use of a variety of languages in the English classroom. Both o£ these emphases are present in the course materials.

In all sessions observed, students had the opportunity to explore their tentative understandings and refine the ways they saw things through using language. Facilitators generally resisted the temptation to say things for the students, rather helping them to say things for themselves, and then giving feedback on their comments. In one of the sessions, exploratory talk was not only modelled, but explicitly discussed for use with pupils in the classroom.

As far as multilingualism is concerned, there was little student use of languages other than English in the sessions observed. However, in one of the sessions the subject was discussed as it related to the pupils. In another session, attention was drawn to texts/stories in which languages other than English were used for appropriate effect; but in the same session, though students used isiZulu for a group task, they quickly reverted to English when the facilitator approached. In the materials development session, reference was made to the importance of a multicultural awareness in materials design.

EXTENSION OR STUDENT'S THEORETICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AND ITS RELATION TO PRACTICE

In terms of the goals of the programme, students need subject content knowledge, understanding of theory, and ability to relate theory and practice.

In the first year sessions, the emphasis was appropriately much more on practice with theory implicit. Topics covered were central to practice:

• group work,

• lesson planning.

However, the link between practice and theory was made through the insistence on reflection and evaluation.

In the second year classes, the emphasis on theory was overt, even in sessions that were clearly directed at practice. The kinds of issues dealt with were all central ones in the materials:

- What is poetry? What are the difficulties of teaching it? What are different ways of teaching it?
- What is research? How can data be collected? Why would teachers be well placed to do classroom research?
- What is the difference between resources and teaching materials? How do you make effective use of resources for teaching purposes?
- What is imaginative language? What does it mean to speak in some else's voice? How do you write effective stories?

One problem became clear in the session on teaching poetry. The topic was intended to help students to explore issues in teaching poetry, but it became clear that many students felt intimidated by the task of understanding poetry for themselves. Without the ability to get to grips with poetry analysis themselves, they will not really successfully be able to devise methods to teach it. Perhaps an area of knowledge of English as a subject which needs to be addressed more seriously in the course materials is understanding poetry.

LINKS WITH EXPERIENCE, WITH WORK IN THE OTHER ENGLISH COURSES, AND FUTURE CLASSROOM PRACTICE

A range of strategies was used in these sessions to base new work on the students' experiences in the classroom and wider context. Students were asked to discuss their difficulties in teaching poetry; they were asked to share their lesson planning experience in PRESET and in day-to-day practice; they were asked to think about the resources available in their schools and communities; they were asked to write about their own experiences; they were asked during the lesson to evaluate the suggested ideas in terms of their knowledge of their own pupils' level and interests.

As mentioned above, the lessons were all based on the course materials, but in addition, links were made in the sessions with work done the previous year (for example, research done as part of the Theory and Practice course), in the previous session, and in the sessions to come. There was strong emphasis on materials development as central to English teaching in a number of the sessions - not only in the session on materials development. Similarly, the teacher as researcher was emphasized in the Theory and Practice sessions, the Materials Development sessions, and Literature sessions, as well as in the Researching our Language Classrooms sessions.

A number of methods were employed to ensure that transfer occurred in classroom practice. Facilitators modelled approaches that could be used in classrooms (for example, mind maps) and in most sessions asked students how they could use techniques in their own classrooms. In most sessions, students were encouraged to reflect on and evaluate methods.

LINKS BETWEEN ENGLISH AND EDUCATION STUDIES COURSES

Learner-centred education and the constructivist approach was modelled in all the English sessions, though not referred to explicitly. Facilitators required students to use their own experience, and through carefully designed tasks and skilful questioning,

required students to build meaning. In two of the sessions, the concept of `scaffolding' was referred to directly so that students could make the links between what had been taught in the Curriculum and Classrooms course, and what was being advocated in the English courses.

OBSERVATIONS OF THE EDUCATION SESSIONS

Essentially the model used for the management of the relatively large numbers of students attending these sessions was an interactive lecture followed by small group tutorials ran by a range of tutors. It appeared that the focus in the Education sessions was not so much on modelling certain teaching approaches with a view to transfer to the classroom as on using certain teaching methods to ensure that students understood the necessary concepts.

The interactive lectures will be analyzed briefly first, and then the tutorials.

LECTURES

Physical environment and use of visual aids/equipment

Severe limitations were placed on the interactive lecture method because of the largeness particularly of the second year group. It was difficult to see the overhead transparency from the back of the room and in one case, very difficult to hear student response to questions. One of the lecturers overcame the difficulty of seeing the overhead transparency from the back of the room by using an the overhead transparency of a diagram that was already printed in the course materials.

Objectives, purpose and structure of sessions

Each lecture had a clear purpose, and moved according to a carefully planned structure.

Interaction, questioning, Student Participation and Classroom atmosphere

It was impossible to achieve successful interaction in one of the venues (exam hall) because of the audibility and visibility problems. However, the lecturer made a valiant effort, and the students in the first half of the room probably gained from the interchange. In neither of the lectures was there direct student-to-student interaction - this was left to the tutorials.

In both lectures, lecturers unpacked concepts rigorously through question and answer. The students generated questions and did not only rely on those asked by the lecturers, the lecturers took the questions seriously, and reflected the questions back to the students to give the issues enough space for discussion before arriving at a response. Despite the physical difficulties of the venues, the atmosphere created was positive and relaxed.

Language

Reference to multilingualism was made by both lecturers as it pertained to classroom experience, but there were no multilingual practices in the lectures themselves.

Extension of student's theoretical content knowledge and its relation to practice

The major thrust of both the sessions observed, was development of students' understanding of concepts (e.g. context, learner centredness) through provision of examples (case studies), reference to the course materials, drawing on students' experiences, comparing the concept with other similar concepts, interrogation of student responses to questions, and moving the students from a `slogan' approach to educational concepts to a more nuanced approach.

Links with experience, between different parts of the education courses, and future classroom practice

In both lectures direct reference was made to students' classroom experience - both through examples chosen, and through direct questioning about own experience. Lecturers made frequent links between the lecture and what would be covered in the tutorials. Second year students had clearly done the activities which formed the basis for the lecture and therefore were able to engage.

In both lectures reference was made to how the ideas could influence classroom practice. For example, in the Contexts lecture, ways in which teachers as change agents could transform schools and classrooms were mentioned.

TUTORIALS

These are designed for groups of about 30 students (although in one of the tutorials observed there were only 18 and in the other, 36), so that a greater degree of interaction is possible than in a lecture of over 200 students. It should be possible also for individual difficulties to be aired in a smaller group. The topic of the tutorial is derived from the issues addressed in the main lecture.

Physical environment and use of visual aids/equipment

Students in one of the tutorials were arranged in a horse-shoe shape, but in the other, little attention was paid to physical environment. Both tutors made use of the chalkboard.

Objectives, purpose and structure of sessions

In both of the tutorials observed, the purpose was not made clear - perhaps it was assumed that the lecture had outlined the purpose clearly enough. In one of the sessions, the structure was clear and coherent, but in the other, much of the content was not entirely relevant to the topic as outlined in the lecture.

Interactions, questioning, student participation and classroom atmosphere

In one of the tutorials observed, not all the students had the confidence to speak, but a good number engaged, and the lively discussion was related back to the lecture. Students responded to other students' questions though not directly. The tutor adopted a similar probing approach to that adopted in the lectures. Overall the atmosphere was relaxed and informal, and the tutor conveyed an interest in the students' contexts.

In the second tutorial observed, the tutor dominated the session with a range of his own ideas, not always related to the issues raised in the lecture. Students were asked a

question, and some did respond, but there was no opportunity to turn the answers into a discussion. Student generated questions were not handled in a way that would lead to discussion.

Language

The issue of medium of instruction was the topic for discussion in one of the tutorials, but in neither of the tutorials was there any student use of languages other than English.

Extension of students' theoretical content knowledge and its relation to practice

In one of the tutorials observed, the main activity was a whole group exploration of how a variety of contexts within which teachers find themselves affects the way in which teachers make decisions. There was also a discussion of how teachers can transform what happens at classroom level. There was a sense that the students' understanding of the issues raised in the lecture had been deepened.

In the second tutorial observed, content was not always relevant - the focus was a description of teachers, and a brief analysis of how apartheid affects the context of education. Context was defined as place or situation.

Links with experience and with the preceding lecture

In the first tutorial observed, a variety of student experiences were drawn on, for example, medium of instruction and the problematic nature of group work. The diagram referred to in the lecture was used as a means of analyzing examples given. In the second session, teachers' experiences were referred to, but not very positively. There was little reference to the preceding lecture.

CONCLUSION

In the English sessions, the focus was clearly on modelling good practice, because the central thrust of the majority of the courses is shifting teachers' practice in concrete ways. It appeared that the focus in the Education sessions was not so much on modelling certain teaching practice with a view to transfer to the classroom as on using effective strategies to ensure that students understood the necessary concepts. The method adopted in the Education sessions of an interactive lecture followed by tutorial is potentially a useful way of ensuring that large numbers of students get the benefit of careful conceptual analysis as well as opportunity to interact with each other on the basis of their knowledge and experience. However, the benefits of the carefully designed and implemented interactive lectures were lost on many students because they could not hear and see properly. For the model to work, there also needs to be more effective planning of the purposes and methods in the tutorials as related to the lectures.

However, generally students experienced skilled and varied teaching in which every effort was made to model the approaches and attitudes recommended in the courses.

The major features of the teaching in these residential sessions that could be generalized to other teacher development programmes are as follows:

- It is important that there is coherence between the ideas and approaches discussed in the various sessions and courses.
- Students learn not only from the content of the sessions, but also from their form. If the teaching approaches and attitudes are not consistent with each other, the impact of good teaching approaches in one course could be weakened by less satisfactory approaches and attitudes in another.
- Theory is important, but not theory in isolation from practice. The genesis of theory in reflection on practice needs to be clear.
- It is helpful to use students' experiences in their classrooms and schools as a basis for the sessions, and for students to be encouraged to think of how they could use or apply ideas in practice.
- The teaching methods practised in the sessions themselves can be the subject of discussion. This encourages reflective practice and is also likely to result in more effective transfer to the teachers' own classroom practice.

Chapter Five

Assessment Design, Support and Quality Assurance

INTRODUCTION

It could be argued that unless an effective assessment strategy is in place, good course materials and successful teaching on residentials could have next to no impact on student learning. Assessment tasks compel students to engage with what has been taught, and the way assessment tasks are set encourages learning processes that are either helpful or unhelpful, that contribute to the goals of the programme or that distract students from achieving them.

Usually an assessment strategy is evaluated in terms of its validity, reliability, fairness, and feasibility.

Validity is to do with setting meaningful goals for student learning and then designing effective ways to assess student achievement of those goals. Kathy Luckett outlines the major questions around validity: [1]

> Are we assessing the right things'? In other words, Are our learning outcomes (our construct) the right things to be assessing?
> Are we assessing the thing right? In other words, Does the assessment assess (the construct) that it claims to assess'?

In this report, we have already established the validity of the programme goals, so the first question is not an issue. The second question is therefore the major one in evaluating assessment design.

Reliability and fairness are about quality assurance measures set in place to ensure that standards are maintained from year to year and across the numbers of students enrolled in the programme. Very often there is a tension between reliability and validity in assessment design. More valid ways of assessing complex goals (eg the capacity for reflective practice, rather than a more simple outcome such as recognition of the function of a word in a sentence) are often less reliable than standardized objective tests which enable one to generalize about student achievement at different times and places and with a range of assessors.

---

[1] Kathy Luckett, from an overhead transparency displayed at workshop on Assessment at the University of Natal in April 1998

in this chapter, we will not look in depth at the balance between validity and reliability. What is of more concern for a distance education programme which should be able to deal with large numbers of learners in different places, is the kinds of quality assurance mechanisms that need to be put in place to ensure reliability across markers as well as efficiency in assignment management. Since the English courses are offered to relatively few students and nearly all the marking managed by one lecturer, whereas the Education Studies courses are offered to 280 with the marking managed by eight tutors, this chapter will look at the quality assurance strategies developed by the Education coordinator to ensure reliability and fairness in marking. When the English course is offered to more students and involves more tutors, it will be important for appropriate quality assurance mechanisms to be developed, and lessons can be learned from the system developed by the Education coordinator.

Feasibility has two dimensions - designing assessment strategies that are manageable in terms of workload for staff and complexity and expense of implementation; and designing assessment strategies that are feasible for the students - is there enough support to enable them to succeed in completing the assessment? Again, as with reliability, there is often a tension between validity and feasibility. In terns of this programme which aims `to develop in schools quality learning and teaching relevant to a changing South Africa' and `to extend students' subject teaching knowledge and skills', it is clear that the most valid form of assessment would be visiting schools and assessing the performance of students and their learners in schools. However, as will be pointed out in the chapter on learner support, this is not feasible for the programme at the moment, even though there is a vision for it. What is interesting is to see how the assessment in this programme has been designed to achieve the classroom and school-based goals even though the lecturers are not able to actually visit their students in the schools.

In a distance education programme there is a further dimension to the evaluation of an assessment strategy - *teaching through assessment.* Because of the limited contact between student and lecturer or tutor, it becomes important to use assignments not just to grade learners, but as a major form of teaching. As is pointed out in the Tutor's Guide prepared by SAIDE [2]:

You can think of teaching through assignments as a learner-led dialogue between yourself and the individual learner. This dialogue starts with the learner's work, and continues with your feedback, and their response to your comments.

feedback

learners' development

dialogue
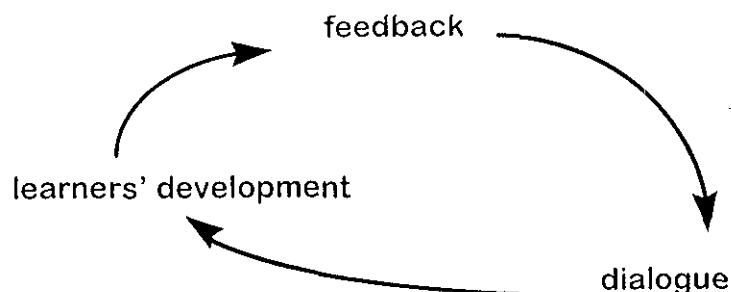
[2]SAIDE, 1998, *Supporting Distance Learners: A Tutor's Guide*, Cape Town: Francolin

To summarize: if you do not design assessment properly, students will not achieve what you want them to achieve. If you do not support students adequately, they will not achieve what you want them to achieve. If you do not have effective quality assurance procedures in assignment marking and management, some students will achieve what you want them to achieve, and some will not.

This chapter will therefore deal with three aspects of assessment, primarily as it relates to central course, Theory and Practice, but with some reference to the other English courses, as well as to the Education quality assurance strategy

Design

Assessment needs to designed in such a way that it contributes to the achievement of the programme goals, mastery of the course content, and development of broad abilities both in teens of the product expected and in terms of the process students go through to achieve that product. Another aspect of assessment design is the extent to which it supports students to achieve assessment requirements by providing clear instructions and criteria, and scaffolding and support in the achievement of the tasks.

Support - teaching on assignments

The commenting on assignments needs to be an effective means of extending the teaching on the course and providing supportive formative feedback.

Quality assurance

There need to be mechanisms in place to ensure that the marking is fair and reliable, particularly if there are different markers, and there also need to be mechanisms in place to ensure that the turnaround time on assignments is kept to a minimum.

These aspects will be evaluated using information from the course coordinators and assessment documentation and then by analyzing student opinion provided in the survey and in interviews. For the section on support, a further sources of evidence, the Theory and Practice portfolios of the sample of six students will be examined. In addition, some the examiners' reports on the Theory and Practice and Grammar examinations in 1997 were also used.

ASSESSMENT DESIGN DESCRIPTION OF ASSESSMENT DESIGN

According to the English coordinator, the overall assessment design for the English courses is as follows:

- self-assessment activities (in the materials);
- tutor-marked assignments;
- course portfolio (not required for all courses); and
- examination or examination equivalent assignment.

Each course in the programme has different versions of the above outline, according to the demands of the specific course, According to Wits regulations, the year mark is

worth 50% and the exam mark is worth 50%. The exam can be an examination equivalent.

The Theory and Practice course consists of four interrelated units with assignments following each unit. In addition there is an introductory assignment which students are required to submit before the first residential. The four assignments are equally weighted and make up the year mark which counts for 50% of the total mark. The final 50% is allocated to the end of course examination. In addition, a limited portfolio system is used: students place all their assignments with the feedback comments in a file and write a reflective comment on what they learned from each assignment during the year. This reflective comment and the general organization of the portfolio can move the student's year mark up or down. In practice it does not increase a mark by more than 2%. Since the Theory and Practice examination is an open book examination, it helps students organize their work and their thoughts in preparation for the examination.

ASSESSMENT DESIGN IN RELATION TO PROGRAMME GOALS

In summary, the programme hopes that students will
• improve their classroom practice;
• extend their subject knowledge and subject teaching knowledge and skills;
• become competent reflective professionals;
• learn how to do classroom and school-based research;
• learn how to work cooperatively;
• learn how to critically evaluate and adapt teaching strategies for their own classrooms.

In addition it is said that the programme will
• recognize what teachers already know;
• facilitate reflection on experience;
• offer extensions or alternative to established subject knowledge and patterns of classroom practice.

Good features of the assessment design for the Theory and Practice course

The assessment design contributes to the achievement of the above goals in the following positive ways:

l. The most important point to be made is that every assignment in the Theory and Practice course (except for the pre-course assignment) demands that students work directly in the classroom - either teaching or doing research on their learners. There are no assignments which require students to read and reformulate theory without applying it to classroom research or classroom practice.

2. What is interesting about the assessment design for this course is that whereas the detailed content of the assignments and examination questions differs from unit to unit, the basic processes through which students are required to work are broadly similar. These processes of design (or adaptation of lessons or approaches provided), implementation and reflection are shown diagrammatically below.
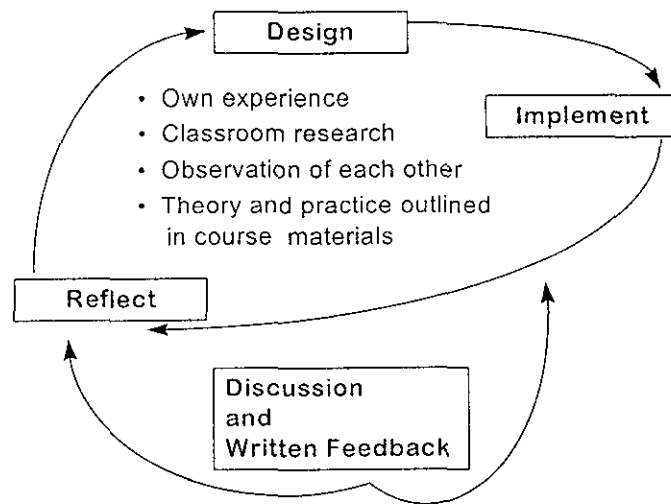
It is important that students are required to go through the same processes again and again as it gives them an opportunity to develop broader abilities over time, rather than merely master the content of individual units one by one. Furthermore these broad abilities are central to the successful teaching of reflective practitioners.

3.   Another feature of the assignments is that they usually structure in self and peer assessment. In one assignment, study partners are required to observe each other in the classroom and then share their reflections before submitting individually written assignments. In another, study partners are asked to work on an assignment together and then submit one jointly written or two separately written accounts of their work. In other assignments, students are required to try out a lesson or series of lessons in the classroom and then use various means to reflect by themselves on the successes and lack of successes. What is interesting is that collaboration and reflection are also allowed in the usually constrained conditions of the examination room at the end of the year. For the first part of the Theory and Practice Examination, students may plan their lesson or series of lessons together, after which they individually write down both the lessons, and their reflections on the lessons. This means that the collaborative practice developed through the course work assessment is not merely treated in a token way and undermined by the examination.

4.   Individual reflection and the development of students' ability to assess their own progress is encouraged through the requirement that students should submit all their Theory and Practice assignments at the end of the year in the form of a portfolio with a reflective comment.

5.   The notion that teachers need to be researchers in their own classroom is a theme through all the assignments, but is particularly evident in one assignment which requires students to investigate the literacy practices of the pupils in her class.

6. At least two of the assignments directly require students to describe their own past experience as a basis for developing theoretical understandings of, in the first case,

multilingual language acquisition, and in the second case literacy practices in home, the wider community and the school. As will be reported below in the student responses to the assessment design, this has the effect of demystifying theory and helping students to see that theory is merely a way of understanding reality.

7. Several of the assignments offer students a choice. This is particularly notable in the assignments for Unit Two. Besides its obvious advantage in encouraging students to think about why they should choose a particular option (and increasing their motivation to do the option they have specially chosen), the provision of choice could contribute to the development of students' ability `to critically evaluate and adapt teaching strategies for their own classrooms'.

8. Many mechanisms are provided to assist students to achieve the requirements of the assessment. One is building in peer support in the completion of assignments. Another is dividing the assignments carefully into sections, and giving the students targets and products for individual sections. Another is discussing the requirements of the assignments carefully during residential sessions. Finally, a mechanism used not in the Theory and Practice course, but in the Researching Our Language Classrooms course is the division of the final examination equivalent assignment into stages with interim reporting and formative feedback from both lecturer and peers. This allows students to see clearly where they are going wrong and what strengths they can build on, so that they can adjust their work to perform well in the final research report.

Some criticisms of the assessment design for the Theory and Practice course

1. One of the programme goals has not been `covered' in the outline of features of the assessment strategy above, and this is the goal that refers to extension of students' subject knowledge and subject teaching knowledge. A criticism of the assessment design in the Theory and Practice course is that though students will develop excellently through the repeated process they are required to go through, it is by no means certain that they will learn to reflect on their practice using the ideas and language of subject teaching theory. In the assignments there is not enough requirement to use the theories that are so carefully mediated in the materials.[3]

2. In addition, particularly in Unit Two, the provision of five choices of assignments could mean that students can avoid engaging with four fifths of the twit. If it is regarded as important for students to engage with all these issues in order to extend their subject teaching knowledge, then the assessment design has not succeeded in encouraging them to do so.

---

[3] This problem has been resolved to some extent in other courses. In both the Developing English Teaching and Learning Materials course and the Researching Our Language Classrooms course, students are required to engage with the theory that establishes the basis of the course by completing and submitting a series of in-text activities.

3. In order to be guided to perform the assessment tasks satisfactorily, students need not only clear instructions and a range of means to support them in achieving the requirements: they also need clear statements of criteria in terms of which they will be judged. These (like learning outcomes in the course materials) are absent. Students only learn after the fact from the kinds of comments made by the marker what the criteria are against which they were judged. The issue of criteria is picked in the external examiner's report for the November 1997 Theory and Practice exam from the marker's point of view:

> It was fairly straight forward to assess the students' performance in the first and second sections of the questions, as, broadly speaking, one was looking for depth of theoretical understanding as opposed to vague generalisations. However, it was more difficult to mark the lessons without a set of criteria. I looked for things like valid objectives/outcomes, content that matches what you say that you're going to do, clear steps, textured and sufficient content to the lessons, variety of methods - summarized into: Is the lesson solid, workable, exciting?

Flexibility of assessment design across the courses

The impression might have been created above that there should be one assessment design applied rigorously to all content in order to realize the goals of the programme. A feature of the assessment design across the courses which must be mentioned in conclusion is that even though a good `formula' is developed for the Theory and Practice course, it is not assumed that this formula will be equally applicable to the other courses. In the Grammar course, for example, when content mastery is much more of an issue, there are many more smaller assignments and even a test. The test helps students prepare for the examination, in which they will be required to show not only that they know how to teach grammar, but also that they know enough grammar to equip them to teach it accurately.

In the Reading and Writing for Personal and Professional Growth, there is an emphasis on the development of a portfolio in a fuller sense than it was used in the Theory and Practice Course. As the introduction to the course says:

> For your exam equivalent assignment you are required to submit a portfolio of your personal and professional writing. The portfolio must consist of a range of writing done in the two units of this course. You must submit at least four pieces of writing. Writing activities that can be submitted for the portfolio are marked with a portfolio icon and * and have the heading `For your portfolio'.

> NB It is crucial that you do the activities in each section of the course so that you are equipped to put together your portfolio. You will not be able to create a portfolio overnight.

Student opinion and experience of assessment design

Survey

The questions asked in the survey of student opinion were on all three aspects: assessment design, teaching on assessment and quality assurance. It is useful, however, to record the responses together, because they demonstrate an overwhelmingly positive opinion of assessment as a teaching and learning strategy in the English courses.

		Very much		Not at all
1.	Were the assignments helpful in consolidating the teaching of the course?	40	3	0
2.	Did the assignments say clearly what was expected?	34	8	0
3.	Were the assignments returned sufficiently quickly?	32	10	1
4.	Were you able to learn from your tutor's comments?	39	3	1
5.	Were your tutor's comments supportive and constructive?	41	1	1

A comment from one of the students during the course of an interview adds some texture to the positive opinion represented in the survey:

> The standard at Wits is high compared to UNISA. At UNISA, you use a book, you reproduce what you learnt ... no creativity. At Wits you produce your own assignment and create something new.

Interviews

In interviews with students, we were interested to pick up on whether or not the assessment design was working in terms of process. One of the points made in the introduction is that the way assessment tasks are set encourages learning processes that are either helpful or unhelpful, that contribute to the goals of the programme or that distract students from achieving them. Three aspects of process emerged from the interviews: the need to do the assignments in the classroom, the amount of reading that needs to be done, and the role of the study partner in completing the assignment. If students can narrate these processes, then it means that the assessment design will help students achieve the goals not only in terms of product, but also in terms of process.

A related issue is how the students dealt with having a choice (this was one of the criticisms of assessment design above -if you give a choice, does it not allow students to avoid uncomfortable sections of the work?).

In order to unpack these issues, students were asked to talk about their experience of choosing and writing the assignment for Unit Two of the Theory and Practice course. In this unit there are five choices each relating to a different section of the Unit, and students are required to do one.

What emerged was that students choose the assignments on two grounds - what facilities they have available at their schools (three did not choose the assignments requiring an audio tape because they did not have them in the school) and what is important for their learners and the improvement of their teaching sometimes interpreted in fairly narrow terms (assignments suitable for primary school or not) and sometimes interpreted more broadly as follows:

> [The importance of developing my pupils'] speaking and listening skills [influenced my choice of assignments]. I started teaching here last year. When I arrived here, I found that these pupils couldn't hear what I was saying in English (my home

> language is Northern Sotho, not Xitsonga). I told myself that I'm going to make these people talk. I made some jokes, I dramatized things for them, I tell them more stories, I ask them to go and read their own stories and come and tell them to me, I ask them to cut pictures. I also read the story to them in a natural way. And after that some of them like to listen to the story and when I ask them questions I can see that they understand. Then they are able to speak English. That is why I chose this assignment.

It is significant that half of the students are using their choice thoughtfully, rather than merely strategically. Whatever their choice motivation, it is clear that the students like the idea of choice as it provides flexibility (two students commented on this).

From the responses to the issue of choice,   the conclusion can also be drawn that students understand the assignments as something you have to do actively and in your school and classroom. This is emphasized by the following three comments from different students:

> Many of Yvonne's assignments make you to work inside the classroom. You have to go and present the lesson, write the comments on the lesson, ask any colleague to come and observe you, and write comments on the lesson. The assignments are motivating, they force you to teach an actual lesson.

> For some assignments, classroom activity must be done and there is no way one can cheat.

> When I (lid the assignment, I asked [the pupils] to answer the questions for all their subjects. Then they reported. Then [the pupils'] handouts were posted outside the classroom for the other teachers to see. The teachers were very interested to read what the pupils said about their subject.

This leads to the first point about process. The assignments obviously compel students to work in the classroom. However, the way this is done is not as with many other courses, where students are simply required to repeat in their own class the model lesson provided by the lecturer. There is a process of adaptation. As one student reflects:

> ... the text can be adapted to suit different levels whether primary or secondary. ... the text provides room for interpretation and thus encouraging the teacher to take into account the realities in the school and level of the pupils [the student referred to p.95 in the Theory and Practice course] ... the slang words are not suitable for the children here... Some of the activities depend on the amount of vocabulary the pupils have and the teacher can make judgements and adapt the activities.

Another teacher confirmed this emphasis on adaptation:

> Yvonne gave us different examples. Many transcriptions, many examples of other teachers. You read that, then you ask yourself 'How am I going to present this lesson [to my class]?

A third comment was:

> The text forces one to think about one's own realities and draw on one's own experiences.

The second aspect of process relates to reading and interaction with study partners around assignment completion. Two students mentioned reading the course materials as essential to the assignment:

The reading usually builds up towards an assignment. In this way one has to read and one cannot write the assignment without the reading.

Although collaborative work on assignments is not regarded as essential by all students, one student reported quite an interesting process:

> First of all, before I involve my study partner, I read [the information on the assignment] alone at (tome, and I decide which one I must write that is on their level - not any assignment pleases me, because the focus is on the learner.

> From there I decide whether if 1 do 1,2,3, will I be relevant to my lecturer,

> From there I go to my study partner and discuss it. We share ideas. As we share, I write some of it down, so that when I go back I combine my own ideas with my study partner's. Sometimes if we get stuck, we involve other teachers who are doing the course. So today I invited one of the teachers to come and evaluate my work.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

It is clear both from the features of assessment design recorded above and from the processes students record moving through to complete assignments for the Theory and Practice course that the assessment is creative, motivating and classroom based, and that it assists students to design lessons and research, implement these and reflect on their own practice in collaboration with others and on their own. It is also clear that the students appreciate the opportunities created by the assessment. It must also be noted that it is not only the high achievers or the secondary school teachers that express this appreciation. All the students - those that are struggling with the theoretical parts of the programme, and those that are relishing the intellectual stimulation, find that the emphasis in assessment on classrooms and learners is invaluable to them.

TEACHING ON ASSESSMENT

The FDE embraces a constructivist approach to learning with a focus on a cyclical process of learning. As such, feedback is central as a teaching mechanism:

> Learning is far more than simply 'being taught'. To learn, we need to plan what we're going to do; attempt to do it; and then receive feedback on our work. We then use this feedback to improve the work we have just done, or, more often in education, to ensure that the next work we do embraces what we have learned. [4]

Rowntree [5] states that:

> ... the assessor may respond as a teacher, using the knowledge gained to interact with the student in helping him grow; or he may respond as a reporter, classifying, labeling, or describing the student for the benefit of others who have an interest in the student.

COMMENTS ON ASSIGNMENTS

Comments on assignments can be grouped into two broad categories: comments which are written in the margin, paragraph by paragraph and comments which are made on the assignment as a whole. Whatever the category of the comment we cannot underestimate the importance of written comments in distance education in the

---

[4] Baume, D. and Baume, C. 1996, *Learning to Teach. Assessing Students 'work.* Oxford: The Oxford Centre for Staff Development. p.10.

[5] Rowntree, D. *Assessing Students. How Shall we Know Them?.* London: Kogan page.pp. 199-200.

absence of face-to-face contact, indeed written feedback should be regarded as a teaching opportunity. Rowntree [6] says about feedback in a distance education context:

> It has to be more considered and articulate because it must carry all the weight of the teaching that other teachers are able to share between written comments and spoken amplification.

Recent research has suggested that feedback is most effective when teachers write a concentration of content feedback along with a limited amount of grammar, punctuation and spelling feedback. Teachers are advised to offer students questions about their writing, and include comments of praise and encouragement to motivate students.

As discussed in a previous chapter, modelling is very important and it is clear that the comments on assignments we looked at model good practice in giving feedback and use assignments as a teaching tool.

To analyse the feedback on assignments we looked at the comments made on the Theory and Practice assignments of our sample of six students and fitted them into categories of what is commonly regarded as good feedback practice. The comments and categories appear in the table below.

In-text comments are explicit.

- The marker had made in-text comments but had managed to avoid cryptic and ambiguous marginal responses such as a circled word.

In the feedback, the marker praises and reacts positively to good things in the work and does not make general statements but rather says what was good in specific terms.

- *You have made some interesting suggestions about both your colleagues lesson and your own.*
- *I have enjoyed both the quality of your writing and the information you have presented.*
- *I was pleased to see that in part two you and your colleague decided that group work activities should be included.*
- *The transcript section helps to bring the lesson alive.*

The feedback is encouraging.

- *I look forward to reading your next assignment*
- *You have made steady progress throughout the year and I hope you will enjoy the second year of the FDE programme.*

In the feedback, the marker gives suggestions about how to improve work that is already good.
• *With reference to literature, you could encourage groups of students to take responsibility for preparing information (on short stories or chapters in a novel or poems or scenes from a play) to present to the rest of the class.*

The marker uses the feedback to give constructive criticism and alert students how to overcome errors; in what respect their work was wrong, or poor or inappropriate. The feedback is specific and is coupled with suggestions on ways in which work could be improved and advice on how work can be changed in the future.
• *Content can be very interesting and contain language errors. Alternatively sometimes a piece of writing with no language errors may have boring or limited content.* • *I agree with you that the lesson focused on conscious language learning but disagree with your description of it as a communicative lesson.* • *Taking a communicative approach to your teaching means working out activities in which students talk to each other in their own words in order to complete a task. I suggest that you read pages 16 - 22 of unit one.*

The marker respects the individuality of each student and in the feedback acknowledges each teacher as an individual, for example by using their names in the feedback.
• *Dear [name of student]* *I look forward to reading your next assignment* • *Dear [name of student]* *..... I look forward to meeting you at the residential sessions.* • *I enjoyed seeing you on 31 May and look forward to our next meeting.*

The marker uses the feedback to start a dialogue.
• *The literacy practices among your students seem to differ according to gender. Did any girls enjoy reading soccer or any boys enjoy recipes?*

The marker recognizes difficulties and offers to help.
• *I know you have had to work without a study partner and I am impressed with what you have achieved on your own.* • *From reading your comments I sense that you've also found the workload very demanding. If there is anything in the course that you do not understand, please contact me.*

In the feedback, the marker comments not only on content but comments on and encourages the values embodied in the programme
• *It is clear from what you have written that you are a highly motivated teacher.* • *You seem very committed to your students.* • *What I found particularly impressive is the commitment you have shown to undertaking further studies while you have been working.* • *It is clear from your writing that you care about your students. They are fortunate to have you for a teacher.*

The tone of feedback is condescending or threatening but has the flavour of dialogue and establishes rapport.
• *Like you, I was disturbed by the situation that some of your female students are in.* • *I found your account of your work with 97 grade one learners from a poverty-stricken community very moving.*

TUTORIAL LETTERS

In addition to detailed individual feedback on assignments, a general tutorial letter is sent out.

The tutorial letters summarize the issues arizing from the assignments and from the summary it is clear that the programme goals/aims/approach is reflected and reinforced through the comments. When the tutorial letters were looked at, the following then7es emerged:
- the need for thorough observation as a basis for reflection;
- the importance of learning cooperatively;
- the relationship between theory and practice;
- the importance of developing certain academic skills such as clear detailed description, the ability to write coherently, the importance of including and referring to evidence, and the need to follow instructions for assignments carefully;
- the importance of suggesting ways to improve, not only stating what is wrong; and • the importance of furthering professional development by combining own experience with new ideas being promoted through the course;.

These clearly mirror the programme goals and aims and approach.

The course advocates a particular approach to giving feedback - praise, question, and encourage, and this approach is reflected in the tutorial letters. Feedback in the letters comprises three parts: strengths of assignments; aspects that could be improved and some ideas to think about.

Thirdly, in the tutorial letters students are encouraged to ask questions about the feedback they are given. In addition, they are asked to submit their assignments if they haven't already done so and reminded of other points.

STUDENT VIEWS ON FEEDBACK

Comments of students also indicate the importance of the feedback, particularly as a mechanism for encouraging and motivating students.

One student commented about the feedback
> It's always very encouraging. They motivate us and are very positive.

And another student said:
> I have gained confidence that at least I am able to cope. After not having studied for a couple of years, I was not sure how I would cope with this distance course at a university. But through the assignments I have realized that I am capable. I feel that I ant communicating with Yvonne and she has come to know me a lot through my assignments though we do not have much physical contact. The comment I liked very much was the one where she commented about my writing style. 'I really enjoy your writing style', 'I like this term chronological status'. My wife looked at it and she was thrilled.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Detailed and useful comments on the assignments make feedback an important teaching mechanism on the EDE programme and a way of establishing dialogue with and motivating teachers. The usefulness of the feedback given to learners is further supported by comments made by the external examiner such as the one below[7].

The students received a great deal of individual attention - through extensive and encouraging comments on their assignments and in the tutorial letters, individual discussions with the course coordinator, and structured work with partners.

Feedback is a useful tool to promote the goals of the programme and to encourage teachers to improve their practice by linking what they write in assignments to their own contexts. Most importantly, feedback is used to model good approaches to marking and as such contributes to the central goal of the programme to improve classroom practice.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

There are two aspects to quality assurance as it applies to assessment:

• assignment management, with particular emphasis on turnaround time;

• reliability and fairness of marking.

ASSIGNMENT MANAGEMENT

The aim of feedback on assignments is to create a dialogue between the student and the lecturer. If the assignments are not returned before the next assignment has to be written and submitted, then the dialogue has been curtailed. In distance education, turnaround time on assignments is not simply a matter of tutors marking assignments quickly. When large numbers of students are being dealt with, there are administrative processes of receiving assignments, allocating them to tutors, recording the marks/comments given by tutors, and sending them back to students.

From the interview with the English coordinator the following information about turnaround time on assignments was obtained.

---

[7] November 1996

Assignments from learners are sent to the university, are received by the administrative office of the FDE. Assignments must reflect the following details: course/specialization, Further Diploma in Education, Faculty of Education and Wits University. They are then recorded and sent to the lecturers for marking. When assignments have been marked and individual comments made, feedback or tutorial letters are prepared. The marked assignments together with feedback/tutorial letters are then sent to the administrative office for mailing back to the learners.

The turnaround period for assignments is estimated at four to six weeks. However, this is dependent on the kind of assignments, when they are received, the number of scripts to be marked and whether or not marking has to be shared with markers external to the FDE programme or to the university. Some learners do not submit their assignments on the specified date. For example, the postal submission date for one assignment was 9 February 1998, but only on 23 February (14 days later) were most of the assignments in. The coordinator usually takes a week to mark the assignments, and then either posts them back or returns them at residentials. The result is that the turnaround time is anything from four to six weeks.

The question to be asked about this is whether the students find this satisfactory.

No direct questions were asked on this topic in the interviews, but the responses in the survey (see above) indicate that of all the aspects related to assessment in the English courses, this is regarded as least satisfactory by the students.

RELIABILITY AND FAIRNESS OF MARKING

As has been mentioned above, this is not a big issue with the English courses, because usually one lecturer marks all the assignments and examinations of the students doing a particular course in a particular year.

In the English courses at the moment the only check on reliability and fairness of marking at present is the fact that the courses have an external examiner who looks at each batch of examinations and examination equivalent assignments. In terms of reliability and fairness the examiner found that the marking was accurate and consistent and very few changes in marks were made. Essentially, though, the external examiner system is a quality control system.

What is more interesting is to record the quality assurance system devised by the Education coordinator to cope with larger numbers of students and a group of eight markers. The development of criteria in terms of which student achievement is to be judged becomes critical when tutors marking the same group of students need to be sure about what standards they are applying.

For each education assignment, broad assessment criteria are provided in the assignment booklets. However, when tutors receive a batch of assignments, they sit together and work out a much more detailed set of criteria in teens of what the students have produced. The course coordinator plots these criteria on a grid which tutors then use to give marks to students. The students receive a copy of the grid with a rationale for

the mark they have been awarded. A copy of the grid worked out for the third assignment in the Curriculum and Classrooms course is on the next page.

Wits University, Further Diplomas in Education

'Curriculum and Classrooms': Assignment 3 - Final Marking Grid

CONTENT FORM	C1 - Has not demonstrated an understanding of constructivism - Has not presented evidence of reading course materials	C2 - Some understanding of key ideas in constructivism, perhaps superficial and not comprehensive - begins to relate constructivism to learner-centred education - goes beyond slogans	C3 - comprehensive understanding of consructivism and roots of learner-centredness in constructivism - moves beyond mere discourse of learner - centred education and engages with complexities in constructivism and learner-centred teaching	C4 - understanding of differences between theories of learning and classroom approaches and how they inform each other - critiques or reinterprets learner-centredness in terms of constructivism
F1 - isolated ideas with little depth or elaboration. - chunks copied from course - slogans/ rhetoric - sweeping generalisations - evidence of rote-learning - poor organisation and structure	Below 45%	45% - 50%	50% - 59%	

	45% -49%	50% - 59%	60% - 69%	
F2 - attempts to elaborate and clarify meanings through examples, quotes etc - organisation and structure evident, (*particularly in* use of paragraphs, intro, concl)	.			
F3 - relates concepts to each other and to appropriate examples - relates different texts to each other (including classroom experience) - uses appropriate evidence to back up claims - organisation and structure used to maintain focus		55% - 65%	70% - 74%	75% - 80%
F4 - well integrated, focussed and argued piece - clear *expression of* differences between theory and practice and relationships between them			75% - 80%	above 80%

The procedures for marking each assignment is therefore as follows:
- Tutors individually sample mark some assignments to get a sense of criteria to use.
- Tutors as a group workshop the criteria.
- The coordinator works out the grid.
- The tutors group mark and discuss several assignments together in order to get a sense of how to use the grid.
- They then mark their own set of 30 assignments.
- Sometimes the coordinator moderates the assignments, but the benefits of this must be measured against the disadvantage of increasing the turn around time.

This approach is helpful in a number of ways:

1. It provides a balance between being transparent about assessment criteria and evolving assessment criteria through professional judgement based on what the students produce.
2. It provides opportunity for the professional development of tutors both in terms of the demands of the course and the manner in which feedback should be provided.
3. Use of the method is likely to increase inter-tutor reliability as far as grading of the students is concerned.
4. The amount, accuracy, as well as efficiency with which feedback can be given to students is impressive.

CONCLUSIONS

If students are going to complain about a programme, the first thing they tend to complain about is the assessment. It is significant, therefore, that not only did the students not complain about the assessment in the English courses on this programme, but it was commented on very favourably both in the survey and the interviews.

Assessment design

In terms of the main research question, which is to determine the teaching and learning practices that lead to improved classroom practice, the findings on assessment design are crucial. Even if assessment of students' classroom practice by lecturers/tutors in schools is not feasible, classroom practice and reflection on practice can be built into the assessment design and assessed indirectly. In this programme the majority of the assignments require the students to work in the classroom - either teaching, preparing materials, or doing research. The students definitely see and value the link between the assignments and the improvement of their classroom practice.

What is also interesting is that the way the assessment is designed allows for the cumulative development of competence. Similar competences are required in a series of assignments, which mean that students have a chance to `get better'. For example, in the Theory and Practice course, nearly every assignment requires design and/or adaptation of a lesson(s), theoretical justification of approach, actual implementation of the lesson, and reflection on the success/lack of success. This process also involves self and peer assessment and builds cooperative as well as independent learning.

A very practical, applied, process approach in assignments has its dangers, however. Often it means that students can avoid specific engagement with the particular theory dealt with in the course, and simply fall back on what they know already to analyze what happens. Strategies need to be found to encourage engagement with theory.

A strong feature of the assessment in the English courses is that support is structured into the design of the assignments. Students are not expected to know automatically how to do a complex assignment, but are guided step by step through the process, often with formative assessment at specific stages. This support would be further strengthened if specific assessment criteria were provided to guide students in their assessment of themselves and each other.

Teaching on assignments

Teaching on assignments, both in the form of commenting on individual assignments and in the form of tutorial letters, is a useful tool to promote the goals of the programme and to encourage teachers to improve their practice by linking what they write in assignments to their own contexts. Most importantly, feedback can be used to model good approaches to marking and as such contribute to the central goal of the programme - the improvement of classroom practice.

The feedback on assessment in the English courses had a number of important features. Every possible opportunity was found for praise and encouragement on specific matters. However, the comment did not stop at the positive; it includes constructive criticism which opened dialogue, and pointed to concrete changes for improvement. Most importantly, the style of commenting established a supportive relationship in which the difficulties facing the students as well as the efforts they have made were recognized.

Quality assurance

The quality control function of the external examiner is not adequate, particularly when there are large numbers of students and a team of markers (some of whom might not be very experienced). The external examiner only sees the marking when it is done, and only sees the end of year examination or examination equivalent.

In addition, there needs to be a quality assurance process which starts with careful assessment design, provides criteria for students, ensures that all markers understand the criteria and can apply them fairly, and ensures that the turnaround time is kept to a minimum.

The quality assurance process used in the education studies courses in the programme has the following good features:

- It provides a balance between being transparent about assessment criteria and evolving assessment criteria through professional judgement based on what the students produce.

- It provides opportunity for the professional development of tutors both in terms of the demands of the course and the manner in which feedback should be provided.

- Use of the process is likely to increase inter-tutor reliability as far as grading of the students is concerned.

- The amount, accuracy, as well as efficiency with which feedback can be given to students is impressive.

Chapter Six

Student Support

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we look at forms of support and how they meet the needs of individual students and contribute towards meeting the programme goals and aims. Tait[1] defines learner or student support as

> those activities which are individualized or delivered in interactive groups (whether face-to-face, by telephone, electronically or in some other medium), such as tutoring and counseling, in contrast with the learning materials prepared for a mass of users without any actual individual or group in mind.

Similarly, Bailey, Kirkup and Taylor[2] argue that

> Support systems are usually conceptualized as that range of resources- human, technical and administrative - available to learners, which are complementary to centrally produced, possibly multi-media, materials. [3]

In the South African context, a high percentage of students are not likely to succeed if they are admitted to distance education institutions but are not provided with adequate support. This is because of the well documented poor quality of education for the majority of the population. Glennie [4] sums up the reasons for the high failure and attrition rates by saying

Many learners undertaking distance education programmes at secondary and tertiary level do so on the basis of very negative experiences of education. Their schools have operated sporadically, their teachers have often been alienated, unmotivated, and authoritarian, and rote learning will have been the norm. The prospective learners are likely to lack many essential learning skills, and, in general, are underprepared.

---

[1] Tait, A. and Mills, R., (eds.), 1997, *Supporting the Learner in Open and Distance Learning.* London: Routledge, Page 59

[2] Bailey, D. & Kirkup, G. and Taylor, L., 1996, Equal Opportunities in open and distance learning. In Tait, A. and Mills, R. (eds.), 1996, *Supporting the Learner in Open and Distance Learning.* London: Pitman Publishing, p. 139

[3] An important aspect of learner support is humanizing the institution and helping the student in managing the administrative process' and it is important for distance education institutions to have an efficient administrative system which is responsive to individual learner needs.
Due to time limitations we did not focus on administration but the following comments can be made. No special arrangements have been made by the university authorities to recognize the special needs of distance learners. Applications are processed centrally with other applications. No officer has been allocated the task of isolating the applications into the FDE programme so that they can be processed earlier. The overall dateline for applications is the end of September. However, there is provision for late registration up to the end of December. This means learners get to know about their admission state in February/March. As a result, this year registration of learners overlapped with the residential block held in April 1997.

[4] Glennie, J. 1996 Towards learner-centred distance education in the changing South African context. In Tait, A. and Mills, R. (eds) *Supporting the Learner in Open and Distance Learning.* London: Routledge. p. 25.

Clearly student support is critical to the success of any well functioning distance education system. The Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation[5] acknowledges the positive role of distance education and resource based-learning in relation to providing access and promoting the quality of education but cautions that despite these positive aspects, there is 'inadequate learner support'. A Distance Education Quality Standards Framework for South Africa is firm in its assertion that learner support needs to be an integral part of well functioning distance education.

A Policy Framework for Education and Training' is unequivocal in its statement that learner support is a necessary criteria for distance education to function effectively:

> For distance education to function effectively, there are a number of criteria to be met, including well-designed courses, learner support, efficient administrative processes and appropriate organisational structures and evaluation procedures. (my emphasis)

The national Teacher Audit[s] also recognizes that support is very important to the success of any teacher education programme offered at a distance and advocates that:

> [P]rovision should be made by distance education providers to advise and help individuals who would otherwise be isolated throughout the learning process... It should be made easily available through a variety of devices including, most importantly, human intervention.[9]

It goes on to say,

> If learners are to adapt to the special requirements of guided self-study, they require various forms of support, for example satisfactory access to tutors and facilitators, opportunity to interact with other learners, and access to the necessary facilities.

Support should help, motivate and encourage learners as well as help to combat feelings of isolation. The main structures provided for student support in the FDE are:

- compulsory residential blocks (contact sessions);
- peer support;
- voluntary mid-cycle workshops;
- telephone support;
- individual face-to-face consultation with lecturers and tutors;
- feedback on assignments.

The tables below illustrates what types of support students make use of and how they rate the importance of each type of support.

[5] Department of Education,1996, The *Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation,* Pretoria, p. 25.

[6] Department of Education, 1996, *A Distance Education Quality Standards Framework for South Africa, A* Discussion Document prepared by the Directorate for Distance Education, Media and Technological Services, Pretoria.

[7] Department of Education. A Policy Framework for Education and Training. 1994. Pretoria. p.77 *"SAIDE. 1995, Teacher Education Offered at a Distance in South Africa Braamfontein: SAIDE, p. 21*

[8] Ibid. p 21

[9] This will be discussed in Chapter 5

Question: Which of the following types of support did you make use of?

1. I attended residential sessions	All- 40	Most- 3	A few- 0
2. I attended mid-cycle workshops	All - 25	Sometimes- 10	None- 6
3. I worked with a study partner	A lot- 17	Sometimes- 24	Not at all - 2
4. I phoned my lecturer /tutor for help	Often- 4	Occasionally- 10	Never - 29
5. I visited my lecturer/tutor at Wits	Often- 3	Occasionally - 8	Never - 32

Question: How necessary do you think the following types of support are for successful study on this programme?

	Essential	Quite important	Not necessary
1. Residential sessions	28	12	2
2. Mid-cycle workshops	15	25	3
3. Working with a study partner	28	13	1
4. Telephone support from lecturer/tutor	14	25	4
5. Face-to-face support from lecturer/tutor	30	8	5

as well as residential sessions and working with a study partner as very important. They do not view mid-cycle workshops and telephone support as essential although they feel it is necessary. A contradiction that needs to be explored is in relation to face-to-face support and telephone support. Although students rate these forms of direct personal support as important there is low usage of this type of support. The reasons why students make use of various forms of support more than other forms is discussed below in relation to each form of support.

RESIDENTIALS

Introduction

The FIDE is described by the University as a `mixed mode' course and the major form of support provided is the contact session or residential block. Much of the literature on distance education has argued that tutorials are a vital form of support if distance education learners are to succeed." In addition to modelling as discussed in Chapter

[11] Thorpe, M. 1979, When is a course not a course'? In *Teaching at a Distance*, no 16. pp. 7 - 13

Chee-Kwong, K. 1996, Strategic Tutor Monitoring. In *Open Learning, vol. 11. No. 2. pp38 - 40*

Four, and the more obvious purely `academic' function of residentials, studies have also cited other benefits of contact sessions. In various research, learners reported that they valued the residential sessions for confidence building and networking [2]. Furthermore, Willis points out the importance of unobtrusive cues in face-to-face teaching. In distance education such cues are missing. It has also been reported that students appreciate real time interaction with other people in their studies, particularly with their lecturers / tutors. This desire for interaction is strongest in rural areas."

Whereas Chapter Four focused on how teachers can learn through the kinds of teaching modelled at residentials, this section focuses on the support functions of tutorials.

Information from course coordinator

A total of seven compulsory residential blocks are held at the university over the two year duration of the programme. The blocks take place during school holidays. In the first year of study, four blocks are held each of an average of three and half days. Three residential blocks are held in the second year of study. Courses are designed with residential blocks in mind and the blocks are used to cover parts of the course not included in the written materials, to highlight main points and expand on concepts. At the residential block, learners also have the opportunity to:

• access library resources and other university facilities;
• meet with learners from other regions;
• meet with lecturers and tutors face to face and discuss course related matters; and • carry out practicals.

Lecturers, tutors, and contracted materials developers form a support team at the residential blocks.

Accommodation is arranged by the university and paid for by the learner. Transport costs are borne by the learner.

The course coordinator for English says that the main purposes of the residentials are:
• the modeling of good practice,
• introducing additional issues ,
• opportunity to learn from each other,
• opportunity to see a video or listen to a visitor,
• introducing the assignment.

Even though the residentials seek to achieve a tremendous amount, they are necessary in the form in which they currently operate. It is necessary to convey information in oral and written form so that students understand.

According to the English course coordinator, mixed mode is essential from a pedagogic point of view, but the expense for the students is problematic. If students are registered in particular areas, then residentials could be offered closer to students.

[12] Gordon, A. et al. *1996,* Final Report for the *WK* Kellogg Foundation. Rural Educator Facilitator Research and Development Programme. August *1996.*
[13] Purnell, K., Cuskelly, E. and Danaher, *P. 1994.* Improving Distance Education for University Students: Issues and Experiences *of* Students in Cities and Rural Areas. In *Journal of Distance Education, vol. X1,* no *2*

Information from the programmes for contact sessions

From looking at the programmes for the contact sessions, it appeared that the following were the functions of the contact sessions for the English courses in 1997:

1. Orientation to programme as a whole and to the specific course.
2. Helping students understand content. Certain key difficult techniques (such as working with transcripts) are selected for students to work on together, so that they are not a hindrance to their understanding of the materials. Task suited to face-to-face contact (such as how to organize group work) are also dealt with in these sessions.
3. Establishing learners' right to use their own voices in the course.
4. Helping learners establish themselves in the approach of the course - moving from experience to reflection to extension/alternatives.
5. Modelling of approaches recommended in materials.
6. Giving learners a chance to get to know each other.
7. Providing administrative support through explanations of arrangements.
8. Helping learners with assignments.
9. Developing learners' oral/aural language skills (much group work/oral presentations).
10. Getting feedback from students on how the course is going.
11. Providing an opportunity to introduce other voices/people into the course - storytelling, presentations by READ etc.
12. Providing access to other resources eg Wits library.
13. Providing opportunities for individual consultation with lecturer/tutor.
14. Opportunity to establish a students' representative body.

While the above information outlines the coordinators views of the functions of contact sessions, information from observations of the contact sessions allowed the researchers the opportunity to see what actually happens in contact sessions and interviews with students and the survey captured students' views.

Information from observations

The contact sessions supported the learners in the following main ways. *Assignments*

An important function of the residentials is helping students with assignments. In at least four of the sessions observed teachers were given direct help with assignment The sessions offer students support in working on assignments still to be written a well as providing additional feedback on previous assignments.

Interacting with materials

Regardless of how good materials are, there are certain things which materials cannot cater for and therefore residentials are an important part of the Wits EDE delivery model. The residentials are used to support teachers by assisting them with difficulties in the materials (for example exploratory talk as a way of getting to grips with content) and giving them opportunities to discuss ideas and approaches in the materials. Moreover, key points are summarizing and emphasized in these sessions. Another important support function is the enriching of the materials by introducing

additional information and resources, for example brochures from various sources, videos, handouts and books. Lecturers are also able to check for understanding, for example through regular report backs after group and pair work, asking teachers to summarize parts of materials in their own words.

Social support and building confidence

The residentials give students the opportunity to get to know each other and interact with each other. Student participation was commented on favourably in most of the observation providing an opportunity for students to get to know each other. The conducive classroom atmosphere (informal and friendly but professional) and group and pair activities which were central in the sessions also contributed to this. Because a variety of types of interaction were encouraged, students who did not feel confident to speak to the whole group, nevertheless had an opportunity to contribute in groups and pairs. In two of the classes, males tended to dominate in the plenary discussion, but the facilitators were aware of this, and in one case deliberately requested female students to respond.

Questioning and encouraging the use of Students' questions to build rich discussion was skillfully employed. Facilitators not only asked questions of the students but encouraged students to ask questions of each other.

Students were credited with being experts in their own contexts and with their own pupils and facilitators frequently drew on teachers' experiences and elicited their opinions. Students' experiences in the classroom and in the wider context were often the starting point for introducing new work. For example students were asked to discuss their difficulties in teaching poetry; they were asked to share their lesson planning experience in PRESET and in day-to-day practice; they were asked to think about the resources available in their schools and communities; they were asked to write about their own experiences; they were asked during the lesson to evaluate the suggested ideas in terms of their knowledge of their own pupils' level and interest.

Values

The residentials contributed towards conveying important values that may be difficult to convey through materials, for example a discussion on learners with disabilities. Other values that are promoted are respect for students views, the value of group work, and participation by all.

Transfer

Importantly, residentials help teachers to relate the materials and issues to their own context for example by posing probing questions and by modelling as discussed in Chapter Four.

Information from surveys

As residentials are compulsory, forty students said that they attended all of the sessions, and three said they attended most of the sessions. Most students attend residentials despite the fact that it is expensive for students to travel to residentials. This affirms that students see residentials as important. Responses from the survey also indicate that students view residentials as very valuable. Twenty-eight students

indicated that they believe residentials are essential, twelve quite important and only two students said that they were not necessary.

Information from interviews

An important function of the residentials is to combat the isolation of the distance learner and in an interview, one teacher said that she did not feel too lonely because of the support she receives from other teachers she meets during the residentials. Another teacher also mentioned the importance of sharing problems at the residentials.

A third student commented on the value of the residentials for assisting with the clarification of assignments and said that `We can't deal just with the assignments. We need the residentials to deal with the difficulties with the assignment', and another commented `I think they[the residentials] are an essential part. It's no point with just the materials, you won't have any contact with your tutor, seeing if you understand everything. They are important for getting additional information, for asking questions, and discussing so that the difficulties can be resolved'. He also felt that another purpose of the residentials is `Getting to know one's study partners, and the social part of it'.

Concluding comments

Evidence from the various sources strongly indicate that the contact sessions support students in a number of ways. Most importantly the sessions help learners to deal with difficult concepts and give learners the opportunity to discuss difficulties with both lecturers and fellow learners. The sessions also combat feelings of isolation and loneliness and help to build confidence.

PEER SUPPORT

An important part of the student support strategy of the FIDE is peer support. Peer support is built into the design of all the courses in the programme. Students identify study partners at registration and at the first residential session. As the introductory booklet explains:

You are in the fortunate position of studying with a partner at your own school or in the same region. You will have to do many of your course activities with your study partner so don't hesitate to make contact with him or her. You could also share problems and discuss issues raised in the study materials with your study partner (or even colleagues not on the FDE course). (p.7)

Holmberg has confirmed the importance of peer interaction and has argued that students:

need to share discoveries and intellectual experiences with someone else, to exchange views and through this exchange learn confidently to work with the intellectual matter concerned. [14]

Peer groups are important, especially in distance education. They encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and help them to become aware of the active role they can play in knowledge making. [15]

[14] Holmberg, B. 1984. Guided Didactic Conversation in Distance Education. In Sewart, D. & Keegan, D. & Holmberg, B. (eds.), *Distance Education. International Perspectives.* London: Routledge.
[15] Thomson, C. and Inglis, M. 1993, Peer Group Learning: Whose responsibility ? In *Journal of Education, Vol.* 18, no 1.

Paul has argued that:

One of the biggest problems faced by first-time students in such an environment [i.e. open university] is the absence of peers. While this is a serious academic problem, given the interaction and being exposed to different perspectives on issues, it is even more fundamental a concern in terms of student persistence. [16]

Furthermore, Fage and Mills[17] have observed that Open University students tend to blame themselves for failure rather than the institution or courses when they perform badly. As such it is important to develop the learners self confidence and peers can offer reassurance and support.

In practice, some students live too far apart to make it feasible to work with a partner, but these students are definitely in the minority. Students can have different study partners for the English courses from those that they have for the Education courses. Very often there is a Maths or Science student in their school, and it is convenient to work on the education assignments together. The teachers often change study partners when they choose their options in the second year.

Peer support is built into various parts of the course such as assignments and exams.

For example the *Unit One Assignment: Relating theories of language learning and acquisition to own teaching and teaching of study partner* involves classroom observation, discussion with partner about lessons observed, and own reflections about partner's observation of student's own lesson.

The Theory and Practice Course extends the notion of study partners into the exam. The examination in the Theory and Practice course is open book and the students receive the questions beforehand. Students choose one of four questions. Each question focuses on a different aspect of the course - oral language, reading, writing, and integrating skills. Two different strategies using the peer support systems have been built into the assignments during the course of the year. In the first year in which the course was nm, students were required to spend the first part of the examination working in pairs to prepare a lesson/series of lessons in response to one of the questions. This was awarded 70% of the marks. In the second part of the examination they were required to write an individual commentary on the task just completed with the partner. This was awarded 30% of the marks. This had problems, picked up both by the external examiner and the course coordinator. The following year (1997), students were given an option of discussing the question with a partner at the beginning of the examination then each had to write their own full answer to the question. See Appendix ? for the two examiner's reports on the different approaches.

Opinion of course coordinator

According to the Education Course Coordinator, the effectiveness of the study partner system is variable - it works excellently for some but for others it doesn't work well for logistic as well as other reasons (for example a teacher couldn't phone her partner at

[16] Paul, R. 1990.Towards Open Management. *In Leadership and Integrity in Open Learning and Distance Education.* London: Kogan Page
[17] Fage, O. & Mills, R. 1986, Student -Tutor feedback in the Open University. In *Open Learning, vol. 1. no. 3*

home because the partner's wife objected). Sometimes study partners help each other to do good work, but sometimes they reinforce the worst things in each other. There have also been problems with copying each other's assignments word for word. However, once it has been drawn to the attention of students that they can work together but then must go away and write their own assignments, it usually works.

Findings from the survey

In the survey seventeen students said that they worked with a study partner `a lot `, twenty four said `sometimes' and only two students said that they did not work with a study partner at all. The majority of students, twenty eight, said that this form of support was essential, thirteen quite important and one not necessary. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, we did not pursue further why study partners were perceived as essential and what the limitations of study partners were.

Findings from the interview

The sample comprised students who have study partners as well as two who did not. In one instance the students reported that they were satisfied with the type of support they were getting from each other. However another student indicated that cooperation with her partner was very difficult to achieve. She said that they work together only when it is absolutely necessary to do so, for example when an assignment requires them to work together.

One of the teachers who does not have a study partner gets a colleague to fill in to observe lessons and work with him when work is required with a partner. This students comes from a school which seems to be very supportive of his studying. [18]

Although due to limited time we did not pursue the issue of study partners to its full extent, one student reported how she used her study partner to do an assignment. She said:

> First of all, before I involve my study partner, I read [the information on the assignment] alone at home, and I decide which one I must write that is on their level - not any assignment pleases me, because the focus is on the learner. From there I decide whether if I do one, two, three, will I be relevant to my lecturer. From there I go to my study partner and discuss it. We share ideas. As we share, I write some of it down, so that when I go back I combine my own ideas with my study partner's. Sometimes if we get stuck, we involve other teachers who are doing the course. So today I invited one of the teachers to come and evaluate my work.

She said that if her and her partner decide to do different topics they still help each other.

[18] One of the goals of the programme is 'enabling and fostering, collegial and co-operative ways of working among teachers'. Teachers are encouraged to draw support from colleagues in the school. In the survey all but one students felt that the English teaching programme was very successful (29 students) or fairly successful (13 students) in meeting this goal. Interviews with students revealed that depending on the school, teachers could draw on colleagues for help. In these schools teachers also contributed to the improved practice of those who were not registered for the diploma. However, not all schools offer this type of support. One teacher said that the teachers and principal in her school do not work together and she gets very little support and recognition from them.

A further positive spin off of the pairs is the sharing of information. For example, in an interview, one student reported that sometimes one of the pair comes to the mid cycle workshop and passes on information to the absent study partner.

Concluding comments

Most of the students work with study partners and value this system of support. The way peer support is built into various aspects of the course seems to work well and reinforces the importance of peer work. Peer support works particularly well for some students and not as well for others, particularly because of logistics.

In many ways peer support is linked to the assumption permeating the diploma that it is important to recognize what the teachers already know as a result of their previous experiences as students and from their experiences as teachers, family members and members of communities. It is recognized that colleagues are an important resource and this reaffirms that teachers themselves are active participants in the construction of knowledge. The peer system also contributes to the programme aim of `enabling and fostering collegial and co-operative ways of working among teachers' and its aim `to provide for dialogue will) and among teachers.'

MID-CYCLE WORKSHOPS

Information from course coordinator

Mid cycle workshops are not compulsory. They are conducted midway between the first and second residential periods. Their function is primarily to assist with assignment and content queries. They are conducted at two venues - Phalaborwa and Wits on Saturdays. According to the English coordinator, about half to two thirds of the students attend the mid-cycle workshops. There is better attendance at Phalaborwa than at Wits - probably because students who live quite close to Wits can visit their tutors at other times. Sometimes one of a pair comes and passes on information to the other.

In the English courses, there is a concrete focus on assignments, but content issues are also dealt with. In the education courses, there is a focus on assigmnents, but also on improving reading and writing skills, as students have a lot of problems coping with this on their own.

Findings from the survey

In the survey 25 students said they attended all the mid cycle workshops, 10 students said they attended sometimes and 6 said they had not attended any. 15 students said that mid cycle workshops were essential, 15 said they were quite important and 3 said they were not necessary.

15 teachers, found the mid cycle workshops essential compared to 28 teachers saying the workshops were essential. It would have been interesting to pursue the differences between these two support structures but time did not permit this. It is possible that as the mid-cycle workshops are not compulsory, unlike the workshops, teachers perceive them not to be essential.

Concluding comments

Given that the mid cycle workshops are not compulsory and such a high number of learners attend may be indicative of one of the values of commitment to improved practice.

INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT FROM LECTURERS AND TUTORS

Information from course coordinator

In addition to group tutorials at residential, lecturers and tutors provide individual face to face tutoring throughout the year. The education coordinator reported that three or four students come round assignment time and another three or four will phone in for help. Generally very few learners visit the university and it is usually those in the vicinity of Gauteng who are able to take advantage of one to one tutoring outside of residentials.

The education coordinator reported that students go to good tutors. The ideal is to encourage a close tutor student relationship, for academic support.

In the English courses, the numbers are relatively small, and hence in 1997 there were no tutors, only the course coordinator, and two additional course writers who acted as tutors for their courses. In education there are over 200 students. To cope with this number, there are eight tutors including the course coordinator.

The education coordinator reported that the students come not only with academic problems, but with personal problems which create academic problems. She has decided that she or her tutors can't really deal with these problems, because they don't have the expertise or time to do so. For example, one student lost her child, one female student was beaten up by her husband, another male. student was beaten up by wife's family, lots of students get ill, and lots of students have financial problems. A complicating factor is that these problems usually come in the form of requests for extensions on assignments. Now the coordinator asks students to put in writing the request for late submission of assignments, and then makes a decision as she believes that if you want to be strict about submission dates, decisions about extensions must be done centrally.

In addition to coming to see lecturers and tutors in-between residentials, many students consult with them during the residentials. An example from the April residential of a list kept by the English coordinator shows how common this is:

5 April: Day One of residential Approximately 75 minutes	
Brief discussion with 8 students - requests for extensions re assignment deadlines; messages from absent study partners, personal problems (a husband who destroyed his wife's study material; a student recovering from a miscarriage)	
6 April: Day Two of residential Approximately 60 minutes	
Tea and lunch break discussions with 5 students - request to resubmit a failed assignment; requests for books for colleagues not on the course; preparation for Grammar exam in July.	
7 April: Day Three of residential Approximately 70 minutes	
Tea and lunch break discussions with 6 students - clarification of assignment tasks; preparation for Grammar exam, request to leave the residential early because of a sick child.	
8 April: Day Four of residential Approximately 70 minutes	
Tea and end of session discussions with 4 students - request for some information for a school principal; clarification of assignment tasks.	

Although some students managed to speak to the coordinator during the residentials, she has pointed out that at the residential sessions, there is limited time available for individual consultation, especially because she teaches students in both year groups. On average the coordinator estimates that she spends 60 - 90 minutes per day doing individual counselling during the residential week.

Findings from survey

In the survey most students, thirty two said that they had never visited their lecturer / tutor at Wits, eight had occasionally and three often. Despite the fact that a low number of teachers visit lecturers / tutors, the majority of students, thirty, said that face-to-face support from the lecturer / tutor was essential, eight said that it was quite important and five said that it was not necessary. It would be necessary to further explore why visits are not frequent, but as mentioned, it is likely that one factor for this is the teachers' geographic distance from Wits.

It is unlikely that teachers do not visit lecturers / tutors because they do not find them good as 10 teachers commented on the supportiveness and helpfulness of the lecturers/tutors in the open-ended part of the survey.

Interviews with students

One student reaffirmed the importance of contact with tutors:

I think they [the residentials] are au essential part. It's no point with just the materials, you won't have any contact with your tutor, seeing if you understand everything. They are important for getting additional information, for asking questions, and discussing so that the difficulties can he resolved.

TELEPHONE SUPPORT Information from course coordinator

Teachers are invited to phone lecturers and tutors and an overnight answering machine is available for learners to use after hours. Some lecturers have made their home numbers available to learners.

On average the coordinator estimates that she spends 15 - 60 minutes per week telephone tutoring / counselling telephonically.

During the period 1 - 30 April 1998 the coordinator kept a list of year one and year two students who had telephoned her. All in all the telephone calls were few in number, totaling 50 minutes in time. The list below indicates the dates of phone calls and nature of conversations.

1 - 3 April 4 X 5 minutes phone calls about assignments that students should bring to the residential sessions.

23 April 1 X 10 minute phone call - clarification of assignment task.

26 April 2 X 10 minute phone calls - problems with conducting the classroom observation pail of an assignment.

She reported that there is a slight increase in telephone calls in the month before exams or the presentation of the exam equivalent assignment.

According to staff, teachers do not make as much use of the support offered as they could:

> What puzzles me is that most students request very little support despite repeated reassurances that they are welcome to phone me. They all have my home telephone number as it is easier to reach me in the early mornings or the evenings but comparatively few contact me. I know that some (many'?) students support each other through the study partners system. (Yvonne Reed)

Future research is to be conducted by SAIDE to explore why this is the case.

Information from survey

Not many learners use telephone support. In the survey it was revealed that twenty nine learners had never phoned the lecturer/tutor, ten had occasionally phoned and four phoned often. Despite the low number of teachers who phoned in for support, only four teachers said telephone support was not necessary. Twenty-five students said that they thought telephone support was quite important and fourteen said it was essential. This indicates that learners would like to phone but may not have access to telephones, or there may be other reasons why they cannot phone, for example teachers may be hindered by the cost of long distance calls.

SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS THROUGH THE USE OF FACILITATORS

Introduction

Currently there is no provision built into the support structures so that lecturers/tutors can visit teachers at their schools. The question about whether or not students would like support in their classroom teaching is important to retain in any survey of student opinion on an in-service course (even though the logistics and cost of arranging it are insurmountable), because often the assumption is that students do not see the need for classroom visits as they are already qualified teachers.

This is clearly not the case with the FDE students as discussed below. They value the programme as having a direct bearing on their classroom teaching, and would like more hands on support in improving their classroom practice.

Leach[19] argues that

Perhaps the greatest challenge, however, for distance programmes of teacher education is to develop frameworks of support not only for the study of course materials but also for school-based learning.

This challenges raises important questions about the interplay of theory and practice. She goes on to describe how the practical dimension of teacher education has encouraged the concept of partnerships between institutions responsible for teacher education courses and schools which can provide experience of practice and cites Moon [20] to expand on this concept:

The *mentor* within the *practicum* provides the crucial link that mediates the beginning knowledge and skills of the teacher with practical experience in schools. In school-focused professional development programmes the role of more experienced teachers in assisting the professional growth of their less-experienced colleagues is becoming increasingly acknowledged. Most significantly the mentor role is crucial to the forging of pedagogic knowledge and academic or subject domain knowledge.

Information from survey

The overwhelming majority of students, twenty nine would like lectures / tutors to visit them in the classroom to give them support. Three students said that they would like this type of support sometimes and only five said they did not need classroom support. (It would be interesting to see if these five teachers had support from more experienced colleagues and hence did not need additional support).

Information from coordinators

Although not yet operational, there is a plan to introduce support in schools. The plan is that facilitators will be employed on a part time basis and will be based in the regions. They will be an immediate link between the learner and the institution. A facilitator should be able to assist learners in two of the following four subjects: Education, Mathematics, English Language Teaching, and Science. A facilitator will be responsible for a cluster of about thirty learners. The facilitator will be responsible for:

• establishing and maintaining a relationship with learners;
• assisting learners to develop a work schedule;
• visiting every cluster of learners each term;
• visiting every learner in school at least twice a year;
• holding weekend workshops in clusters on a regular basis;
• assisting individual learners as they work through their course materials;
• interpreting and expanding comments in Tutor Marked Assignments;
• providing counselling to learners;

[19] Leach, J. 1996. Learning in practice: Support for Professional development. In Tait, A. and Mills, R. (eds.), *Supporting the Learner in Open and Distance Learning.* London: Pitman Publishing. P. 105.
[20] Moon, R. 1996. Practical experience in teacher education: Charting a European Agenda, in *European Journal of Teacher Education, vol.* 19. No. 2. p.18.

- drawing up regular progress reports; and
- attending and tutoring on residential courses organized by the FDE programme.

This plan has not yet been realized due to financial constraints. However, a half-time post of student support coordinator was filled last year. Because the appointment was made at the end of the year, the course coordinators did not have the time to work with her to plan overall support work. The coordinator has therefore acted mainly as a education tutor thus far. However, she has also played a role in such tasks as tracking down students who haven't submitted assignments.

Concluding comments

An important aim of the FDE is to provide for dialogue with and among teachers and to encourage reflective practitioners. Leach[21] raises the issue that teachers often find it difficult to `make solitary reflections on his / her own and others' practice' and it is here that the role of the mentor becomes central if rigorous attention is paid to the process of teaching and learning and experienced teachers making explicit their pedagogic strategies to novice teachers. Thus Leach argues that good models of support should not see learning theory and professional practice as separate and distinct. She says[22]

> .. support should be set in a framework which provides for a range of opportunities: relation-ships and activities in a variety of settings, which include schools and classrooms. We would also argue that support in the professional development context must ensure that opportunities for learning continually challenge traditional dichotomies of theory and practice, teacher and learner, institutional learning and 'everyday' experience. The variety of opportunities provided by such support are not a series of unconnected events but should provide, in an ongoing, unfolding way, the basis for 'learning in 'practice' that stretches across time and space.

Although the plan for schools based support has not yet been realized, the FDE captures many of the features of school-based support through features such as the encouragement of peer support and assessment strategies.

OTHER SUPPORT

A support function is also provided by staff at the Phalaborwa Foundation (where mid cycle workshops are held) even though they are not employees of the university. Sometimes a person from the Foundation will contact the course coordinators about the requests of students. There is also a possibility of establishing links with former teacher colleges now transforming into community colleges. A further integral form of support is feedback on assignments and this is discussed in the chapter on assessment.

In the survey the following suggestions were made about additional support:

• Additional course materials (e.g. audiotapes and even videotapes, tutorial letters) - 7 respondents;
• Help with finances - 6 respondents;

---

[21] Ibid. p.106.
[22] Ibid, p.108.

- Residentials (eg extra mid-cycle workshops, provincializing the residentials, two week residentials, education to be given more time during residentials) - 4 respondents;
- Face-to-face (regular face-to-face support, lecturers should visit monthly, student counselling for encouragement) - 3 respondents;
- School visits (classroom observation by lecturer) - 2 respondents;
- Assignments (more time, more support) - 2 respondents; and
- No additional support needed - 6 respondents.

CONCLUSION

Clearly a major strength of the programme is that such a wide range of support mechanisms have been built into the programme to serve both an academic and social function. It is necessary to explore in more detail why not more use is made of the available support in addition to the more obvious logistical constraints.

Support is as much an attitude as it is a structure and the support on the programme is made successful because of a combination of structures that enable the support to operate effectively as well as the attitude to support. An important element in supporting the teachers is the sense of caring for the students and a strong ethos of collaborative work which encourages teachers to draw on a wide range of support people in their schools in addition to drawing on the programme staff.

The programme recognizes that students are likely to encounter a range of personal problems and counselling of students is done by individuals in varying degrees, although there are no formal structures or mechanisms in place. At present the programme does not offer direct support to teachers in their classrooms, although this has been identified as a need by both staff and students.

The support offered is an integral component of the programme and it functions not only to help students succeed with their studies but to model types of support relationships that teachers could replicate with their pupils.

Chapter Seven

Effect of Programme on Classroom Practice

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the effect of the programme on classroom practice is discussed. The effects are judged in terms of the framework for analysis which embodies the abilities, knowledge and values and attitudes being promoted by the FDE programme. The analytical framework (presented below) was developed by reviewing course materials, assessment, key documents about the programme, interviews with the course coordinators and observing selected contact sessions. The evidence presented here, on what students do to demonstrate the desired abilities, knowledge and values and attitudes, is derived from classroom observations and interviews with students, and a self-administered questionnaire to a cohort of students in the same year of study as the sample.

It is important to look at the physical environment in different schools in order to contextualize the teaching and learning processes and practices in schools. Schools operate in predefined structural constraints which might undermine the achievement of the above mentioned abilities. Similarly, there also exist the possibility that in spite of these constraints, the abilities can be developed.

The infrastructure in the four schools varied considerably.

There was a rural school with no classrooms. The children were taught in a shed made of split poles, nailed together for walls and a wooden corrugated iron roof with some holes in it. There was no furniture in the classroom. The majority of pupils sat on the dusty concrete floor and others sat on plastic chairs which they had brought from home. The classroom has two small chalkboards propped up on a broken desk. The junior grades are taught outside under trees. One of the trees served as the principal's office. One of the students had made special arrangements for her class to be taught in local church. Normally, she teaches her class under a tree. The church was built of sheets of corrugated iron metal with holes in them. There was a table for the teacher and benches for the pupils. Two students who are study partners worked in the school.

There was a rural school with well-ventilated classrooms. In the classroom where the lesson took place, there was enough space for the teacher and the pupils to move around and only a few broken windows. There was a chalkboard which ran the length of the wall and each pupil had a desk, The school does not have electricity.

The classroom walls were bare except for graffiti depicting a gun. A multiplication table was written in chalk on the wall. The school has a library, stocked mainly with outdated books, staff room (which had numerous posters on outcomes based education) and a principal's office.

There was ct community school with large well-ventilated classrooms. The school had electricity. The classrooms were big enough to allow for free movement of the teachers and pupils. There was a chalkboard and displays of pupils work and posters on the walls. There were enough desks for pupils even though some were broken. The school had a staff room, a principal's office and a library.

There was a school in the township with spacious well-ventilated classrooms. The lesson took place in a media room which has been converted into a classroom. Each pupil had a desk and there was chalkboard. Posters of famous poets and writers were displayed on the walls. The school had electricity. In one comer there was small room which served as the teacher's office and overlooked manicured lawns. The description of the various kinds of schools indicates that the programme is reaching teachers in a range of contexts.

The major emphasis in the chapter is the discussion around classroom practice. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part presents the analytical framework. In part two, a discussion of classroom observations is presented in terms of the analytical framework. The link between what has been taught and modelled through the course materials, assessment, residentials and what the students do in the classroom is shown. The interpretation of data and the conclusions are presented in the last part.

THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

All sectors of education and training are concerned with what the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) calls the `transfer of learning'. According to Fogart[1]`transfer means learning something in one context and applying it in another'. They stress that transfer differs from `ordinary learning' as in `ordinary learning' we do more of the same thing in the same context. However, transfer takes place when we are able to do something we learned in one context and apply it in another. Transfer is fairly complex when one considers that newly learnt activities often need to be performed in an unfamiliar or unpredictable context or that learners need to perform multiple activities in various contexts. The NQF does *not* view transfer as,

> ... something which happens after learning has occurred. Transfer happens in the activity of learning itself. It relies on learners becoming aware of how and why they are employing different abilities during task performance. It also relies on learners being able

[1] Fogat, R, Perkins, D., Bar ell, J., 1992, How *to teach for transfer,* Illinois: Skylight Publishing, p.28.

to `read' the contexts within which any task of activity is located, and understanding the differences between those contexts.'

As indicated above the analytical framework which includes abilities, knowledge and values and attitudes was developed by reviewing course materials, assessment, key documents about the programme, interviews with the course coordinators and observing selected residential sessions. The ideas around the `transfer of learning' are in line with aspects of the analytical framework which embraces notions of design and implementation of the lessons, reflection on practice and in practice and values and attitudes.

In designing lessons, students have to take into account the complex and dynamic contexts within which schools operate and also how those contexts might influence or be influenced by the teaching and learning practices. The analytical framework also suggests that students should be able to reflect on their own practice and make improvements.

The Wits FDE in English Teaching is aiming to produce teachers with the following set of abilities, knowledge and attitudes and values. If the course is deemed to be successful with the desired impact on classroom experience teachers should have developed to some extent the following specified abilities, knowledge and values and attitudes.

TEACHING ABILITIES
These fall into three categories - abilities needed for design, for implementation and for reflection and further planning.

Design
Teachers should have the ability to:
- design a lesson/series of lessons with the needs, interests and contexts of the learners in mind;
- design a lesson/series of lessons with a clear purpose, and in which the structure and methods are appropriate for the achievement of that purpose;
- develop appropriate teaching and learning materials for the lesson/series of lessons;
- use existing resources creatively for teaching and learning purposes;
- design a variety of teaching and learning strategies to involve the students actively in their own language learning through the lessons;
- develop appropriate strategies to assess the language learning of the learners.

Implementation
Teachers should have the ability to:
- facilitate learning through the organization of the physical environment in the classroom and the effective manipulation of teaching aids and learning materials;
- ensure learner participation in the lesson through skilful questioning and an appropriate blend of individual, pair and group work;

---

[2] Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), September 1995, *Ways of Seeing the National Qualifications Framework,* Pretoria: HSRC, p.52.

The analysis of classroom data that follows will be done in terms of the analytical framework. Because of the close relationship between aspects of the framework, certain categories have been grouped together.

- facilitate the learners' grasp of key concepts and processes through constructivist methods and the provision of sufficient scaffolding and reinforcement;
- manage the discussion in the lesson in such a way as to encourage critical enquiry and sensitive response to differing viewpoints;
- respond constructively to learners' varying needs, interests and difficulties.

Reflection
Teachers should have the ability to:
- reflect constructively on the success (or) lack of success of the various design and implementation elements in achieving the purpose of the lesson;
- plan improvements to the lesson and the teaching and learning strategies as a whole as a result of critical reflection.

KNOWLEDGE
The programme aims to develop the teachers' knowledge which naturally is given expression through the various abilities described above. However, the extent of the knowledge in the English courses in year one (relevant to the sample of teachers selected who are only now entering year two) needs to be specified.

Teachers should have knowledge and understanding of :
- theories and processes of language learning and acquisition in the multilingual South African contexts;
- literacy events and literacy practices in the social contexts of the home and the wider community as well as school literacy;
- a range of strategies to develop oral language in the English class based on understanding of classroom interaction - the value of talk for learning, the contribution to learning and to language acquisition of effective group work, the contribution of students' main language in talking to learn English activities, the various roles of the teacher in stimulating and supporting classroom talk, and the importance of questions and tasks which encourage the development of listening and speaking skills;
- a range of strategies to develop the reading and writing competence of their learners - approaches to the teaching of reading, learning to read in an additional language, reading to learn, becoming a critical reader, the challenges all writers face, ways of supporting learner writers, and the genre-process debate in regard to writing development;
- the basics of English grammar, and an ability to design lessons in which grammar is understood and used for meaning and in meaningful contexts.

VALUES AND ATTITUDES
Teachers should display the following values/attitudes encouraged and modelled in the various courses:
- respect for their learners and a valuing of their opinions and experiences;
- respect for learners' differing language, cultural and home backgrounds;
- concern that the learners should be progressing as well as they possibly can;
- desire for continuous improvement of own practice through research and critical reflection;
- gender awareness.

ABILITIES

While student views give a report of what students claim they have acquired from the course, observations of classroom practice give practical expression to those claims. Classroom observations were done in two visits to each of the schools. During the first visit, each classroom was observed by two researchers. The observations included pre - and post-observation interviews. In addition, an interview on the impact of the course on classroom teaching was conducted. The same pattern was followed during the second visit, with the exception of impact interviews. In their place, interviews which focused specifically on how students interact with the course materials were carried out. The data gathered during the interviews have been incorporated in Chapter Three. As indicated in the analytical framework, teaching abilities fall into three categories, namely, abilities needed for design and implementation of lessons and for reflection on the lessons. Below is an analysis of how students demonstrated the abilities to design and implement the lessons. The development of teachers' knowledge has been integrated in the analysis.

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF LESSONS

In terms of the abilities needed for the design of lessons, the programme aims to develop teachers who have the ability to:
- design a lesson/series of lessons with a clear purpose, and in which the structure and methods are appropriate for the achievement of that purpose;
- design a lesson/series of lessons with the needs, interests and contexts of the learners in mind;
- develop appropriate teaching and learning materials for the lesson/series of lessons;
- plan to use existing resources creatively for teaching and learning purposes;
- design a variety of teaching and learning strategies to involve the students actively in their own language learning through the lessons;
- develop appropriate strategies to assess the language learning of the learners.

In terms of the abilities needed for the implementation of lessons, the FDE programme aims to develop teachers who have the ability to:
- facilitate learning through the organization of the physical environment in the classroom and the effective manipulation of teaching aids and learning materials;
- ensure learner participation in the lesson through skilful questioning and an appropriate blend of individual, pair and group work;
- facilitate the learners' grasp of key concepts and processes through constructivist methods and the provision of sufficient scaffolding and reinforcement;
- manage the discussion in the lesson in such a way as to encourage critical enquiry and sensitive response to differing viewpoints;
- respond constructively to learners' varying needs, interests and difficulties. Purpose and structure of lesson

The ability to develop a coherent lesson plan is an essential step towards improving the quality of teaching. Students' ability to plan lessons is developed throughout the

Theory and Practice as well as the Grammar course materials. As reflected in Chapter Five, many of the assignments also require lesson planning. In one of the residential sessions observed, the lecturer discussed with the students two models for developing lesson plans. The students were given the opportunity comment on the models, adapt them if necessary and develop their own lesson plans on the basis of the adaptations.

During the pre-observation interviews, all students could describe the purpose and structure of their lessons, the materials (if any) and assessment strategies they were going to use in the lesson. However, the level of clarity of the descriptions varied. Some students gave detailed and clear descriptions of the purpose of the lesson, the different phases of the lesson and how they relate to one another, a variety of assessment strategies, both formative and summative and the materials to be used. They could describe the appropriateness of the lesson structure, methods and assessment strategies for the achievement of the purpose. One student was able to estimate how long each phase would take.

An example of purpose and structure of lesson is provided below:

Purpose of lesson

To encourage language use in English through activities and to improve the pupils' ability in writing.

Structure of lesson

1. Pupils study the picture, and name the animal in the picture.

2. Pupils answer questions about baboons and make sentences. Teacher writes notes from their answers on the chalkboard.

3. Teacher reads story, and writes it next to the picture asking questions so that pupils stay involved.

4. Pupils write own stories in groups.

Assessment method

Pupil will be grouped and will be asked to choose an animal and write a story about it using the guiding questions. Group leaders or another member of the group will read the story aloud.

Some of the guiding questions are the following:

 1. Where do the animals live?

2. What colour are they?

3. Do they live in big families? 4. What do they eat?

5. Where do they sleep?

6. What do they do when they are angry?

Materials designed by the student

The student brought two pictures of baboons with a separate sheet containing nine guiding questions. There was also another chart of picture of animals which the pupils used to choose an animal to write about.

Other students gave statements of purpose of the lesson which were vague. One student said the purpose of his lesson was to, `teach learners to take notes and to develop oral skills.' Another said the purpose of the lesson was `to teach learners different colours.' However, when the students were probed about what they were planning to do in their lessons and what processes they were going to employ, they were able to give clear descriptions of their intentions. Of the six students, two produced written lesson plans.

When the students spoke about the purpose, content and structure of the lessons, they drew on the concepts which they said underpin the FIDE programme. They articulated clearly key concepts such as learner-centred approaches and a variety of techniques which could be used to ensure maximum pupil participation, recognition and integration of learners' experiences in learning, multilingual approaches to English language teaching, gender sensitivity and the development of integrated language skills (reading, speaking, listening and writing). They were able to justify the practical application of these concepts in relation to the lessons they were going to teach. The students indicated that, because these concepts are grounded in the classrooms, the students are able to `develop deeper meanings' of why certain approaches are encouraged in English language teaching. They compared the FIDE programme with other programmes they have been on in which the same concepts are `simply referred' to and are not linked to classroom practice.

Concluding comment

The students appear to have an understanding of various elements that constitute a lesson and the interrelationships between them. This is also evident with students who had given unclear statements of the purpose of the lesson, but when probed, were able to describe what they were intending to do in the lesson and the processes involved. The students' understanding of the elements of a lesson plan is described in terms of the key concepts which they see as underpinning the programme. For example, the choice of teaching strategies, learning materials or the content of the lesson is informed by an awareness of the need to integrate in the lesson contexts and experiences of the pupils and use approaches that encourage pupil participation. The understanding of the key concepts could be an indication that the programme is succeeding in extending the students' knowledge of English teaching and English as a language and as a subject.

The awareness of the various elements of a lesson plan demonstrated by the students offers possibilities for translating their understanding into practice.

Taking into account learners' life and home experiences

As was indicated in Chapter Three, one of the strengths of the course materials is the way students' personal and professional experience is acknowledged, respected and used in the course materials. In several of the assignments, students are asked directly to record their own life or work experiences as a basis for further study. Even during the residential sessions, a range of strategies were used to link students' experiences to the wider context. The lecturers modelled approaches which could be used to achieve this and the students were constantly reminded to think about how they could apply these approaches in their own classrooms.

Interviews with students and observations of classrooms show that the students are aware of the need to take into account learners' life and home experiences, use the experiences to build the lesson and make links between pupils' experiences in the same subject or across lessons and subjects. The awareness was demonstrated to varying degrees. During an interview, one student said, `... it is important to draw on the pupils' experiences and build on them.' Another said, `it is important to be constantly alert to the needs of the learners...' The choice of the content of the lesson also reflected an awareness of the students' contexts of the pupils. The school where pupils were asked to write stories about wild animals is located very close to the Kruger National Park.

The translation into practice of the students' awareness was varied. In one lesson, the student elicited the learners' life and home experiences by asking learners to identify objects that they know which are similar in shape to the shapes shown to them in class. The pupils mentioned a range of objects mainly from their homes. However, the experiences of the learners were not integrated into the lesson and used to teach further. Neither did the teacher make links across the curriculum and between previous lessons and future ones.

In another school, the student tried to make links across the curriculum by designing an activity that required students' knowledge of major cities in the world. The success of the activity was hampered by learners' apparent lack of knowledge of cities.

In some lessons however, the learner's experiences were not elicited. Neither were attempts made to link the pupils' experiences in lesson with other lessons and subjects.

Concluding comment

The students seemed aware that the experiences of the learners form part of a bigger context and therefore exist in a dynamic relationship with the contexts. They seemed aware that links between lessons should be made and that the lessons should draw on the learners' experiences in order to enhance learning. The application of that understanding, however, points to some challenges. In some instances the

learners' experiences were not elicited at all. The students claimed that some topics are abstract and do not lend themselves to the integration of students' experiences, for example, `nouns' and `pronouns.' Where experiences were elicited, they were not integrated into the lesson. It would appear that recognition of the need to integrate learners' experiences was done somewhat superficially. An attempt to link the lesson across the curriculum was affected by the pupils' lack of knowledge and understanding which was required to make the connection successful.

Appropriate teaching and learning materials and the use of existing resources One of the elective courses in second year is Developing English Teaching and Learning Materials. However, in several of the other English courses, students are encouraged to develop their own materials or adapt those of other people. In one of the residential sessions observed, students' design of appropriate and effective learning materials was a central theme. The session explored ways in which free resources could be harnessed for teaching particularly for use in classrooms in rural areas where learning materials may not be easily obtainable.

During interviews some students recognized the importance of using learning materials in the lessons. They conceded that the sometimes they do not use the materials because the schools cannot afford to buy then. One student mentioned that her initial teacher preparation programme `.... did not encourage students to think creatively to develop their own materials from local resources.' In all the lessons observed in the first round of classroom observations, all the students used some form of learning materials. While some students used `ready made' learning materials in the form of handouts and worksheets, others used those that they had developed themselves. A teacher in a small village near a township, had produced her own materials made from local resources. Due to lack of proper infrastructure at the school, she had to carry the materials on public transport to and from school. The same teacher said she encourages the learners to bring materials from home.

In one lesson, the learners generated essays which they exchanged, read, edited and discussed.

The quality of the materials in terms of the appropriateness to the purpose of the lesson and aesthetics deserves comment. A student who had taken great care in designing her own materials, by pasting pictures on a chart, had chosen pictures so small that the learners at the back of the classroom could not see them. In another class a chart, covered in plastic, reflected light and the learners who were sitting at an angle could not see a picture of a post office depicted on the chart paper. In both cases the materials were appropriate to the purpose of the lesson, the level of the learners, and were well integrated into the lesson even though the technical quality was questionable. The students involved the learners in using the learning materials by asking questions on the learning materials or asking the learners to identify the objects on the chart paper.

In order to determine the suitability of the learning materials, one student mentioned that she has learnt to `...select learning materials and evaluate it so as to determine what is suitable for the learners.' She said, she tries to `...use whatever resources are readily available,'

The organization of the learners and clear instructions regarding how the learners should use the materials are important factors to consider when using learning materials. In one lesson the learners were asked to work in groups to sort cards. It was unclear whether the cards were to be sorted according to colour or shape. The learners used the cards in any way the saw fit. Although there were enough cards for each learner, some learners did not get access to them. The student seemed not to notice this.

Concluding comment

The students seemed aware of the importance of the materials in learning, irrespective of whether they are `ready made' materials or those that have been made by students themselves. There seemed to be an understanding that the materials should be suitable to the level of the pupils, appropriate to the purpose of the lesson and should be integrated into the lesson to enhance learning. There was also evidence to the effect that the students had attempted to make the materials as attractive as possible. Organizational issues with regard to clarity of instructions of how the learning materials should be used, who should it and how they relate to the lesson are important.

While teachers seemed aware that the environments in which they are can be rich sources for learning materials and that the pupils could be involved in developing the materials, there was also a view that schools ought to provide the learning materials. There appeared to be an awareness and desire to develop materials but students said they lacked the creativity to identify resources that could be turned into learning materials.

Lack of secure storage for the materials in some schools seemed to be a factor which might affect securing and developing students' own materials.

Active involvement of learners

As indicated in Chapter Four, a variety of teaching and learning strategies that encourage active involvement of learners were modelled during contact sessions. This was consistent with the general approach in the course materials which also advocated active involvement of learners. The strategies suggested and modelled include questioning skills, the creation of a conducive classroom atmosphere, and a variety of methods of encouraging student participation. In all residential sessions observed, the use of group and pair work as well as whole class discussion was modelled.

In the interviews, the students recognized that the learner always has something to contribute to learning and opportunities that encourage learner participation must be created. A student mentioned that one of the main things she has learnt from the programme is that `children ought to be given more time and space to learn rather than hurrying on to the next topic.' She also said she always looks for ways to `involve the children more in the lessons.'

At the residential sessions, the researchers observed how the lecturers managed the physical environment to ensure maximum participation of the students. As noted in Chapter Four, a related question that was looked at is whether or not the facilities were suitable for the number of students. The physical environment in the classrooms was observed in term of how the students organized it to encourage learner participation and the suitability of the facilities for the number of the learners.

The physical environment of classrooms varied considerably. In a classroom of forty eight pupils, the class was arranged in groups of four around tables facing each other. Some of the desks normally in the classroom had been stacked up outside to create more space for group work. The arrangement of the furniture encouraged cooperative learning in groups and the teacher could move around to provide support to groups.

In one class, the learners sat in groups on a dusty concrete floor. The groups sat so close to one another that sometimes it was difficult to distinguish one group from another. The teacher moved around with difficulty. In another class in the same school, the pupils sat on benches arranged in rows. During group work, some of the children remained seated on their benches. While others worked in groups, those that remained seated tried to do the activity individually on their laps. The teacher made no attempt to organize the pupils so that they could work co-operatively.

All students spoke consciously about group work as a way of encouraging learner participation. During the first round of classroom observations, group work was used in all lessons. Only in one class was group work used together with pair and individual work. In the second round of observations, group work was used in all but one lesson.

One student said that he had always known about group work. Being on the FDE programme had helped him to develop a deeper understanding of why group work was encouraged in English teaching. He said the programme he was on before, simply portrayed `... pupil centred and communicative approaches as slogans.' He said, `instead of being pseudo-military and instructional...', he now created opportunities for students to get involved. In his words, he `takes learners aboard.' Another student said, `the [programme] is learner centred and shifts the focus from the teacher as the sole supplier of knowledge ... kids are active participants in the

acquisition of knowledge.' The same teacher said he no longer concentrated on whole class but used group work. Another said, `I never get tired of using group work.'

The implementation of group work raised interesting questions about the constitution of groups, the role of the student during group work, and the use of feedback from group reports. Group work took the form where an activity was given and the pupils worked together on it. In some classes the instructions were given verbally and repeated during group work. In others the instruction were written up on the chalkboard or on a newsprint.

In most classrooms, learners were divided into predetermined groups with identified group leaders. The groups were not permanent but they were constituted and reviewed by the students from time to time. In one class, each group identified its own scribe, chairperson and presenter and the responsibilities were rotated on a regular basis. The students gave reasons for using predetermined groups. One student noted with concern that generally boys and girls do not like to work with each other. The researchers noted that in mixed groups there were more boys than girls and vice versa. One student said he allocated pupils to groups according to the rows (front to back) and because boys tend to sit at the back, he was able to get mixed groups. Another student said he had to work with predetermined groups because, `with a class of sixty eight learners, it is quicker for pupils to get into predetermined groups.' The researchers confirmed this. Within a very short time the pupils were in their groups. He also said bright pupils tend to form their own groups and exclude the weak ones. The researchers were unable to ascertain the extent to which this concern was addressed.

The role of the student during group work was played out differently in different classrooms. In one classroom, the student did little to encourage the pupils sufficiently. Although the activity was suitable for group work and the level of the pupils, she did not support or monitor group work activities. She gave unclear instructions for the group activity from her desk which was in front of the class. As a result, the pupils interpreted the activity differently. Some sorted the cards which they had been given according to colours, others sorted them according to according to shape. Very few pupils worked in groups, others worked in pairs, the majority worked individually and some just sat on their benches with the cards in their hands. From time to time, she would shout from her desk and ask the pupils not to make too much noise. The locus of control rested very much with the teacher who was the initiator of whatever interaction took place.

In another lesson, the student moved around the groups but repeated the same instructions despite indications that the pupils were having difficulty understanding the task. He could not diagnose the support the pupils needed in developing the ideas logically. He tended to ask low order questions of one kind, for example, `what.'

In yet another lesson, the teacher spent time with the groups and was able to identify possible problems and redirected the discussions appropriately. Throughout the lesson, through individual interaction with pairs, he provided learners with support and modelled the language they should use orally. Questioning in some cases also provided scaffolding. However, the student tended to provide the answers himself.

The students made use of feedback from the groups and individual learners in different ways. In some lessons, reports from groups were simply acknowledged and the learners were not encouraged to engage with the reports. In one class, the student forewarned the pupils that they should be prepared to `defend their positions' during presentations. During the presentations, the class was given the opportunity to ask questions to the group giving a report and thus generating a large group discussion. The student skilfully guided the discussion by asking purposeful questions which extended the pupils' understandings. The students asked a variety of questions which demanded different levels of understanding, such as, `who has a lean and hungry look?', `what does the phrase mean?', `why did Brutus kill himself?' The student then summarized the key issues and asked the pupils to do an individual activity which was based on the group reports. During the activity, the teacher moved around providing support to individuals. The pupils also asked the teacher for help. Some pupils wanted to do the individual task in pairs but the teacher insisted that they must work individually in order to develop their writing skills.

Concluding comment

The students recognized learners as active participants in learning and that opportunities which encourage pupil involvement must be created. There seemed to be an understanding that in order for co-operative learning to occur, the environment must be conducive. The rearrangement of the classroom demonstrated this very well. In some classes however, it was difficult to reorganize the room because of the design of the furniture and the non-availability of the space. In classrooms where there was space available, the students seemed unable to use it creatively. The pupils tended to crowd in one section of the room rather than spread out..

Although the students spoke about the use of a range of strategies that encourage learner participation, group work seemed to be the only strategy that the students used in their classrooms despite the observation that in the residential sessions a variety of strategies for involving learners were modelled. It would seem group work is viewed as being synonymous with learner participation. Where questioning techniques were used, the students appear not to recognize those techniques as alternative ways of encouraging learner participation. In such instances some students were quick to provide answers to their own questions. This tended to undermine their own efforts to `scaffold' and encourage pupils to discover knowledge. Generally, the questions used to check for understanding tended to require low order skills.

The role of the teacher during group work was played out in different ways. In some cases the students monitored the work of the groups and provided support to the groups. In others no support was provided and thus the students were unable to identify the difficulties the learners were experiencing. There seemed to be an assumption that learning automatically occurs when pupils work in groups. As shown, there was no mediation of group activities in some classes and yet the students seemed quite satisfied that by creating the opportunity for learners to interact with one another, learning will occur. It would appear what is of primary concern to the students is to get the learners to sit together in groups.

Although the students went so far as to solicit feedback from groups, it was not incorporated in the lesson or used to link the lesson with future ones. In some classes group presentations actually marked the end of the lesson. In contrast, where feedback was sought, pupils' understandings were tested through skilful and purposeful questioning which was followed by students' comment and summary.

Assessment

In the residential sessions observed, issues in assessment were not dealt with directly except in a discussion on lesson planning and various questioning techniques. Unfortunately, the Education studies course on Evaluation and Assessment is currently placed at the end of two year programme, which means that issues of assessment are not foregrounded as they should be from the beginning. However, as is indicated in Chapter Five, the kinds of guidance and feedback provided to students in the completion of their own assessment provide an excellent model for the students to follow in their own classrooms.

During pre-observations interviews, the students mentioned different strategies for assessing the learners and how these relate to the achievement of the purpose of the lesson. Five out of six students indicated that they would be using summative forms of assessment in their lessons. They said these would be in the form of questioning and group reports. A student who had indicated that he would be using both formative and summative assessment said he had built a series of `checkpoints' in the lesson. He said lie would monitor and support learners during group, pair and individual work. The support, lie said, would be in the form of carefully constructed questions which would encourage students to build meaning. He also mentioned that during group presentations, lie would ask purposeful questions to seek clarity and correct any misconceptions. As indicated earlier, during group work, the student moved around the groups to offer support and to check for understanding.

Some students, however, tended to repeat the same instructions and seemed unaware of the difficulties the pupils were experiencing.

Concluding comment

Students seemed aware that some form of assessment is necessary at some point in the lesson. Only one student could clearly differentiate formative forms of assessment from summative ones and indicated when he would use what form during the lesson. Others mentioned only summative assessment even though during the lesson, there were formative `checkpoints' in their lessons done mainly through questioning. The students seemed unaware that they were in fact using forms of formative assessment.

REELECTION

The FDE programme aims to develop teachers who have the ability to:

• reflect constructively on the success or lack of success of the various design and implementation elements in achieving the purpose of the lesson; and

• plan improvements to the lesson and the teaching and learning strategies as a whole as a result of critical reflection.

One of the programme goals is to encourage `the development of teachers as competent, reflective professionals within their community. Reflective practice is developed through both assignments and examinations and is also a thread running through all the course materials. In some of the residential sessions observed, the lecturers engaged the students in activities that modelled the reflection process. The post-observation interviews carried out immediately after classroom observations were intended to give students the opportunity to reflect on the lesson they have just taught in terms of why things happened in the way they did and what can the students do to change them in light of the reflection.

The students could identify the links between the lesson they have just taught with previous ones and in some cases future ones. They could identify the kinds of changes they would make in the next lessons on the basis of the reflection on the lesson they have just taught.

One teacher said,

> When preparing a lesson for a week, I have a theme on different activities. [The learners] read stories, I ask them about the story and then pick some new words like the word `bark.' I imitate how dogs bark, and ask them to bark like dogs. Then I ask them to use the words in sentences and from sentences they must make paragraphs ...... today they could write their own story about animals. Maybe tomorrow they can tell me more about domestic animals. They can also change words from singular to plural ....on Friday we dramatize some of our stories.

In another class, the student had taught drama the previous week. He had found the language in the assignments poor. He said he was aware that he had not had enough time to develop oral skills and hence the he chose to do that in the lesson observed. Some students were able to explain what happened in the lesson and why it happened in a particular way. They could also identify areas in the lesson that needed

improvement and suggest ways of improving them. Below are excerpts from the post-observation interviews with students.

> *Did you achieve the purpose of the lesson? Which aspects did you achieve? Which aspects did you not achieve? Why?*

> Yes I have. 1 wanted to draw out the differences between city and rural life and that came out during the discussion. I have the love for poetry and the Wits programme has added more, the way I use my voice to capture the mood and tone of the poem. Pupils were able to identify the figures of speech and give examples from the poems. In one of our previous lessons, we had done figures of speech.

The student also said,

> There was little participation from the pupils particularly girls ...I am still trying to establish rapport with the pupils. I have only been with them for two weeks and we are still working on our relationship. Perhaps group work would have worked better. When they work in groups, I allocate them to different groups because boys do not want to work girls. The pace was a bit fast. They only started poetry recently and there is still a long way to go before the manic exams.

In response to the question above, another student said,

> Yes. As you have heard the pupils were able to describe the characters correctly. There were a few minor errors and these were corrected in class. The atmosphere in the class encouraged them to engage in the discussion without fear of making mistakes.

> *But wasn't it a bit too noisy?*

> No, it was constructive noise. As long as it is constructive I let them. They had a bit of difficulty with the individual task but what seemed to help was the explanation in their home language and giving them an example to guide them. I tan out of time and I could not have written pieces from other pupils. The whole ideas was to encourage them to develop writing skills. This group will be writing manic examinations at the end of the year and the main focus is develop writing skills. That is why I insisted on the individual task.

> The individual task is very important. However, I ran out of time and 1 was unable to do it the way I had wanted to. But I *will* make sure that I give them the chance to complete the task. I actually thought they would find the task easy since they read the `Stars' everyday in the papers and magazines. I think they needed more time to complete the task

In other instances, the students seemed unable to identify the weaknesses in the lesson especially when the weaknesses pointed to the students. Instead, the weaknesses in the lesson were expressed in terms of factors other than the students. One student said site could not have a successful lesson because the learners `cannot speak English.' Another said, she could not use learning materials because `...the school does not have them ...' Asked what changes she would make to her lesson, one student said, `*I will* teach it exactly as it is.'

Concluding comment

The excerpts above show that some students can reflect on their own practice and make suggestions about how it could be improved. In one lesson, the student was able to think about the lesson he had just taught and institute changes on the basis of his reflection. He seemed aware *of* the difficulties the pupils had during the lesson as well as the potential for creativity. He adapted his methods to overcome those difficulties

and create opportunities for creativity. In some cases, the students demonstrated some degree of reflective ability by being able to recognize their own shortcomings how they could improve. However, they seemed overwhelmed by the logistics of organizing to do what seems to be the right thing.

On the other hand, some students seemed unable to identify ways in which the lessons could be improved and therefore could not suggest any improvements on the lesson. Some seemed aware of the weaknesses in the lesson but were uncomfortable about acknowledging their own shortcomings in the way they taught the lesson. The weaknesses in the lesson were expressed in terms of the factors which the students perceived to be beyond their control.

VALUES AND ATTITUDES

The FDE programme aims to develop teachers who can display the following values and attitudes encouraged and modelled in the various courses:

- respect for their learners and a valuing of their opinions and experiences;
- respect for learners' differing language, cultural and home backgrounds;
- concern that the learners should be progressing as well as they possibly can;
- desire for continuous improvement of own practice through research and critical reflection; and
- gender awareness.

Chapter Three shows the importance of style as well as content in establishing a friendly, collegial relationship with the students in which their language, cultural and home backgrounds are recognized and valued. The kinds of feedback on assignments and other support provided to the students demonstrate the lecturers' concern that the students should be progressing as well as they can. Frequent encouragement is provided to students to extend their studies, and suggestions are made wherever possible for further development. Chapter Four illustrates how the values and attitudes being promoted by the programme were modelled during the residential sessions. In other words, the teaching on this programme does not only talk about but also models the kinds of attitudes and values described above.

In this section we now turn to how the students displayed these values and attitudes in their respective classrooms.

Respect for learners and a valuing of their opinions and experiences

Respect or lack of respect for learners was shown in different ways in different classrooms. The students seemed aware of the need to create opportunities that would encourage the learners to express their opinions and share experiences. In one class, the student asked the pupils who have been to a city to share their experiences and show how the city might be different from their own area. The learners' experiences and opinions were integrated in a discussion of a poem depicting the differences between city and rural life. In another class, the pupils were asked to write stories about wild

animals. One group had written a story about a domestic dog instead. The other children laughed at the obvious mistake the group had made. The teacher moved over to the presenter, put her arm reassuringly on his shoulder and asked him questions about the dog. This incident illustrates how the student showed respect for the pupils' knowledge and opinions despite the fact that the group has misunderstood the task.

In one class, however, the student seemed to have low expectation of the learners. During the pre-observation interviews, she indicated that the pupils' `understanding of English was very poor and that they [were] very difficult to teach.' During the course of the lesson, she pointed out to the researchers on two occasions that the learners were clearly demonstrating why she had said the children know very little English and were difficult to teach. During the post-observation interview, the student went on to dwell on the question of how difficult it was to teach those learners. In addition, the manner in which she spoke to some of the learners whom she had singled out to respond to a question was rather harsh These learners were addressed with a loud, stern and somewhat belittling voice which drew the rest of the class's attention towards them and made them feel even more self-conscious about the errors they had made. The teacher made no attempt to correct their mistakes but simply moved on to question others.

Concluding comment

The examples given above indicate that while some students show respect for their learners and value their opinions and experiences, others shows lack of respect for their learners. In the former case, the students do not only create opportunities for the learners to share their experiences and ideas through group presentations and individual responses, but also the views of the learners are integrated in the lesson. In contrast, in the latter case, the experiences and opinions of the learners were not elicited. The student seemed convinced that the learners could not speak English and therefore could not make any valuable contribution in the lesson. It would appear the incorrect responses given by pupils confirmed the student's views of the learners and thus she made no attempt to correct the pupils' mistakes.

Respect for learners' differing language, cultural and home backgrounds

As indicated earlier in the section under design and implementation, the students recognize that English can be taught through multilingual approaches. In other words, allowing the pupils to speak their own languages does not only help them to articulate their own ideas, but also recognize the contribution that language as an aspect of culture can make to learning. Valuing the use of and showing respect for the learners' own languages was demonstrated in some classes. For example, in one class, during group work, the children freely used their additional language. Although the teacher predominantly used the target language throughout the lesson, when the learners seemed to have difficulty understanding or communicating certain concepts, she would use their additional language and encourage them to express themselves in their additional language.

Some students seemed aware of the backgrounds of their learners and the impact of some cultural practices on teaching and learning. One student reported that her class of 86 students was down to 60 because some of the boys were attending circumcision school and that this was a normal occurrence during that time of the year. The first two weeks after the winter break, teaching in some of the senior grades does not start in earnest until the boys are back from circumcision school. In the same school, another student mentioned that during harvest season, attendance is usually poor because some of the children help their parents who are mainly refugees employed in nearby farms.

Concluding comment

The students seem to recognize that allowing the pupils to use their additional language might encourage them to articulate aspects of their own culture which might enhance learning and hence the need to create opportunities for learners to use their own languages. Although the students seemed aware of the pupils' cultural backgrounds and how those backgrounds might affect teaching and learning processes in the school, they seemed unable to suggest alternative ways of addressing these problems. It would appear the students have accepted regular absenteeism brought about by cultural practices as a given and that the school would have to accommodate such practices.

Concern for learners' progress

Most of the students demonstrated concern for the learners to progress as well as they possibly can. One student showed great concern that the pupils should learn and perform the activity successfully and accurately. During the lesson, he engaged continually with the learners individually, in pairs, and as a whole class. Another student showed delight when the pupils could produce fluent writing through the process approach to teaching English. Through a series of lessons, he tirelessly encouraged the pupils to develop their writing skills. In another school, a student was excited to discover that the pupils were able to use new words. She said, `I couldn't believe they would be able to tell what a scorpion is, I thought they only knew it in Xitsonga.'

In one class however, there was no evidence to suggest the student's concern for the pupils to progress as well as they possibly can. In the example given earlier of a teacher who tended to belittle the pupils and not value their responses, it would appear the teacher set out to prove to the researchers that the children cannot speak English.

Concluding comment

The students showed concern for their pupils to progress by identifying a range of support mechanisms to encourage them to learn. They also seemed alert to the improvements the pupils were making and this served as a motivation for the students to try harder.

In contrast, one student seem to have internalized the weaknesses of her pupils and appear to have resigned to the notion that they cannot speak English because of their refugee background.

Desire for continuous improvement of own practice

The desire for continuous professional development was demonstrated by the students. All the students had been on other in-service teacher development programmes before registering with the Wits FDE. One student mentioned that the programme does not treat the key concepts that underpin the programme as mere `slogans' but integrates them into classroom practice. The students said the motivation to extend their knowledge of English as a language and as a subject and improve their practice comes from regular interaction between students, course writers and tutors. They mentioned that they do not feel as lonely as they used to in other programmes.

One student reported that she insisted on her own class which she was determined to 'groom' in order to stop late coming and disorderliness. She said having her own class would enable her to try out new ideas in a sustained manner. In this way, she said, she would be able to take responsibility for her own professional development. During the post-observation interview, the student was eager to get feedback from the researchers on how she had facilitated the lesson.

In another school, the student asked the researcher to observe the same lesson with the next class. He introduced a number of changes in the second lesson on the basis of the shortcomings he had identified in the first lesson.

Concluding comment

The desire for continuous professional development appeared to be encouraged by the students' realization that the programme is contributing to the acquisition of new knowledge and change in their classroom practice. The support from other students and the lecturers and the idea that the programme is grounded in the students' workplaces seemed to be a motivation for ongoing professional development. In addition to the desire for collaborative learning and support, some students have demonstrated the desire for personal professional development through which they can keep track of their own professional development.

Gender awareness

It is important to look at how the programme attempts to encourage gender awareness. This might influence the way in which the students view gender awareness. In one of the residential sessions observed, the male students tended to dominate the discussion and most of the were groups were defined in terms of gender. Some of the lecturers made an attempt to encourage participation from all students, in some cases with very little success. During classroom observations, in all classes the seating patterns were nearly the same. The boys tended to sit at the back or along the sides and girls toward the middle and front of the classroom. In one class, the boys who sat towards the

middle of the class were much younger. In another class, the boys sat on one side of the room and the girls on another and the student made no attempt to mix the pupils.

One student, in a response to a question about what he might do in the lesson next time around, showed gender awareness in suggesting that the groups should be mixed so that the girls who are usually shy can get a chance to overcome their shyness. One student encouraged girls in particular to report back following a group activity. To try and encourage the girls to participate the student said, `... come on, just the other day it was women's day. Show us that that day meant something to you'.

Concluding comment

During post-observation interviews, the students articulated the importance of gender sensitivity. They suggested mixed groups as a way of encouraging girls to participate in the lesson. However, the constitution of groups and generally the seating patterns in some classes reflected very much the opposite despite the students' claim that one of the reasons for allocating pupils to groups is to achieve mixed groups. It would appear there could be a correlation between what happened in some residential sessions and what the students do in their classrooms in so far as gender awareness is concerned.

OVERALL IMPACT

The emphasis on ongoing professional development of teachers is becoming a trend internationally including South Africa. The assumption being made is that a large part of teacher education is going to take place while teachers are in service. Demands for high standards and calls for improving quality put a lot of pressure on teachers to improve their own performance. As a result, more and more ongoing professional development initiatives that aim to improve classroom practice are taking prominence. The individual and the school are inextricably linked, therefore, it becomes important to articulate teachers' personal and individual needs with the needs of the school and the broader national goals.

From the classroom data, it is evident that while there are aspects of the programme that need further development and review, the programme seem to be successful in achieving the identified goals. The results of the questionnaire administered to a cohort of students in the same year of study as the sample attest to the high degree of student satisfaction with their own achievement of the programme goals. The table below presents a section or the survey of the students' responses with regard to their own achievement of the programme goals.

a) To what extent do you think that the English teaching programme is succeeding in achieving its goals *for you personally?*			
	Very	Fair	Not at all
I. To improve the quality of the teaching and learning in your classroom at the school where you teach	39	4	0
II. To extend your knowledge of Education	39	3	0
III. To extend your knowledge of English as a language and as a subject	41	2	0
IV. To extend your English teaching knowledge and skills	41	2	0
V. The help you become competent, reflective professionals within your community	35	7	1
VI. To provide you with opportunities to engage in classroom and school-based research	31	12	0
VII. To enable and foster collegial and co-operative ways of working among teachers	29	13	1
VIII. To open career paths for you through professional development and possible access to further qualifications	35	8	0

The degree o€ student satisfaction with their own achievement of the programme's goals is very high. For purposes of this research, the first goal is the most important, and the others can be seen as contributing to it to a greater or lesser extent. The respondents will not have distinguished between their own teaching and their pupils' learning, but their positive response indicates that at least they feel that their classroom teaching has improved as a result of involvement in the programme.

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

From the data, it is evident that the students are aware of the key concepts underpinning the programme and can articulate them clearly. The students showed knowledge of the course content and seemed confident. The students also seemed to have some ideas of how the key concepts can be translated into practice. The implementation in the classroom however, seems to suggest a discrepancy between intent and what actually happens. This is not to suggest that perceptions necessarily determine what practice will look like. The perceptions are abstract until they have been translated into practice. It could be said that a discrepancy between intent and implementation can be expected given the dynamic and to some extent unpredictable nature of classrooms. However, of key importance is whether or not the students can recognize the discrepancy and suggest ways of addressing it. This point is discussed below under reflection.

A few examples are noted which illustrate the discrepancy between awareness and implementation. A student who had articulated the role of multilingual approaches to

English teaching, seemed not to encourage her pupils to speak their home language during group work. The reaction of the pupils upon realizing the teacher coming towards their group, may suggest that they are not allowed to use their additional language in the classroom. In an informal chat with the same pupils, they indicated that `[they] are not allowed to speak Sepedi in class...'. The seating patterns in the classrooms and the constitution of groups may also point to a disjunction between their awareness of gender issues and the translation of that understanding into practice.

At best the students attempted to implement the concepts somewhat superficially. The use of group work provides a useful example. The rationale for group work commonly shared by the students was that it encourages pupil participation. However, group work seemed to be narrowly understood to be the only way through which learner participation and involvement can be encouraged. The role of the students during group work also confirmed this assertion. As noted, in some cases, no mediation or meaningful support was provided by the students. The students did not monitor the work of the groups or tended to repeat the same instructions despite indications that the learners were having difficulty understanding the tasks. It would appear, an assumption is being made, that once the learners are together in groups, participation will automatically occur.

The students also recognize the need to integrate the experiences of learners into learning. Although learner experiences were elicited and acknowledged, they were not integrated in the lesson.

It must be noted that the discrepancy between awareness and implementation was not displayed by all students. Some were able to integrate the design elements with implementation very well.

REFLECTION

The ability to reflect on practice is one of the goals of the programme. The ability to reflect entails being able to understand why things happen in the way they do and what changes can be made and why.

One teacher expressed concern that she was `...not connecting with the pupils.' Her reasons included lack of facilities in the schools, non-collaborative and non-collegial culture in her school and that `learners could not speak English because they are from refugee camps.' It would appear that while the student recognizes her own shortcomings, she distances herself from the situation and therefore does not see herself as a possible contributor to changing the situation. While lack of facilities and an unsupportive environment are real issues for the student, at no point did she say what her contribution could be towards redressing the prevailing situation. She appears to have succumbed to the notion that the context in which she finds herself has been prescribed and therefore she does not see a role for herself in changing it.

A student in the same school, under similar circumstances, also recognized lack of facilities, lack of support from colleagues, and numerous disruptions in the form of teacher union meetings as factors which affected her own teaching. However, she was able to identify for herself the problems which she could tackle and those that were beyond her control. She developed her own materials which she carried to and from school. She also asked the pupils to bring learning materials from home.

The differences between students who are on the same programme can be attributed to the fact that students ` .... do not simply carry out the messages they acquire in their teacher [development] programme' (p. 5). They can interpret and translate those messages differently and they can initiate their own messages. This point confirms the notion that the teaching approach in the materials treats students as professionals who can contribute to the construction of knowledge.

Leach's [3] thinking about the transformation of practice is important to look at. She asserts that transformation of practice takes place through the context of criticism which involves `... a critical examination of everyday, familiar ways of working'; the context of discovery where learners design a way out of the practice under criticism and make new discoveries; and the context of practical social application which involves implementing the new expanded discoveries. Her model is useful in contrasting the two students who are under similar circumstances but react differently to those circumstances. While one student seemed able to critically examine her own realities, which then gave rise to new discoveries and application, the other student appeared not to be able to design a way out of the practice tinder criticism.

Leach's phases of transformation of practice are in line with the notion of applied competence as put forth by the discussion document, *Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, Training and Development.* The document describes applied competence as an overarching term for three interconnected kinds of competence:

> Practical competence is the demonstrated ability, in an authentic context, to consider a range of possibilities for action, make considered decisions about which possibility to follow, and to perform the chosen action which is grounded in foundational competence, whereby the learner demonstrates understanding of the knowledge which underpins the actions taken. This is integrated through reflexive competence in which the learner demonstrates ability to integrate or connect performances and decision-making with understanding and with an ability to adapt to change and unforeseen circumstances and explain the reasons behind these adaptations. [4]

The classroom data suggests that while some students can demonstrate all aspects of applied competence, others can implement only some aspects of the transformation of practice as characterized by Leach.

[3] Leach, J. 1996, Learning in Practice: Support for Professional Development, in Tait A. & Mills, R. (eds), *Supporting the Learner in Open and Distance Learning,* London: Pitman Publishing. p. 3
[4] Department of Education, 1997, Norms *and Standards for Teacher Education, Training and Development,* a discussion document prepared by the Technical Committee on the Revision of Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, Pretoria. p. 125

The FDE programme among others aims to enable and foster collegial and cooperative ways of working among teachers. The concept of a study partner is one way through which this is encouraged. The programme also aims to develop competent and reflective professionals within their own communities. Leach contends that the idea of reflection in action is premised on the `... learner's ability to make solitary reflections on their practice and others practice'. [5] She observes that this understanding of reflection locates the learning process `... in the head of the individual.' Instead, she advocates the notion of joint practice which does not only recognize reflective practice as always taking place in and being informed by the broader context of social practice but also acknowledges that `... knowledge is constantly created and transformed at the intersection of dialogue between their collective knowledge and experience in particular settings and context'.[°]

Although classroom observations could not directly uncover issues in working with study partners, students spoke about the role of a study partner in improving classroom practice. The partners support each other in carrying out classroom observations which then inform the assignments and the activities that the students do either individually or jointly. The concept of a study partner must be understood within the context of the school. This may include how interpersonal relationships within the school and between partners may affect the relationship between study partners. The concept of a study partner can be seen in much broader terms, and that is, to inject a culture of collaborative planning, implementation and reflection. If practised well, it could also expand to the rest of the school to include teachers who are not on the FDE programme. One student pointed out that his colleagues use his Theory and Practice course materials to inform their own teaching. Even though the process of reflection on practice may not be done collaboratively, the fact that teachers see the need to share the course materials could be viewed as a necessary step towards joint practice. A student who does not have a study partner, says lie has been able to `thrive' in the course because of a collegial and collaborative ethos that characterizes his school. In this way, he says he enjoys more than one study partner and has a pool of partners to draw on.

VALUES AND ATTITUDES

Generally, the students seemed positive about the impact of the programme on classroom practice. The student's perception seemed to be that the programme has made them conscious of their own practice and the dynamics around it and that they can explore innovative ideas with confidence. While there is sometimes a disjunction between design and implementation, it is important to recognize the enthusiasm and motivation that the students have shown. The tenacity displayed by the students is a necessary but not sufficient condition for new learning, and it could offer possibilities for the improvement of practice. However, the potential danger which can be brought

[5] Leach, J. 1996, Learning in Practice. Support for Professional Development, in Tait A. & Mills, R. (eds), *Supporting the Learner in Open and Distance Learning,* London: Pitman Publishing. p. 3 [°] lbid.

about by the enthusiasm, is that students may `unwittingly trivialize the process of change'.'

CONCLUDING COMMENT

Overall there seems to be consonance between the abilities that the programme set out to develop, what the students say about those abilities and what they do to translate them into practice. As shown, the extent to which the transfer of learning takes place is different for different students. The ability to reflect varies across the students. Some students have demonstrated a full grasp of the reflective process. Others seem to be able to think about their own practice but are unable to make new discoveries which they can apply to improve their own practice. Generally the students appear to display the values and attitudes being promoted by the programme.

It is important to recognize there are factors beyond the control of the programme which might affect ways in which the students teach. Classrooms and schools do not exist independently of the social formations that have created them. As a result, the process of translating into practice the students' own understandings is a complex one that influences and can be influenced by the dynamics beyond classrooms and schools. In the next chapter, we present the strategies that could be generalizable to other teacher education programmes offered mixed mode using distance education methods.

Chapter Eight

Quality Teacher Education at a Distance:

Strategies for Programme Design and Delivery

As was pointed out in the previous chapter, overall there seems to be consonance between the abilities that the programme set out to develop, what the students say about those abilities and what they do to translate them into practice.

The final part of the research summarizes the kinds of teaching and learning practices in the programme that could have contributed to the development of the required abilities, knowledge and attitudes and values.

The central question is:

What strategies for programme design and delivery can be employed in teacher education programmes to develop teachers' competence (knowledge, abilities, values/attitudes) and result in improved teaching in the classroom?

From the background research done for this report (see Chapter One for more detail), the following general insights were gained about the design and delivery of teacher development programmes using distance education methods:

• It is important to integrate school-based activities into teacher development.

• Course materials should be complemented with peer and school-based interaction.

• Courses, activities and assessment must be linked with classroom practice.

• It is important to integrate theory and practice.

The programme goals as well as the curriculum outline indicate that the Wits Further Diploma in Education programme operates within these general guidelines, but it has developed teaching and learning practices to give substance to these general points. These were reviewed in Chapters Two to Six.

What follows is a synthesis of the various strategies for the design and delivery of quality teacher education programmes at a distance provided in the conclusions to the individual chapters. They are organized according to the main teaching and learning practices in the programme as represented in the following diagram:

COURSE MATERIALS

In a distance education programme, and even in a mixed mode programme, the course materials need to be seen as the main means whereby the curriculum is communicated. A great deal therefore depends on their effectiveness.

The most important point to be made about these course materials is that the students like them, read them, find them both challenging and relevant to their teaching situations, and use them in their teaching.
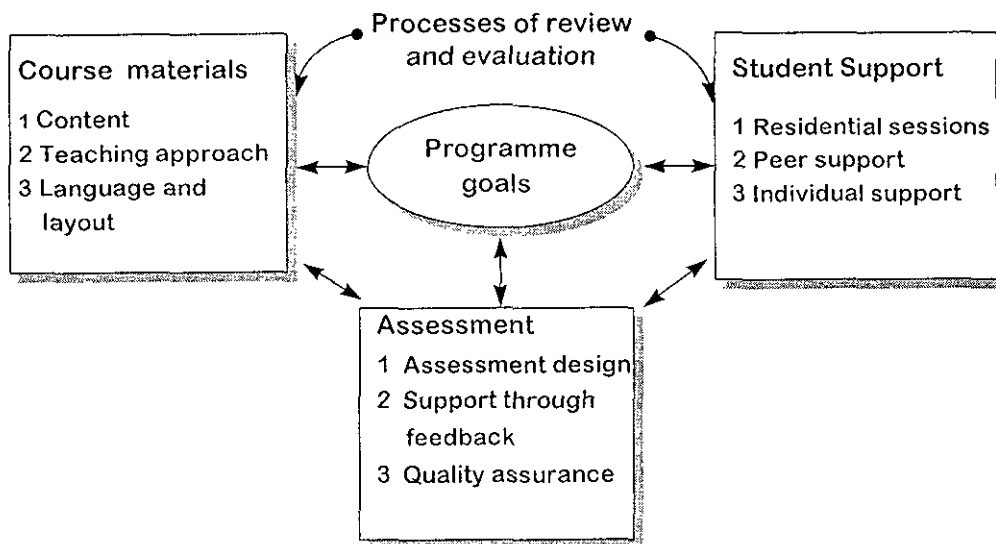
What is it that has had this effect? What has been done well that could be used to guide other course materials developers?

The first point that needs to be made is that the *programme goals* should not only be valid, but should guide each course in a tangible way. The goals of this programme reflect a concern for the development of quality learning and teaching relevant to a changing South Africa, and each course contributes in a different way to the realization of these goals.

The second point is that the *course content* has to be well-researched and up-to-date. But it should also be contextualized: students want to see themselves and their own situations in what they read about. They need to feel that there is plenty to explore, many examples and ideas they can take up, and many things they can do with the materials even when the course is finished. They need to hear many voices speaking in the materials; they need to pick up an excitement about being part of making knowledge.

The third point is that the *teaching approach* used in the materials should help the students engage with the materials actively in a variety of ways. Several features of the teaching approach in these materials need to be specifically mentioned:

The Wits Further Diploma in Education (English Teaching)

- Instead of the presentation of content in a linear way, a recursive process approach to the development of the ideas is adopted. Theory and principles are often presented through stories and interviews rather than merely through abstract text. A range of rich examples are used, both to help students understand the concepts and to provide activities for them to try out in the classroom.

- Activities encourage both understanding of concepts and application in the classroom. The materials encourage critical reflection and adaptation of ideas for specific contexts and classrooms, rather than imitation of model lessons.

- Students' personal and professional experience is acknowledged and respected. They are encouraged to build their own understanding of issues based on their experiences.

- Built into the materials is the understanding that students are not working on their own - they have study partners and colleagues in the schools in which they work. They are encouraged to discuss ideas with each other, to work together, and to develop a community of concerned professionals around them.

- The style used in the materials establishes a friendly collegial relationship with the learners in which they are treated as fellow professionals who have individual experiences and ideas and can contribute as professionals to the creation of knowledge.

From the research, it seems that there are two major areas which would improve the effectiveness of the English course materials as vehicles for independent teaching and learning: increased accessibility from a layout point of view, and increased clarity about learning outcomes with associated self-assessment exercises,

Layout is not simply a matter of malting materials attractive, although attractiveness does help. It is about arranging the material in such a way that students can grasp concepts and access ideas and examples without having to move through the text sentence by sentence and page by page. It is about encouraging more effective reading and studying.

Provision of clear *learning outcomes and self-assessment* is a useful way of helping the students focus on what is important, and develop the skills required for independent learning: the ability to assess what one wants to learn, what one is required to learn for certain purposes, and the extent to which one has learnt these things.

There seems to be evidence from this research that even if accessibility were improved and learning outcomes and self-assessment exercises provided, student use of the materials would not necessarily be more efficient, It is important therefore that effective ways of *teaching students to use the materials efficiently and flexibly for independent study* should be built into the programme as a whole.

THE TEACHING IN THE RESIDENTIAL, SESSIONS

In a mixed mode programme, the teaching in the residential or contact sessions is an important complement to the teaching through the course materials, and needs to model and extend the approaches and attitudes described in the course materials.

In some instances, most notably where large numbers of students were lectured together and then broken up into smaller tutorial groups for in depth discussion, the kind of teaching advocated in the materials was not modelled. However, in by far the majority of the residential sessions observed in this particular programme, students experienced skilled and varied teaching in which every effort was made to model the approaches and attitudes recommended in the courses.

The major features of the teaching in these residential sessions that could be generalized to other teacher development programmes are as follows:

- It is important that there is coherence between the ideas and approaches discussed in the various sessions and courses.

- Students learn not only from the content of the sessions, but also from their form. If the teaching approaches and attitudes are not consistent with each other, the impact of good teaching approaches in one course could be weakened by less satisfactory approaches and attitudes in another.

- Theory is important, but not theory in isolation from practice. The genesis of theory in reflection on practice needs to be clear.

- It is helpful to use students' experiences in their classrooms and schools as a basis for the sessions, and for students to be encouraged to think of how they could use or apply ideas in practice.

- The teaching methods practised in the sessions themselves can be the subject of discussion. This encourages reflective practice and is also likely to result in more effective transfer to the teachers' own classroom practice.

ASSESSMENT DESIGN, SUPPORT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

It could be argued that unless an effective assessment strategy is in place, good course materials and successful teaching on residentials could have next to no impact on student learning. Assessment tasks compel students to engage with what has been taught, and the way assessment tasks are set encourages learning processes that are either helpful or unhelpful, that contribute to the goals of the programme or that distract students from achieving them.

The programme offers a number of insights into how to design assessment, how to support students in the assessment process and how to ensure the fairness and reliability of the assessment procedures.

Assessment design

In terms of the main research question, which is to determine the teaching and learning practices that lead to improved classroom practice, the findings on assessment design are crucial. Even if assessment of students' classroom practice by lecturers/tutors in schools is not feasible, classroom practice and reflection on practice can be built into the assessment design and assessed indirectly. In this programme the majority of the assignments require the students to work in the classroom - either teaching, preparing materials, or doing research. The students definitely see and value the link between the assignments and the improvement of their classroom practice.

of assignments, which mean that students have a chance to `get better'. For example, in the Theory and Practice course, nearly every assignment requires design and/or adaptation of a lesson(s), theoretical justification of approach, actual implementation of the lesson, and reflection on the success/lack of success. This process also often involves self and peer assessment and builds cooperative as well as independent learning.

A very practical, applied, process approach in assignments has its dangers, however. Often it means that students can avoid specific engagement with the particular theory dealt with in the course, and simply fall back on what they know already to reflect on what happens in their classrooms. Strategies need to be found to encourage engagement with theory.

A strong feature of the assessment in the English courses is that support is structured into the design of the assignments. Students are not expected to know automatically how to do a complex assignment, but are guided step by step through the process, often with formative assessment at specific stages. This support would be further strengthened if specific assessment criteria were provided to guide students in their assessment of themselves and each other.

Teaching on assignments

Teaching on assignments, both in the form of commenting on individual assignments and in the form of tutorial letters, is a useful tool to promote the goals of the programme and to encourage teachers to improve their practice by linking what they write in assignments to their own contexts. Most importantly, feedback can be used to model good approaches to marking and as such contribute to the central goal of the programme - the improvement of classroom practice.

The feedback on assessment in the English courses had a number of important features. Every possible opportunity was found for praise and encouragement on specific matters. However, the comment did not stop at the positive; it included constructive criticism which opened dialogue, and pointed to concrete changes for improvement. Most importantly, the style of commenting established a supportive relationship in which the difficulties facing the students as well as the efforts they have made were recognized.

Quality assurance

The quality control function of the external examiner is not adequate, particularly when there are large numbers of students and a team of markers (some of whom might not be very experienced). The external examiner only sees the marking when it is done, and only sees the end of year examination or examination equivalent. In addition to external examination, there needs to be a quality assurance process which starts with careful assessment design, provides criteria for students, ensures that all markers understand the criteria and can apply them fairly, and ensures that the turnaround time is kept to a minimum.

The quality assurance process used in the education studies courses in the programme has the following good features:

- It provides a balance between being transparent about assessment criteria and evolving assessment criteria through professional judgement based on what the students produce.
- It provides opportunity for the professional development of tutors both in terms of the demands of the course and the manner in which feedback should be provided.
- Use of the process is likely to increase inter-tutor reliability as far as grading of the students is concerned.
- The amount, accuracy, as well as efficiency with which feedback can be given to students is impressive.

STUDENT SUPPORT

Effective student support is critical for the success of an educational programme, particularly one where there is considerable work done by students independently at a distance. Support should motivate and encourage learners as well as help to combat feelings of isolation.

Support cannot be left to chance. Structures must be set up to facilitate the provision of support. The strength of this programme is the wide range of support structures which have been set up to serve both academic and social functions - the residentials sessions, peer support, voluntary rind-cycle workshops, telephone support, individual face-to-face consultation with lecturers and tutors. However, it is necessary to explore in more detail why not more use is made of all available support in addition to the more obvious logistical constraints.

Support is as much an attitude as it is a structure. The support on a programme is effective because of the attitude to support as well as the combination of structures that enable the support to operate effectively. An important element in this programme the sense of caring for the students and a strong ethos of collaborative work which encourages teachers to draw on a wide range of support people in their schools in addition to drawing on the programme staff.

A programme should recognize that students are likely to encounter a range of personal problems and provision needs to be made for counselling of students. In this programme, counselling is done by individuals in varying degrees, although there are no formal structures or mechanisms in place.

Finally, in a teacher development programme, ideally there should be support for teachers in schools. At present the programme does not offer direct support to teachers in their classrooms. Through the study partner system and the encouragement of a collegial approach, the programme encourages teachers to be each other's mentors, but most students express the need for direct support from programme staff in their classrooms.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

Some final remarks need to be made about the use of these strategies for programme design and delivery.

Obviously, design and delivery of educational programmes needs to take cognisance of current policy requirements. While the research did not set out to critique the Wits FDE programme in terms of the proposed Norms *and Standards for Educators,* [1] the abilities, knowledge and attitudes and values specified in Chapter Seven are in line with the roles for educators in Norms *and Standards for Educators.* This document suggests that while providers can organize their learning programmes in a variety of ways, they should develop competence in the suggested roles, use appropriate methods of assessment and meet the purposes of the qualifications they are offering. Two excerpts from the Norms and Standards document are printed in Appendix G - the roles that teachers must be prepared to play, and an exemplar of the structure of a Further Diploma in Education. It can be seen that the knowledge, abilities and attitudes/values are related to the teaching roles described and the kinds of competence specifically to be developed in a Further Diploma in Education qualification.

It is hoped that the strategies that have been described in this report will be used by institutions which are planning to introduce distance education programmes for teachers or those that are in the process of redesigning existing programmes so that they can improve classroom practice. At a broader level, the strategies could inform the work of the Teacher Development Centre regarding interventions in educator development in a context of whole school development.

[1] Department of Education, 1998, *Norms and Standards for Educators,* prepared by the Technical Committee on the revision of Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, Pretoria