

Chapter 1: Introduction

Piano and Drums

When at break of day at a riverside
I hear jungle drums telegraphing
the mystic rhythm, urgent, raw
like bleeding flesh, speaking of
primal youth and the beginning,
I see the panther ready to pounce,
the leopard snarling about to leap
and the hunters crouch with spears poised;

And my blood ripples, turns torrent,
topples the year and at once I'm
in my mother's lap a suckling;
at once I'm walking simple
paths with no innovations,
rugged, fashioned with the naked
warmth of hurrying feet and groping hearts
in green leaves and wild flowers pulsing.

Then I hear a wailing piano
solo speaking of complex ways
in tear-furrowed concerto;
of far-away lands
and new horizons with
coaxing diminuendo, counterpoint,
crescendo. But lost in the labyrinth
of its complexities, it ends in the middle
of a phrase at a daggerpoint.

And I lost in the morning mist
of an age at a riverside keep
wandering in the mystic rhythm
of jungle drums and the concerto.

Gabriel Okara

1.1 Context of the study

Gabriel Okara's powerful poem speaks of a man caught between two worlds: traditional Africa, his home, and the developed world of his western-style education. Both worlds call to him and leave him lost and confused amid their contradictory traditions. In a similar way, the education system in southern Africa has been a confusing world in which policy and theory have somehow become divorced from practice and experience. Teachers in classrooms complain that their training has not equipped them for the realities of their day-to-day school experience, that there is too much theory and too little practice (even when new curriculum initiatives like OBE are "workshopped" with them). On the other hand, policy makers, researchers and academics have consistently lamented the lack of conceptual understanding and critical engagement of the classroom-based educator. As Adler (in Adler and Reed 2002: 5) notes:

The problem is that no teacher education programme, wherever it is, can provide experience of all the complexities teachers are likely to face. As a result, some argue that programmes need to provide opportunities for teachers to understand the underlying principles of teaching in general and of specific subjects. These can then be applied and adapted to particular and diverse circumstances, and to new challenges as these arise. Others argue that this kind of knowledge, divorced as it is from real classrooms, is not easily applied or adapted, and thus teacher education is likely to be more effective if it is focused on examples of practice and more direct experience in the classroom and alongside experienced teachers.

The dichotomy between policy and practice, perceived needs and actual experiences is not peculiar to the professional development of classroom-based educators but rather has been seen as endemic to the education and training system and a primary motivation behind development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) on which the National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) has been formally registered.

The following table, taken from the SAQA document *The National Qualifications Framework and Quality Assurance* (2000:5-6), outlines the principles on which development of the NQF is based together with some reflection on the majority experience (this is SAQA's term to describe the experience that the majority of South Africans had under the previous pre-democracy dispensation) on these issues to date.

It provides a useful frame of reference for reflection on the Unisa NPDE as an NQF-registered qualification.

Table 1: Principles of the NQF

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Majority experience</i>
Integration form part of a system of human resources development which provides for the establishment of a unifying approach to education and training	... separation by race, sex, age; by mental and manual, theory and practice, academic and technical and vocational
Relevance be and remain responsive to national development needs	... little match between what is taught in schools and what is required for the world of work
Credibility have national and international value and acceptance	... only some certificates and qualifications are accepted and recognised at international and even national levels
Coherence work within a consistent framework of principles and certification	... little or no means to establish equivalency across programmes and providers
Flexibility allow for multiple pathways to the same learning ends	... no mechanisms for assessing and recognising non-formal provision or prior learning through life and work experience
Standards be expressed in terms of a nationally agreed framework and internationally acceptable outcomes	... varied differences in standards across different institutions, sectors, enterprises, provinces, and the fragmented national government departments
Legitimacy provide for the participation of all national stakeholders in the planning and co-ordination of standards and qualifications	... little or no co-operation or consultation across government departments (education, training and manpower) with little co-operation across industries, enterprises or sectors and little involvement with the state who relied heavily on experts
Access provide ease of entry to appropriate levels of education and training for all prospective learners in a manner which facilitates progression	... entry principally by certificate based on years of study and generally restricted by race, sex and age

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Majority experience</i>
Articulation provide for learners, on successful completion of accredited prerequisites, to move between components of the delivery system	... entry requirements set at provider level with large differences between providers. Change of learning interest generally meant starting again
Progressionensure that the framework of qualifications permits individuals to move through the levels of national qualifications via different appropriate combinations of the delivery system	... rather than stepping through a clearly sequenced series of outcome requirements for higher levels on a learning pathway, learners were required to attain credits and qualifications in ways specified at the particular provider
Portability enable learners to transfer their credits or qualifications from one learning institution and/ore employer to another	... training generally sector, enterprise or even employer specific, locking learners in because there was no common recognition system
Recognition of Prior Learning ... (RPL)	... through assessment, give credit to learning which has already been acquired in different ways e.g. through life experience	... front end education delivery system whereby learning is regarded to stop at a particular point in life thereby excluding the possibility of learning in contexts other than the formal system
Guidance of learners provide for the counselling of learners by specially trained individuals who meet nationally recognised standards for educators and trainers	... guidance and counselling viewed as specialist services and separate from the learning system itself. Services were only available to a minority of learners and at particular points in career development.

In essence, the quality process established by SAQA begins with standards setting and the registration of standards and qualifications on the NQF. Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) can then be accredited to monitor and audit the provision, assessment and achievement of specified standards and/or qualifications. The NPDE qualification is a result of this process. The NPDE qualification was developed by the Standards Generating Body (SGB) for Field 05: Educators in Schooling. Resulting from a process established by the Committee for Higher Education (CHE), seventeen providers were accredited to offer the NPDE nationally. As is to be expected, each provider has interpreted the NPDE curriculum as plan, somewhat differently in practice.

This evaluation study explores the nature of the National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) generally, and the way in which it has been operationalised by the University of South Africa (Unisa) in particular, as a way of resolving the tensions outlined above and guiding classroom-based educators, and with them the schooling system as a whole, successfully through Okara’s “morning mist”.

1.1.1 Background to the NPDE

In its March 2001 *Edusource Data News* publication, the Education Foundation reports as follows on teacher qualifications (2001:12-13).

The total number of teachers employed by the DoE countrywide at the end of February 2000 was 347 982. Almost 24% of teachers (85 501) are under- or unqualified, and 80% of these teachers are in rural primary schools. Thus the ‘poorest of the poor’ in rural areas and in the least resourced provinces have the least qualified teachers. The following table reflects the geographical distribution of these teachers:

Table 2: Edusource

Un(der) qualified teachers by province, 2000	
Eastern Cape	18 716
Free State	6 537
Gauteng	4 614
KwaZulu-Natal	20 853
Mpumalanga	5 651
Northern Cape	1 131
Northern Province	10 595
North West	14 682
Western Cape	2 722
Total	85 501

Source: Mail & Guardian 8/12/00 reported in Edusource No. 32, p. 12

Edusource quote the Minister of Education, Professor Asmal, as saying that 10 000 un(der)qualified teachers would have their qualifications upgraded in 2001 with an interim qualification, the National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE). The NPDE had been registered with the SA Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and was due to be implemented in 2001. Bursaries amounting to R50m would be made available to these teachers. The Minister noted that teacher upgrading would be a priority for the Department of Education over the next five years.

1.1.2 What is the NPDE?

The NPDE is a new qualification which has been registered on the National Qualifications Framework to offer educators an opportunity to gain qualified teacher status (currently REQV13).

The NPDE has two main goals:

1. It is designed to help educators to reflect and improve upon their classroom practice and to implement the new Outcomes-based Education approach.
2. It provides an alternative route into further professional development via the 2nd part of a B.Ed or via an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE: REQV 14) and then entry into a B.Ed (Hons) (REQV15).

The NPDE has four main components:

1. Personal literacy and numeracy

The first component is concerned with developing educators' personal literacy and numeracy skills. This is based on a recognition that many of the target educators will not have been involved in studying for a long time and may need to revise those skills. It is also based on an understanding of the weaknesses of many earlier educator development programmes which ignored the need for fundamental learning.

2. Competences related to the subject and content of teaching

The second component is concerned with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that educators need to develop as a foundation, intermediate or senior phase teacher.

3. Competences related to teaching and learning processes

The third component deals with general learning and teaching issues and processes applicable to all educators, such as planning, assessment, mediation of learning and classroom management.

4. Competences related to the school and profession

The fourth component deals largely with issues outside of the classroom. However, these school and professional issues will still influence what happens inside the classroom, which is why they are also explored in the NPDE programme.

The full Unisa NPDE programme comprises 240 credits at Level 4/5 on the NQF, which is equivalent to approximately 2400 hours of learning. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) can be awarded for a maximum of 120 credits.

1.1.3 Unisa's response to the challenge set by the NPDE

The fact that Unisa should attempt to address the need for large scale teacher development and upgrading through offering an NPDE was recognised during the course of 2000, as a result of the debates that flowed from the publication in February 2000 of the Department of Education's *Norms and Standards for Educators* (DoE, 2000) and the Department's subsequent commitment to upgrading the competence of currently underqualified educators. It was recognised that a large number of learners then enrolled with the South African College for Teacher Education (Sacte) and the South African College of Open Learning (Sacol), both of which institutions were in the process of being absorbed into Unisa, would fall under this category and should therefore be integrated into an NPDE programme.

A number of informal discussions were held during the course of 2000, and a steering committee representing the three institutions in the process of merging, as well as the South African Institute for Distance Education (Saide) representation, was formally appointed during a meeting held at Unisa on 02 February, 2001.

The steering committee subsequently met on six dates over the next few months until August 2001.

As a result of these discussions, and the work that went on in between, Unisa was able successfully to meet the 31 August deadline for the submission of NPDE proposals, approved by the Unisa council, to the Department of Education.

The Unisa NPDE proposal was subsequently approved by the Interim Joint Committee of the Committee for Higher Education which was constituted for this purpose.

1.1.4 The form of the Unisa NPDE

The Unisa NPDE can accommodate educators teaching in the foundation, intermediate and senior phases.

To accommodate the different specialisations, 52 core modules were identified, and subjected to a first level evaluation. The total programme as proposed involved 71 different modules once the various language options were taken into consideration.

With the expansion of the curriculum to include all eight learning areas taught in the senior phase, the programme currently comprises 79 modules and 30 study options as outlined in Chapter 3 of this evaluation.

Educators registering for the full NPDE programme theoretically need to take 20 modules of 12 credits each. RPL can be offered to a maximum of 120 credits (10 Unisa modules), so most learners will need to complete between 10 and 20 modules in order to gain the qualification.

For each module, educators complete two assignments which count for 50% of their module mark.

They also write an examination, which counts for the other 50% of their module mark.

In order to fulfil the NPDE requirement for integrated assessment, the educators on the programme are required to compile a portfolio. For the final summative assessment, it was proposed that the module marks should contribute 80% and the portfolio 20% towards educators' final marks. However, problems with the administration of this arrangement have resulted in the portfolio becoming a departmental requirement for qualification rather than bearing marks towards the final award.

The Unisa NPDE is not a correspondence course. For each module, 12 hours of contact support is offered. The rationale for this will be explored in Chapters 2 and 3.

1.1.5 The current status of the Unisa NPDE

Registration for the first year of the Unisa NPDE programme opened on 03 December 2002 and extended till 31 May 2002 due to delays in the national bursary process. During the course of 2002, some 2252 registered learners worked through the first five compulsory modules in the programme. The first year, with its limited curriculum offering and limited numbers of learners, was used to establish the kinds of functioning sub-systems necessary for the effective implementation of the whole programme in subsequent years.

During 2003, a second cohort of first years was enrolled whilst continuing students embarked on a second year of study within their specialist role in Component 2 of the NPDE programme. During 2003, 2318 students were involved with the Unisa NPDE programme.

The lessons learned from the first two years of operation can be used to inform the process of curriculum and materials development running parallel to implementation during 2002-3 as well as offering insights and guidelines for delivery planning in the further roll-out of the programme in the period 2004 - 6.

1.2 Problem statement

As noted above, the first two years of offering the new NPDE programme need to be used partly as a learning opportunity for subsequent development of the programme. In addition, it should be possible to begin answering questions about the viability of the NPDE programme and delivery approach as a model for other programmes offered by the Faculty of Education. This implies exploring answers to questions in two broad areas of concern:

1.2.1 Curriculum issues

It will be necessary to ascertain whether the planned curriculum, in terms of

- content
- assessment; and
- pedagogy

actually addresses the national and learner needs for which it was designed and in particular begins to bring about an improvement in classroom practice.

1.2.2 Delivery systems

Over and above the direct curriculum issues outlined above, it will be necessary to ascertain the extent to which supporting sub-systems contribute to the achievement of the programme's planned outcomes. The evaluation will need to take cognisance of the fact that the Unisa NPDE is a distance learning programme. This will mean, inter alia, collecting and analysing information on the impact of the following sub-systems:

- management
- registration
- despatch
- contact sessions
- assessment systems
- materials development.

1.3 Aims

The overall aim of this research report will be to evaluate, primarily from a qualitative research perspective, the impact of the first two years of operation of the NPDE in achieving the primary goal of the programme, namely an improvement in the classroom performance of educators enrolled with the programme.

The intention is to use the experience of the first two years of delivery of the programme to provide informed guidelines for improved implementation in subsequent years of the programme, in respect to both curriculum design and curriculum delivery issues.

1.4 Motivation

The NPDE is a strategically important intervention. South Africa currently has large numbers of teachers who have not mastered basic academic skills nor the content of the subjects and learning areas they are required to teach (Taylor & Vinjevold 1999). In addition, Welch (2001) points to the need for increased flexibility in the provision of initial teacher education, which also strongly supports the need for best and flexible practice in improving the applied competence of existing classroom

educators.

Welch identifies two factors that will increase the need for flexibility of provision of teacher education:

The regulated entry and exit points from the main initial teacher education qualification

Distance education providers have always had to consider students entering and exiting their programmes in flexible ways. The establishment of a qualifications framework with regulated exit and entry points means that it is not only distance education providers that will have to consider this – face-to-face institutions will have to find more flexible ways to meet the varying needs of their students. In the past there was relatively clear choice – either distance or face-to-face – and students did distance if they couldn't afford face-to-face (either from a money or time perspective) or didn't have access to face-to-face institutions because of the segregation of institutions. With the existence of clear and regulated entry/exit points from longer qualifications, it will be much easier for the same student to complete the qualification in a variety of different ways, over different periods of time.

The crisis in teacher supply

Although not yet felt in the schools, there is a crisis in teacher supply. The confidence of the public in teaching as a profession is lower than it has ever been. There are 13 005 students enrolled in initial teacher education programmes across the country¹. However, the country will soon need to respond to the effects of AIDS: analysts predict that some 30 000 teachers per year will be needed. As Luis Crouch succinctly puts it (Crouch, 2001, p.3):

Forecasts of teacher demand and supply suggest a looming imbalance between supply and demand due in part to the AIDS epidemic, but due also in part to a) an overly hasty administrative planning process to control teacher training capacity, and b) an uncontrolled (because uninformed) and relatively short-sighted reaction on the part of young persons potentially interested in becoming teachers.

As a result of this crisis there will be pressure to get candidates interested in teaching into classrooms as soon as possible.

Thus, we need to be thinking about the most efficient and effective ways of ensuring there are qualified and competent educators in South African classrooms. If the materials and approaches developed for the Unisa NPDE prove successful, we will also have developed materials and models that could be adapted for successful pre-service or learnership type induction programmes for prospective educators.

¹ Vinjevold, Penny, 2001, *Provision of initial teacher education in 2001: institutions, student numbers and types of programmes*, unpublished paper. The figure quoted excludes Unisa, UNITRA, and Fort Hare.

Lessons learned from evaluating the implementation of the Unisa NPDE programme should then be useful for two purposes:

1.4.1 Providing information for decision-making

There is a need to make decisions about the curriculum design and delivery process for the period 2004 - 6 and beyond based upon the lessons of experience derived from 2002 -3.

1.4.2 Adding to current body of knowledge

An evaluation of the Unisa NPDE programme should help in the identification of critical success factors for successful implementation of the flexible educator development programmes for which Welch (2001) has identified the need.

1.5 Literature review

It is believed that education and training are social activities and that teachers are primarily agents of social change.

Indeed, the latest policy documents such as *Curriculum 2005* and the *Norms and Standards for Educators* outline an explicit role for educators of promoting social democratic ideals and values. A programme like the NPDE needs therefore to be evaluated from the perspective of social critical theory. It will be necessary to provide a philosophical and epistemological framework within which to engage with the issues that arise. This implies the need to engage with the work of social and critical and learning theorists such as Michel Foucault, Paulo Freire, Jürgen Habermas, John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Albert Bandura, Burrhus Skinner, Uri Bronfenbrenner, Mel Ainscow and others.

The Unisa NPDE is a distance programme aimed at developing the competence of classroom-based educators. An evaluation of the NPDE programme will therefore need to draw evaluation criteria from a number of different sources, including current thinking on:

- the nature of contemporary distance education practice
- requirements for effective educator development

- effective curriculum design; and in particular
- the role of assessment in effective education provision.

1.6 Research method and design

Babbie and Mouton (2001:335) quote Rossi and Freeman (1993:5) who define evaluation research as follows:

... the systematic application of social research procedures for assessing the conceptualization, design, implementation, and utility of social intervention programmes.

They then proceed to quote Patton (1997) as follows on three primary uses/purposes of evaluation studies:

Table 3: Uses or purposes of evaluation studies

Uses or purposes	Examples
Judge merit or worth	Summative evaluation Accountability Audits Quality Control Cost-benefit decisions Deciding a programme's future Accreditation/ licensing
Improve programmes	Formative evaluation Identifying strengths and weaknesses Quality enhancement Managing more effectively Adopting a model locally
Generate knowledge	Generalizations about effectiveness Extrapolating principles about what works Building new theories and models Informing policy

[Source: Patten (1997:76) cited in Babbie & Mouton (2001:338)]

Given that the Unisa NPDE programme was in its second year of implementation with its first cohort of learners whilst this study was being conducted, and that subsequent years of the programme were being designed and developed simultaneously with implementation of the programme for the first cohort year, the focus of this evaluation study falls within the second category aimed at developing formative insights for the improvement of design and delivery in the second and subsequent years of implementation.

Babbie and Mouton (2001:341) suggest that a programme evaluation will be concerned with answering variations of the following four key questions:

1. Is the programme conceptualized and designed in such a way that it addresses the real needs of the intended beneficiaries (the target group)?

For the Unisa NPDE, this will be an interesting question to answer.

The national NPDE is being promoted by the Department of Education which is interested in having a more effective and efficient educator complement. The educators on the programme will come with certain needs and expectations which the programme will need to address. However, the central importance of developing teachers rests on the influence they have on the development of the learners in their care. Ultimately, then the beneficiaries of a programme like the NPDE, which is geared towards improved classroom practice, will be the learners in schools. In order to ascertain whether the programme meets the real needs of the beneficiaries, we will need to use a variety of strategies, including:

- records
- observations
- self-reports (Babbie & Mouton 2001:347).

It will be necessary to clarify the expectations of the Department of Education, through an examination of policy documents and research reports that led up to the development of the NPDE proposal.

It will be necessary to ascertain from educators on the programme their needs and expectations at the start of the programme and the extent to which these have been met by the end of the programme. It will also be necessary to attempt to corroborate this information by direct observation of teaching and work produced by the teacher-learners.

2. Has the programme been properly (well) implemented (and managed)?

In order to address this question, it will be necessary to document very carefully the implementation and development plan; to try to ascertain from the documentation, and possibly interviews with key role players, the way in which the plan was designed to lead to the intended outcomes; to note any deviations from the plan and the reasons for them and to use this information to reflect on and make recommendations for the implementation of the programme during subsequent years.

The analysis and recommendations will need to be informed by current literature and models offering insight into the criteria for efficient and effective:

- distance education interventions
- educator development interventions
- curriculum design processes; and in particular
- assessment procedures, which have been foregrounded in the overall NPDE programme design.

3. Have the intended outcomes of the programme materialized?

The primary purpose of the NPDE programme is to develop educators as competent classroom practitioners. This purpose has been derived from recent research (e.g. Taylor & Vinjevd 1999) which suggests that many classroom-based educators are **not** competent classroom practitioners. It will therefore be necessary to examine the literature to identify criteria for measuring classroom competence and then to seek evidence of a change in educator's performance against these criteria. This implies a pre-test-post-test design (Babbie & Mouton 2001:349).

Because of the importance of the educator's own sense of plausibility (Prabhu, 1990) in bringing about change in classroom practice, it will be necessary to have educators reflect upon how **they** feel the programme has or has not influenced their beliefs and practices and, then to try and substantiate this in some way using a triangulation of methods (Cohen & Manion 1994) including direct classroom observation, the examination of actual classroom artefacts e.g. lesson plans,

learner work, educator assessment of learner work and the ability of the educator him or herself to demonstrate and articulate the changes that have come about.

4. Were the programme outcomes obtained in the most cost-efficient manner?

There is a popular misconception that distance education is necessarily a cheap option. However, an examination of models of good distance education practice suggests that there are very high start up costs that need to be amortised over large student numbers before economies of scale help to bring down unit costs (Rumble 1997).

During its first year, for a variety of reasons including the fact that the NPDE was launched nationally only in April 2002 whilst Unisa had an obligation to its pipeline learners to allow for registration from December 2001, the Unisa NPDE programme seemed unlikely to achieve significant economies of scale. However, as noted previously, by the end of May 2002 more than 2000 educators had been enrolled on the programme. The income and expenditure patterns, the careful control of deviations from budget during the first two years, and an analysis of retention and throughput rates should provide useful lessons for the subsequent implementation of the NPDE programme, as well as other decentralised, contact-supported educational offerings..

Some of the research required for an evaluation study had already begun prior to the writing of this dissertation since the author has integrated an evaluation research component into the overall management of the NPDE.

Some additional guiding principles ...

Muller in Taylor and Vinjevold (1999:37-64), in a chapter entitled “Reason, reality and public trust: the case of educational research for policy”, points to the tension that exists between constructivist and realist approaches to social research and argues for a compromise between the two paradigms. It must be conceded that evaluating the Unisa NPDE, like any educational offering, is a complex

process and as Van Niekerk (2002:42) notes:

... It is continuously postponing final conclusions and looping and relating data and findings, circling between text and context, text and reality, language and reality, et cetera.

As qualitative researchers, we need to circle back and rediscover the theoretical foundations provided by hermeneutics. Hermeneutics will indicate that there is no finality – and that rigorous study of texts and contexts will contribute to conclusions that are trustworthy, albeit not final ...

In recognition of this truth, the evaluation of the NPDE will require engagement with the programme from multiple perspectives and attempts to try and triangulate data wherever possible.

The engagement with the Unisa NPDE programme, proceeds from the following fundamental beliefs which will be explored in detail in Chapter 2:

- a belief that human beings are active shapers of their environment and not simply passive reactors to their environment
- a belief that political and ideological viewpoints, power relationships and inter-relationships affect behaviour and decisions
- a belief that it is necessary to be critical of assumptions, existing systems and taken for granted ways of doing things in a search for continuous improvement
- a belief in a transformative agenda – that the Unisa NPDE programme could and should bring about positive change not only among the educators taking the programme but within Unisa as a provider of the programme
- a belief in an emancipatory agenda – giving a voice not only to those educators taking the programme and who come from the disempowering and authoritarian systems of the past
- a belief in the efficacy of an action research model in which the cumulative findings of the research process feed back into the actual design and delivery of the programme in a continuous cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting together with the programme stakeholders
- use of a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods to gain insight into the ways in which the programme is designed and delivered and the ways in which it is experienced.

Taken together these standpoints suggest a perspective which Babbie and Mouton (2001) and Higgs and Smith (2000) would characterise as socially critical.

Danielson (2001:12-15) points to an emerging refocus on the evaluation of teacher performance in a process in which the educator is him/herself an active participant. Portfolios and opportunities for professional conversations are key features of such moves and this inevitably results in the production of narratives of educator experience. This evaluation report draws extensively on narrative both as a source of information as well as a means of reporting on what has been learned. Verhesschen (2003:449-465) notes that the construction of first-person narratives is central to most processes involved in developing a 'reflective practitioner' but concedes that the value of such narratives is contested. Verhesschen (ibid) suggests that the writing of Paul Ricoeur (1983, 1984, 1985) and his concept of 'triple mimesis' offers a theoretical framework for using narratives meaningfully in evaluation exercises. Ricoeur's theory can be summarised in three stages as follows:

- *Mimesis I*

This stage is concerned with a recognition of the way in which human experience naturally lends itself to narrative descriptions using narrative techniques.

- *Mimesis II*

This stage is concerned with the selection and arrangement of information that accentuates the narrative flow and transforms disparate events into a meaningful whole.

- *Mimesis III*

This stage is concerned with the way in which the reader interprets the narrative based on his/her own life experiences. The stages are presented separately only for ease of reference: in practice, the boundaries are blurred.

Criticism of narrative theory centres to a large extent on the subjectivity inherent in selecting and arranging the information in a particular way. However, it could be argued that any kind of writing involves this kind of selection and that various readers will possibly interpret the information in different ways. The narrative should therefore be seen as providing a particular perspective that is open to critical debate and that it is incumbent on the writer to be as honest and authentic as possible in presenting the narrative and in engaging with his/her reader (Denscombe 1998). As Verhesschen (2003:462) notes, when narratives are used in teacher education:

Because the novice and the supervisor more or less share the same experience, the latter

can point the student towards relevant aspects in the situation that she neglected in her narrative ... Because of the transformative or constitutive power of narratives, the narrative the student tells about classroom events is always significant. The narrative contains an invitation to look at the situation in a particular way. And since the narrative can lead to a transformation of actions, some interpretations are considered better than other ones. The aim is not that the student sees the events and situations as they 'really' are. In teacher education, teacher educators invite students to look at classroom life in a particular, rich and sensitive way. Some narratives do justice to the situation and others do less or not at all.

It is hoped that this dissertation will be seen in the above light: as an invitation to look at the Unisa NPDE and its lessons of experience in a particular way that provides meaningful insight into the recommendations made for changes in the way in which the curriculum is both designed and delivered. Overall, a “fourth generation evaluation” approach, as recommended by Guba and Lincoln (1989:252-264) has been followed. The underlying principles of this approach are understood as follows:

- Recognition of evaluation as a sociopolitical process not a value-free objective description of reality
- Evaluation as a joint, collaborative process in which there is interaction and a search for meaning between the evaluator and the programme stakeholders
- Evaluation as a formative process in which all the participants should learn through a hermeneutic dialectic relationship
- Evaluation as a continuous, recursive and divergent process: the dissertation is not the final word in interpreting the Unisa NPDE experience and what is presented here is itself open to reconstruction and deconstruction
- Evaluation as an emergent process: it is likely that the evaluation will highlight new areas for investigation
- Evaluation as a process with unpredictable outcomes
- Evaluation that offers a perspective for public critical scrutiny rather than attempting to pretend that there is only one way to interpret the data.

In selecting what to focus on and in making recommendations, within the context of education needing to become more business-like in approach, the researcher has also been guided by the influential work of Peter Senge (1990). Senge suggests that in order to learn and grow, it is necessary to look at the system as a whole and plan for the longer term rather than seeking too simple short-term solutions to emerging problems.

1.7 Organisation of the dissertation

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background to the Unisa NPDE programme, problem statements, aim, rationale and key concepts and research design

Chapter 2: Social critical theory and the implications for teacher education at a distance

Chapter 3: Learning and teaching and the Unisa NPDE

3.1 Curriculum as plan and practice

3.2 Materials review

3.3 Assessment strategy

3.4 RPL strategy

3.5 Portfolio development

3.6 Tutor recruitment, training and development

Chapter 4: Logistics, management and costs for the Unisa NPDE

4.1 Programme management

4.2 Programme costing

4.3 Impact and throughput analysis

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations

Bibliography and references

Supporting appendices