

Chapter 3: Learning and teaching and the Unisa NPDE

"This is the first class in English spelling and philosophy, Nickleby," said Squeers, beckoning Nicholas to stand beside him. "We'll get up a Latin one, and hand that over to you. Now, then, where's the first boy?"

"Please, sir, he's cleaning the back parlour window," said the temporary head of the philosophical class.

"So he is, to be sure," rejoined Squeers. "We go upon the practical mode of teaching, Nickleby; the regular education system. C-l-e-a-n, clean, verb active, to make bright, to scour. W-l-n, win, d-e-r, der, winder, a casement. When the boy knows this out of the book, he goes and does it. It's just the same principle as the use of the globe. Where's the second boy?"

"Please, sir, he's weeding the garden," replied a small voice.

"To be sure," said Squeers, by no means disconcerted. "So he is. B-o-t, bot, t-i-n, tin, bottin, n-e-y, ney, bottiney, noun substantive, a knowledge of plants. When he has learned that bottiney means a knowledge of plants, he goes and knows 'em. That's our system Nickleby, what do you think of it?"

"It's a very useful one, at any rate," answered Nicholas.

"I believe you," rejoined Squeers, not remarking the emphasis of his usher. "Third boy, what's a horse?"

"A beast, sir," replied the boy.

"So it is," said Squeers. "Ain't it, Nickleby?"

"I believe there is no doubt of that, sir," answered Nicholas.

"Of course there isn't," said Squeers. "A horse is a quadruped, and quadruped's Latin for beast, as every body that's gone through the grammar, knows, or else where's the use of having grammars at all?"

"Where, indeed!" said Nicholas abstractedly.

"As you're perfect in that," resumed Squeers, turning to the boy, "go down and look after *my* horse, and rub him down well, or I'll rub you down. The rest of the class go and draw water up, till somebody tells you to leave off, for it's washing-day to-morrow, and they want the coppers filled."

So saying, he dismissed the first class to their experiments in practical philosophy, and eyed Nicholas with a look, half-cunning and half doubtful, as if he were not altogether certain what he might think of him by this time.

Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, 1838-1839

3.1 Curriculum as plan and practice

The above extract from *Nicholas Nickleby*, reflects Dickens' contempt for the many rural schools set up by unscrupulous people in Victorian England for whom education was not really a goal, but

who rather performed the service of keeping unwanted members of families out of sight and out of mind.

Squeers' self-serving approach to the "education" of the children in his care is ad-hoc in nature and raises questions about just how a curriculum should be put together even if one's motives are somewhat more altruistic than those of Squeers.

As a starting point, Luckett (1996:28-9) stresses the wide range of ways in which curriculum has been defined by different curriculum theorists and offers the following examples:

The word derives from the Latin *currere* which means 'to run' and its associated noun which has been translated as 'a course'. Hence, the word has been used to refer to **following a course of study**; but like many other terms, its meaning has been subtly changed over the years ... (Jarvis 1995:189)

(Curriculum is) ... **the ostensible or official course of study** made up in our era of a series of documents covering various subject areas and grade levels together with statements of 'aims and objectives' and sets of syllabi, the whole constituting, as it were, the rules, regulations and principles to guide what should be taught ... (G. S. Tomkins quoted in Goodson and Dowbiggan, 1993:155)

(Curriculum is the) ... **courses and subjects which comprise the intended outcomes of teaching**, the knowledge and skills which it is the business of education to transmit ... (Griffin, 1983:12)

A curriculum is the offering of **socially valued knowledge, skills and attitudes** made available through a variety of arrangements during the time they are at school, college or university ... (Bell, 1971:9)

Curriculum construction is an **ongoing activity** that is shaped by various contextual influences within and beyond the classroom and is **accomplished interactively, primarily by teachers and students** ... (Cornbleth, 1990:24)

We seem to be confronted by two different views of curriculum on the one hand the curriculum is seen **as intention, plan or prescription**, an idea about what one would like to happen in schools. On the other hand, it is seen as an existing state of affairs in schools, **what does, in fact, happen** ... A curriculum is an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice ... (Stenhouse, 1975:4)

In a very real sense, curricula ... are the most tangible **codification of the objectives a society wants to reach through its education system, and of the skills and values it wishes to instil in future generations** ... Values such as patriotism, filial piety, critical thinking, sharing, competition, religious orthodoxy, tolerance, obedience, respect for life or punctuality all loom large in one curricular system or another, and not just in the form of general abstract categories, but also, if less easily discernible, in the detail of specific curricular guidelines, textbooks, teaching materials, and so on ... (Weiler, 1993:281)

The curriculum is a **site of struggle, conflict and debate** ... Though often expressed in terms of specific disagreements over the knowledge content of syllabuses or the forms of assessment, such conflicts reflect sharp differences about the kind of society people are trying to create ... In other words the curriculum is, as always, a political question in every sense and at every level. Anyone who is serious about trying to change the curriculum in other than superficial ways cannot avoid grasping its political nature ... (Young, 1993:17)

Luckett goes on to suggest (following the work of Habermas, who built on Aristotle) that it is possible to discern three broad paradigms of curriculum theory as illustrated in the following table:

Table 6: Curriculum paradigms

| | Traditional (technical interest) | Hermeneutic (practical interest) | Critical (emancipatory interest) |
|--|--|--|--|
| Curriculum | Curriculum as product – teaching inputs, learning outputs, content-based | Curriculum as practice – based on teacher’s professional judgement & learners’ understanding | Curriculum as praxis – teacher & learner together viewed as social agents transforming institutions & society; politicisation via contextualisation |
| Curriculum development | An empirical-analytic, value-neutral science | An interpretative/ hermeneutical science which is value-laden and context specific | A critical praxis or ideologically orientated inquiry which leads to political & social emancipation of the participants and greater socio-economic equity & justice in society |
| Model of education/ academic development | Add-on support programme to remedy specific student deficiencies | An integrated model in which mainstream teachers take responsibility for ensuring that their teaching is meaningful to all students; attempts to ensure that students gain life skills and general interdisciplinary knowledge | AD is not a concern; the university as a whole is out of touch with its community; the university should be transformed to serve as a resource for learning, research & critical analysis in its community |
| Goals of education | To equip students with the knowledge & skills they need for the workplace | To produce self-actualising, reflective ‘educated people’ | As in hermeneutic, but also with a criticality which enables participation in self-transformation & in the transformation of society |
| Teacher-learner relationship | An authority figure who controls the learning process in a hierarchical relationship: status = power | A leader who progressively yields control of the learning process to learners within a mentoring relationship; status & power based on merit | A co-ordinator with emancipatory aims who emphasises commonality of concerns within an open & democratic relationship; deliberately aims at power-sharing & participatory control |

| | Traditional (technical interest) | Hermeneutic (practical interest) | Critical (emancipatory interest) |
|---------------------|--|--|--|
| Role of the learner | A receiver of transmitted knowledge who can reproduce correct information within the framework of what is taught; often instrumentalist attitude to learning; tends to adopt a surface approach to learning | An active constructor of his/her own knowledge who builds it via experiential & inquiry-based learning activities; tends to adopt a deep approach to learning | A co-learner who participates in socially significant collaborative projects with a view to furthering social justice and critiquing & reconstructing received knowledge |
| Learning theory | Behaviourist; deficit model of the learner | Constructivist & interactionist; the learner builds cognitive structure through interaction | Social constructionist, interactionist; the learner reconstructs his/her knowledge self-reflexively in an attempt to move beyond subjective understandings |
| Assessment | Tests the 'what', summative; exams to test acquisition of propositional knowledge & mastery of skills, feedback often limited; may encourage a surface approach to learning | Test the 'how', summative & formative; varied procedures – open book, projects, orals etc. to assess learner growth and effectiveness of teaching, emphasises feed-back as part of the learning process; encourages a deep approach to learning | Negotiated assessment; peer assessment, goal-based assessment – i.e. learners' critical response & contribution to action |
| Knowledge* | Positivist; objective, public truth which exists as information & skills "out there"; privileges scientific & rational knowledge (knowledge for controlling the environment); usually a split between researcher & researched and between mental & manual skills | Socially constructed; therefore historically & culturally specific; subjective understandings are important; knowledge for judgement, deliberation and refinement; researcher cannot stand outside of the researched context; some integration of mental & manual skills | Socially constructed but also politically interested; awareness of the relationship between knowledge & power; explores the dialectic between structure & agency; knowledge is validated in praxis in specific social & political contexts |

(PP31-3: This table is adapted from the Centre for adult Education, UNP's Post-graduate Diploma in Adult education, pp. 45 – 50)

Luckett observes that an epistemology or theory of the nature of knowledge is a key assumption that tends to underpin all the other categories in the table. She also notes that the table excludes post-modernist perspectives on the curriculum as well as feminist curriculum theory, although much of this could be categorised within the critical paradigm.

Preedy (1988) notes that definitions of curriculum range from a too narrow interpretation of curriculum as syllabus to interpretations that are so wide it is difficult to differentiate between

curriculum and the meaning and purpose of education as a whole.

Kelly (1989:10-13) points to some of the pitfalls of the first extreme. He notes that:

...many people still equate a curriculum with a syllabus and thus limit their planning to a consideration of the content or the body of knowledge they wish to transmit ... many teachers in primary schools once regarded issues of curriculum as of no concern to them, since they have not usually regarded their task as being to transmit bodies of knowledge in this manner. ... it has tended to proceed in a piecemeal way within subjects rather than according to some overall rationale, so that the curriculum can be seen as 'the amorphous product of generations of tinkering' (Taba, 1962, p. 8) ...

Furthermore ... any definition of curriculum, if it is to be practically effective and productive, must offer much more than a statement about the knowledge content ... which schooling is to 'teach' or 'transmit'. It must go far beyond this to an explanation, and indeed a justification, of the purposes of such transmission and an exploration of the effects that exposure to such knowledge and such subjects is likely to have ...

... some educationists speak of the 'hidden curriculum', by which they mean those things which pupils learn at school because of the way in which the work of the school is planned and organised but which are not in themselves overtly included in the planning or even the consciousness of those responsible for the school arrangements ...

Some would argue that the values implicit in the arrangements made by schools for their pupils are quite clearly in the consciousness of teachers and planners and are clearly equally accepted by them as part of what pupils should learn at school, even though they are not overtly recognised by the pupils themselves. In other words, teachers deliberately plan the school's 'expressive culture'. In such instances, therefore, the curriculum is 'hidden' only to or from the pupils.

Furthermore, we must not lose sight of the fact that curriculum studies must ultimately be concerned with the relationship between these two views of the curriculum, between intention and reality, if it is to succeed in linking the theory and the practice of the curriculum (Stenhouse, 1975).

Kelly (ibid:14) goes on to observe that in light of the above, any discussion about curriculum needs to take cognizance of

at least four major dimensions of educational planning and practice: the intentions of the planners, the procedures adopted for the implementation of those intentions, the actual experiences of the pupils resulting from the teachers' direct attempts to carry out their planners' intentions, and the 'hidden' learning that

occurs as a by-product of the organisation of the curriculum, and, indeed, of the school.

Kelly sees curriculum as a process that contributes to the achievement of 'education', which he perceives in terms of development based on agreed guiding principles. This is not inconsistent with the definition proposed in Chapter 1.

Moore (1991:8) summarises some key aspects of what thinking about the curriculum involves which seem to accord well with Kelly's position:

- (a) The curriculum is not simply a body of knowledge. Because the knowledge has to be learned, the curriculum is a **process** not simply a thing.
- (b) This process aims to produce a desired change (or '**development**') in the individual.
- (c) Implicit within any particular organisation of the curriculum is an **ideal** model of the type of **person** such an organised programme of knowledge will produce.
- (d) Such models are always constructed from within particular traditions, with their distinctive values and ideals. Hence they are intrinsically **ideological**.
- (e) Because these ideal outcomes of the curriculum are social in purpose (developing the attributes desired for a particular type of society), there is also an associated **ideal** model of **social order**. [Own emphasis.]

Moore (ibid:33-35) identifies three dimensions that need to underpin discussion about curriculum: epistemological (about knowledge); psychological (how people learn); sociological (how knowledge is selected, organised and distributed). He suggests that the following standpoints are currently dominant:

| <i>Position</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Principle</i> | <i>Source</i> | <i>Institutional base</i> |
|-----------------|------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Liberal | Rationalist | Knowledge/reason | Academics/ the disciplines | Universities |
| | Progressive | The child/ 'growth' | Educationists | Colleges/Departments of education |
| New right | Neo-conservative | Social cohesion | Tradition/ heritage | The state, the market, 'the common people' |
| | Modernisers | Economic efficiency | The needs of industry | The State (MSC), 'representatives' of industry |

It would seem, in light of the above discussion, that all of the definitions given at the beginning of this section are deficient and unhelpful in one respect or another. One useful attempt at arriving at a workable definition is given by Preedy (1988:7) who offers the following from the UK Department of Education and Science:

A school's curriculum consists of all those activities designed or encouraged within its organisational framework to promote the intellectual, personal, social and physical development of its pupils.

It includes not only the formal programme of lessons, but also the 'informal' programme of so-called extra-curricular activities as well as all those features which produce the school's 'ethos', such as the quality of relationships, the concern for equality of opportunity, the values exemplified in the way the school sets about its task and the way in which it is organised and managed ...
DES, 1985a, p.7

This definition seems to touch on most of the ideas discussed earlier. It is, however, specifically directed at the schooling sector.

Sparg and Winberg/USWE (1999:3) offer a slightly more condensed version of the above:

***curriculum:** a plan of a learning process. It implies an integration of the intentions of the planners, the principles and methods of the implementors, the entrance requirements of the learners, the learning materials used and the assessment methods and criteria.*

They then 'unpack' their definition as follows (ibid:3).

The curriculum frames the entire teaching and learning process. It answers such questions as:

- Who teaches whom?*
- What is taught and learned?*
- How is it taught? Why?*
- How is it assessed? Why?*
- Where does teaching and learning happen?*
- When does teaching and learning happen?*

It is affected by factors such as:

- Who decides about all these things?*
- Whose interests or needs are served by this curriculum?*
- What kinds of human and practical resources are available to service this curriculum?"*

Wragg (1997) is concerned that the curriculum needs to be explored in a less linear fashion than is

implied above.

He argues that different dimensions of curriculum decision-making impact on one another and therefore the impact of a decision to be made must be considered simultaneously from the perspective of each dimension. He envisages a simplified “cubic curriculum” in which the key three dimensions that should influence each decision are:

- Subjects and related issues:
 - Content and key concepts
 - Level and sequence
 - Teacher’s subject knowledge
- Cross-curricular issues
 - Looking across the curriculum
 - Language and communication
 - Thinking – problem-solving, prediction and speculative thinking
 - Personal and social development and citizenship
- Teaching and learning styles
 - Learning – familiarity, association, transfer, observation, imitation, emotions, motivation, learning styles, feedback
 - Teaching and learning – telling and explaining, discovery and invention, group and team work.

Marsh (1992) undertook an extensive review of the literature on curriculum study and identified **five**, rather than three, key areas which impact on curriculum decision-making and which suggest areas of further enquiry (although he was writing for school teachers, it is possible see corollaries in other sectors):

- Student perspectives
 - Learning environments
 - Hidden curriculum
 - Curriculum and gender
 - Students’ role in curriculum decision-making
 - Examinations

- Teacher perspectives
 - Teacher empowerment
 - Textbooks
 - Leadership and the school principal
 - Teacher appraisal
- Curriculum planning and development
 - Curriculum frameworks
 - Situational analysis/needs analysis
 - Aims, goals and objectives
 - Selection of method
 - Assessment, grading and testing
 - Tyler's model of planning (linear)
 - Walker's deliberative approach to planning (naturalistic)
 - Teachers as researchers/action research
 - Centrally-based curriculum development
 - School-based curriculum development
- Curriculum management
 - Innovation and planned change
 - Managing the curriculum: the collaborative school
 - Effective schools and school improvement
 - School councils and governing bodies
 - School evaluations/reviews
 - Curriculum implementation
- Curriculum ideology.
 - Curriculum history
 - School subjects
 - Curriculum theorizing and the reconceptualists
 - Sociology of knowledge approach to curriculum
 - Curriculum reform.

It is also necessary to address the extent to which the curriculum fits with current national policy concerns and directives. Saide (2000) point to the Department of Education's concern with the changing the nature of the relationship between educators and learners as set out in Table 4 in Chapter 2, as well as with practice being informed by a wider vision, so that all education and training programmes should seek to achieve the critical outcomes that underpin the Curriculum 2005 policy (reaffirmed by the Curriculum 2005 review committee in their Curriculum 21 document published in May 2000).

Taylor (1993) points out that the absence of a theoretical framework on which to pin curriculum studies is a problem that South Africa shares with curriculum scholars around the world. He observes:

The task of reconstructing the school curriculum, both locally and internationally, is a particularly difficult one during the present period of extreme flux and contradiction ... One the one hand post-modernity presses the particular on us, insisting that we consider carefully the specificity of South Africa in thinking about inventing a new knowledge tradition to lead us into the future. Parallel to this, the globalisation of commodity culture, or what Wexler (1990) refers to as dedifferentiation, flattens the specific and shortens the distance between differences ... (1993:1-2)

Taylor's solution to the tension is to juxtapose the perspectives of international and local scholars. He subsequently refers to curriculum as 'discursive space' and quotes (1993:13):

... in the struggle over knowledge production ... education means the capacity to control, to generate, refigure, configure and extrapolate the signifier ... (Wexler, 1987:184).

This suggests that issues around what the curriculum is and how it should be implemented and reviewed are subject to continuing discussion and debate. A particular stance is therefore likely to be very time-sensitive and subject to continual review.

Young (in Taylor 1993:17-38) in reporting on *A British Baccalaureate: Ending the Division between Education and Training* identifies the key issues that such a curriculum set out to address.

These issues accord well with the South African DOE/NTSI concerns outlined earlier:

- The relation between specialist knowledge and general education
- The relation between compulsion and choice
- The relation between developing theory and practice
- The balance between formative and summative assessment
- The relation between content and process
- The relation between modularity and structure.

Deacon and Parker (also in Taylor, 1993) point to a further set of considerations with which South African curriculum developers need to engage in an article entitled *The curriculum and power: a reconceptualisation with a rural dimension* (pp. 127 – 142). They suggest that if we wish to empower rural communities, where a large number if not most of the NPDE learners live, it will be necessary to engage in a process of:

... moving away from the present formal structure ... The necessary core curriculum, such as a mathematics syllabus, should be generated at the centre but taught at the margin in the local language and idiom. Within texts, there should be a proliferation of different identities and the relations between them biased towards those previously excluded. ... Within pedagogy, the focus must not fall on the subjects of the relation (teachers and learners) but on the relation itself, in order to multiply its possible forms and to displace rationality with local common sense. ... The focus must ... be on which decisions and functions should be centralised and decentralised. ...

The necessity for a national core curriculum that promotes nation building and citizenship, literacy and numeracy should be balanced by the equally necessary mediation of local knowledge and power relations ... (1993: 140-1)

A cursory review of the curriculum for the Unisa NPDE programme suggests an eclectic perspective that is most firmly rooted in the hermeneutic and critical paradigms but which is situationally and context specific and therefore does not rule out the applicability of lessons from within the traditional paradigm at times.

In evaluating the UNISA NPDE curriculum **as a plan**, it is therefore necessary to focus on statements which reflect a standpoint on each of the following issues:

1. View of knowledge
2. Understanding of curriculum
3. A model (preferably circular and continuous) for how the curriculum is planned, implemented and reviewed and
4. Who is involved in the process
5. Opportunities for feedback from learners integrated into the review process
6. Opportunities for feedback from educators integrated into the curriculum review process
7. Intended outcomes and how these were derived
8. Pedagogy to be employed
9. Assessment practices and justification thereof
10. Resources (including learner support materials) to be used and how these are developed, costed, managed, distributed and reviewed
11. Relationship between fundamental, core and elective learning
12. How the curriculum and materials development processes take cognisance of the following issues:
 - Integration
 - Relevance
 - Credibility
 - Coherence
 - Flexibility
 - Standards
 - Legitimacy
 - Access
 - Articulation
 - Progression

- Portability
- Recognition of prior learning
- Guidance of learners

13. Balance between centralised and decentralised roles and responsibilities and management and control of decentralised provision.

All of these issues need to be addressed from the perspective of an informed understanding of the nature and needs of the targeted learners. Fortunately, the Department of Education and the Education Trust have been able to provide a fairly detailed learner profile based on the analysis of over 42 000 questionnaires completed by those educators who form the target market for the NPDE programme.

DOE/ET Report findings 2001:

The main findings of the 42 565 forms received are as follows:

- 67,7% have an REQV12, 19,0% have an REQV11, 8,4% have REQV10, 2,9% have an REQV9 and about 2,0% unknown;
- 70,7% of the un(der)qualified educators are women;
- 94,3% of the un(der)qualified educators are in permanent positions;
- 85,8% ... of un(der)qualified educators are post level 1 educators, a total of 36 521 educators, while 5,3% (2 277) educators are heads of department, 0,8% (375) are deputy principals and 6,9% (2 974) are principals of schools.
- Most of the un(der)qualified educators teach in the Foundation Phase (32,8%), followed by the Intermediate Phase (24,8%). A further 19,4% are in the Senior Phase and 7,5% are in the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase;
- 55,8% (23 744) un(der)qualified educators are upgrading their qualifications;
- Almost three-quarters (73,0%) un(der)qualified educators have been in the teaching profession for 10 to 29 years;

- 90% of un(der)qualified educators cite an African language as their home language; and
- A total of 38,7% un(der)qualified educators teach mathematics, 10,9% biology and 10,0% English.

Targeting

- The largest percentage of educators un(der)qualified that need to be targeted are KwaZulu-Natal (28,5%), Eastern Cape (19,8%) and Northern Province (15,6%).
- Educators need to be upgraded from REQV12 to 13 (67,7%).
- Special attention needs to be given to the needs of women educators (70,7%) and post level one educators (85,5%) who are either in the Foundation Phase (32,8%) or if they are specialist educators are teaching mathematics (50,4%).
- Educators according to home language to be targeted are isiZulu (30,7%) and isiXhosa (19,5%). (2001:4)

The profile provided above, suggests several important guidelines for curriculum and materials development:

- the NPDE has mature learners with busy lives so ways must be found of helping the learners to manage their time effectively and to be able to focus on what is essential learning
- NPDE learners are likely to have limited study skills and probable language difficulties since most will be studying in a language that is not their home language – thus the programme will need to develop learners' skills in these areas fairly early on
- NPDE learners will have limited access to additional support e.g. local libraries, peer role models, technology so the programme materials should be self-contained
- NPDE learners need to master conceptual understanding at the level at which they are teaching; *and*
- be prepared for further study at REQV14 level – clearly the NPDE materials cannot simply re-hash Grade 12, which is what happened in many teacher training programmes in the past.

Broad curriculum outline:

The programme will need to allow for:

1. Introduction to appropriate learning areas/phases in terms of the revised National Curriculum Statement
2. Developing knowledge, skills and attitudes for effective learning and teaching in the specialist Learning Area/phase
3. Developing conceptual understanding at the level being taught; *and*
4. Developing a foundation for further study at NQF level 6.

The following discussion will consider each of the above key issues in turn.

3.1.1 View of knowledge in the Unisa NPDE

The Unisa NPDE foregrounds the experience that teacher-learners bring to the programme with a high emphasis on discussion and reflection on this experience within the framework of the understandings of more experienced others. All content, including that which is assessed, is open to contestation. The key function of contact sessions is understood to be to foster such debate and discussion.

3.1.2 Understanding of curriculum

The curriculum is understood as a set of guidelines which need to be continually reviewed and contested, within the limitations imposed by a curriculum framework that has been set nationally. It is understood that there is a distinction to be made between plan and practice and hence constant monitoring is required of tutoring and assessment.

3.1.3 A model (preferably circular and continuous) for how the curriculum is planned, implemented and reviewed

In the period 2001 to 2003, the NPDE curriculum as plan has been subject to review and development, within the broad framework approved by Senate, the Committee on Higher Education and the relevant Standards Generating Body. In the period 2004 - 2006, the

NPDE will be subject to the same three-year curriculum review cycle as all other programmes at Unisa.

Thus, unless there is a change to the NPDE curriculum at national level, there are unlikely to be substantial changes in the Unisa NPDE curriculum. However, some room has been allowed for changes of emphasis through tutorial letters which are changed annually.

3.1.4 Who is involved in the process?

The broad curriculum framework has been set outside of Unisa by the bodies listed in 3.1.3. Internally, the Unisa interpretation of the core curriculum was developed in a consultative process involving representatives of Unisa's Faculty of Education, Sacte and Sacol, with support from Saide. During 2003, the curriculum as plan and the materials related to this curriculum were reviewed and in some cases replaced or expanded. Newly-appointed NPDE-dedicated academic coordinators were at the forefront of this review, with support from Saide and Unisa's Bureau for Learning Development (BLD). The curriculum review process was informed by feedback from Department of Education officials (very limited), programme tutors, teacher-learners on the programme who submit programme evaluation forms at the end of each year as well as changes of emphases in the broad policy environment. Any major changes to the curriculum have to be ratified through a process involving the Tuition Committee and Executive Committees of the Faculty of Education, the Faculty Board and Unisa's Senate. This can be quite a lengthy process which militates against responsiveness.

3.1.5 Opportunities for feedback from learners integrated into the review process

As noted previously, teacher-learners on the programme complete an evaluation form at the end of each year and this feeds into the curriculum and materials review process. All teacher-learners have the right to challenge assessment of their work and apply for remarking if they believe they have been unfairly treated. Such instances again feed into decisions about the selection and use of tutors, the wording of assessment and the appropriateness of the content.

3.1.6 Opportunities for feedback from educators integrated into the curriculum review process

Regular meetings between academic coordinators and with tutors provide insights into the ways in which the curriculum may need to be adjusted. In the Unisa NPDE, currently only academic coordinator input has been formalised.

3.1.7 Intended outcomes and how these were derived

The overall outcomes of the NPDE were determined by the relevant standards generating body, which represents a wide range of stakeholders. The outcomes at module level were determined by the NPDE programme committee (Unisa, Sacte, Sacol and Saide) through a process of debate and discussion over several months. These outcomes, together with the relevant content outlines were subject to the ratification process outlined in 3.1.4 above.

3.1.8 Pedagogy to be employed

The pedagogy (rather andragogy) to be employed on the programme is not spelt out in the curriculum document endorsed by Senate except for the commitment to continuous assessment and contact support. The Programme Manager has advocated a “practise what we preach” philosophy. In other words, the way in which the NPDE programme team engages with tutors should model the ways in which the tutors engage with their teacher-learners and this in turn should model what should happen in classrooms. The broad guidelines for the approach are spelt out in Table 4, Chapter 2.

3.1.9 Assessment practices and justification thereof

The assessment strategy for the programme is spelt out in Sections 3.3 and 3.4 below.

3.1.10 Resources (including learner support materials) to be used and how these are developed, costed, managed, distributed and reviewed

The NPDE programme works from an understanding that most of the teacher-learners on the programme are working in rural and/or under-resourced areas and therefore the course

materials should be as self-contained as possible.

Most materials were originally sourced from existing materials and then revised and updated by NPDE-dedicated staff.

Some modules were bought in while others have been developed internally from conception through a process involving the relevant academic coordinator, the author of this evaluation report, Unisa's Bureau for Learning Development and Unisa full-time staff involved in editing and production. Internal production costs are monitored by Unisa Press and linked directly to Unisa NPDE budget 129. Completed materials are stock managed and despatched by Unisa's Department of Despatch.

3.1.11 Relationship between fundamental, core and elective learning

The relationship between these three aspects of the programme are spelt out in the national NPDE qualification guidelines as registered on the NQF. The full qualification can be viewed at www.saqa.co.za.

3.1.12 How the curriculum and materials development processes take cognisance of the underlying principles of the NQF

Integration

The general tutorial letters, the contact sessions and the integrated portfolio development process attempt to help teacher-learners make connections and see the NPDE as a whole experience rather than as individual modules.

Relevance

A high emphasis is placed in assessment strategies based on actual classroom and school experience as a point of departure (discussed with examples in 3.3 below).

Credibility

The Unisa NPDE curriculum has been submitted to the CHE accreditation process, its management team has reported quarterly to the Department of Education and the ELRC on

progress and problems and has participated fully in the national NPDE workshops and evaluation process managed by the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD).

Through Unisa's Department of Student Affairs, an open communication channel has been kept with the Department of Education's national office.

Coherence

An explicit attempt has been made through both the design and facilitation process to help teacher-learners see the NPDE programme as an unfolding story and to do away with any inconsistencies. One example is the use of a general tutorial letter on the design and interpretation of learning programmes to which all module level tutorial letters refer when the assessment task requires work on a learning programme.

Flexibility

A tension exists between allowing maximum choice and flexibility and managing a system competently for over 2000 students a year. The NPDE has negotiated extended registration deadlines each year, extended assignment deadlines and sets fairly open-ended assessment tasks (see Section 3.5) to allow for a wide variety of responses. However, it has been necessary to become increasingly rigid about assessment deadlines and to restrict module choices in order to be able to manage a system of extensive contact support and to for the programme to fit in with other Unisa systems designed to cater for 250 000 students.

Standards

Broad requirements for the NPDE have been set nationally and the Unisa NPDE has been designed to fit within these. All assessment can be challenged. Tutors or markers marking assignments are required to submit copies of marked assignments with their claims for payment. These copies are moderated by the NPDE academic coordinators. Any teacher-learner can apply for a re-mark. Examination papers are subject to an internal review process with a first and second examiner nominated for each paper set, a marking team that goes through a training workshop and moderation of the marking by the relevant academic coordinator. For each examination paper an external examiner has been appointed. This may be a member of Faculty or an appropriately qualified external person not involved in the original marking process. It is hoped that these measures ensure that standards are maintained.

Legitimacy

The Unisa NPDE is a formal qualification at Unisa and complies with all the requirements of the qualification as registered on the NQF. As noted previously, assessment tends to be open-ended and to allow for reflection of a wide variety of experiences and contexts.

Access

The access requirements for the NPDE have been set nationally. In order to enter the NPDE programme, the prospective teacher-learner is required to provide evidence of the following:

- A std 8/Grade 10 or Std 10/Grade 12 school certificate (or equivalent e.g. O-levels)
- A PTC, STC or equivalent e.g. at least 10 modules of an incomplete three-year teachers' diploma
- Proof that the educator is employed at a school.

Where students have special educational needs, they are requested to indicate these needs on their application form in order to access additional help and support.

Articulation

Teacher-learners who successfully complete the Unisa NPDE gain automatic entry to a Unisa ACE if they wish to continue their studies. Articulation with the undergraduate BEds is more problematic as most have not been re-structured to accommodate this articulation easily.

Progression

In order to comply with Unisa's general requirements for passing a certain number of academic credits within a certain time, to ensure that there is sufficient groundwork on which to build the second year programme and to ensure that students do not attempt too many academic credits in one year, which would have a detrimental effect on their classroom commitments, three of the five first year modules have first to be passed in order to progress to the second year programme. Thereafter, the preferred progression currently is ACE followed by BEd (Hons).

Portability

Since the NPDE is a national qualification, and Unisa has been fully accredited by the CHE to offer the programme, holders of a completed Unisa NPDE will be recognised as having obtained REQV13 and qualified teacher status in terms of *The Employment of Educators Act*. The qualification will be recognised anywhere in the RSA.

Recognition of prior learning

This is discussed separately in Section 3.4 below.

Guidance of learners

This is discussed in Section 3.1.14 below.

3.1.13 Balance between centralised and decentralised roles and responsibilities and management and control of decentralised provision

This is discussed in Section 3.1.14 below.

Having outlined the nature of the Unisa NPDE curriculum as plan, the following discussion considers the evidence available with regard to how the curriculum has been implemented **in practice**.

3.1.14 NPDE in practice

This section comprises a case study of the NPDE curriculum in practice based upon direct observation as well as feedback from teacher-learners on the programme. The discussion is organised around the central role of student support within the Unisa NPDE programme.

Learner support in the Unisa NPDE programme

Section 2.7.2 of this dissertation outlines some of the key considerations in an evaluation of learner support within a distance education programme. The following case study will discuss the learner support offered in the Unisa NPDE programme under the three broad categories outlined in Section 2.7.2. In each part of the discussion, a distinction will be made between what was planned and what actually happened with a view to identifying some useful lessons

of experience.

The case study will incorporate feedback from a student evaluation of the programme as a whole, with a particular emphasis on the effectiveness of the learner support.

1. Support related to learning and teaching processes/needs

As is always the case with Unisa, the university calendar each year contains an overview of the content of the NPDE programme, with information on entry requirements, duration and credit weightings as well as the possibilities for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). However, some of the information literature produced for prospective students was confusing in 2002/3 due to a mismatch between the Department of Education's general information brochure on the NPDE and the requirements of the qualification as outlined on the NQF. The Department of Education NPDE brochure talked about a two-year programme of part-time study while Unisa's calendar, based on the qualification as registered on the NQF, talks about a two-year programme of full-time equivalent study (i.e. 240 credits) and a 'minimum' completion time of two years, with an expectation that for part-time distance study it would not be reasonable to expect completion of more than 60-credits in any one academic year. The issue was further confused by the lack of an agreed national policy on RPL for the NPDE and the fact that in some discussions (including in the Unisa Faculty of Education general information brochure), the REQV status of the NPDE on the new qualifications framework for educators was confused and some students were under the impression that they could get from REQV11 to REQV14 in two years of part-time study. The requirement that senior phase students should specialise in two learning areas, one of which should be Natural Sciences, Mathematics or Technology created further uncertainty as students were often unable to choose between the various options. To address these issues, the following action was taken:

- The calendar entry for the 2004 cohort was completely revised so that first and second year options, articulation and RPL were more clearly spelt out;
- A discussion of the revised qualifications framework for educators was included in the first year module NPD052-G and emphasised during the initial contact session;
- The final general tutorial letter for 2003 included guidance to students on how to select options for their following year of study;

- The first general tutorial letter for 2004 includes a review of what students should actually have registered for, and have received, in respect of their specialist studies.

In recognition of the fact that many prospective students will not have been studying for some time and that many students are Foundation Phase teachers who spend most of their time using various indigenous languages rather than English, the language of instruction in the Unisa NPDE, all students are required to work through a module called *NPD001-4: Language and Learning Skills* at the start of the Unisa NPDE programme. On successful completion of the module, it is hoped that students will have refreshed their language and study skills in English and so be better empowered to engage with the rest of the programme. The module carries a weighting of 12 credits from Component 1: Foundational Learning of the NPDE. In a recent survey of NPDE students, however, only 33/707 students rated NPD001-4 as the most useful module on the course. This was the lowest rating among the five first-year modules suggesting that students either have not seen the relevance of the module to their other studies or have simply not found the module useful in the way that was intended. This issue will need to be explored more fully during 2004.

One of the biggest differences between the Unisa NPDE programme and other Unisa mainstream offerings is the provision of contact sessions as an integral part of the programme delivery. Unisa promised that it would offer contact sessions wherever there was an average of 30 students studying the same modules and these contact sessions would account for at least 10% of the notional learning hours of the programme i.e. at least 60 hours of direct face-to-face contact in a typical 60-credit academic year. Learning from the University of Fort Hare programme (Saide 2001), the contact sessions were intended to orientate, maintain and conclude students' study of each module, with the tutors playing a facilitating/motivating role rather than teaching the content of the modules. In addition, the tutors were to mark and give feedback on the two assignments per module which, taken together, counted for 50% of the final mark for each module.

It was intended that tutors would complete marking between contact sessions and that in subsequent sessions there would be the opportunity for a frank discussion of the assessment feedback and the possibility to challenge the assessment given.

Towards the end of 2003, the 2318 students on the Unisa NPDE programme were invited to participate in an anonymous evaluation of the programme from various perspectives. Of the 707 (30,5%) who submitted an evaluation form, 661 students provided a ranked response to an enquiry about the extent to which the contact sessions had helped them to be successful on the programme. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest rating, the weighted average was 4,84, indicating a high rate of value attached to contact sessions. One student commented that “Most of us wouldn’t have made it without the tutors” and in an open response section at the end of the evaluation form, 58/707 (8,2%) of students indicated that they would have liked more contact sessions.

However, the provision and management of these contact sessions was not unproblematic and the following problems arose from time to time:

- Data on where centres would be needed was often not available before such centres needed to be identified and booked. It has proved necessary to start the programme with centres in projected key regions (using not only Unisa learning centres but also booking rooms in Technical/FETI colleges, teacher centres, schools and sometimes even church halls) and to then expand the number of centres as viable new groupings become clear.
- With at one time more than twenty-five centres operating in 5 different provinces, it was not possible to visit all the centres for quality assurance purposes. In the second year of the programme, some tutors were asked to assume an additional coordinating role as centre managers in larger centres. This proved to be a useful approach in most cases (albeit at an added cost for the extra hours and responsibility) but a serious problem in one centre where the wrong person was chosen as centre manager and

managed to single-handedly confuse and alienate the students, the other tutors and the people whose centre was being used.

- Occasionally, tutors failed to turn up to a planned session but most of the time the fact that tutors were required to submit attendance registers with their claims ensured that it was rare that a tutor was absent unexpectedly.
- Tutors were often good facilitators but not necessarily good assessors or administrators. Although tutors were required to submit mark-sheets by certain deadlines in order to claim for marking, and were also required to submit copies of marked assignments for moderation, many tutors failed to meet the agreed deadlines and as a result students did not always receive assessment feedback timeously. In addition, there have been a number of irregularities where students have apparently marked their own assignments or pressured tutors to accept and mark assignments long after the deadline had elapsed. For 2004, the roles of tutor and assessor should be delinked and students should be required to post all assignments to Unisa for centralised marking.
- In addition to weaknesses in the administration of the assignments, a review of marked assignments (Saide 2002) indicated that tutors had not been able to make full use of assignment feedback as a supportive learning strategy.

Clearly, some if not all of the problems outlined above could be addressed by more intensive tutor training. In general, Unisa tutors receive 2.5 days of training a year. In 2002, the programme manager met with tutors at the beginning of the year to orientate them to the programme, to their roles as tutors and to the first year modules; and then again in the middle of the year to reflect on observations of contact sessions, examples of marked assignments and challenges that had arisen; and then again towards the end of the year to prepare tutors for the guided marking of exam scripts. With some 60 tutors all offering the same module, it proved quite cost-effective for the programme manager to conduct such sessions in three main locations, viz. Pretoria, Nelspruit and Durban. In the second year, the number of different modules on the programme had grown to 39 and the number of tutors to 90, and it was

necessary to add in additional training for portfolio development for integrated assessment and RPL.

With so many different requirements, it was necessary to establish a programme team and either bring all the tutors to a central location or for the team to travel to regional centres. Either approach would have been quite costly, and in the event the latter was chosen. In order to contain costs, it was not possible to do this twice in the year and a 2-day workshop was offered prior to the start of the programme and a half-day workshop for Gauteng-based tutors involved in exam marking was held in October/November 2003. Whilst it is clear that tutors required more training and support, it should be noted that Unisa had been requested to offer an NPDE programme that was as affordable as possible, and accordingly did so at a student fee that was less than half that of most other providers. Thus the Unisa NPDE has been offered under severely constrained budget limitations.

In its original proposal, Unisa indicated that whilst classroom- and school-based support was desirable, it would not be affordable at Unisa's standard fees as charged for the NPDE and that therefore additional funding would be required for classroom- and school-based support. However, no additional funding was made available. Offering a decentralised model of provision, meant that Unisa needed to make use of tutors for this purpose. Given that on average a suitably qualified tutor costs R2000 a day for time and transport, the extent to which any form of school visit could be accommodated was severely constrained. However, in order to provide some feedback on the impact of the programme it was planned that each tutor would visit one volunteer from their tutorial group on three occasions during the course of the year to observe, discuss and evaluate the cumulative impact of the programme on classroom practice. In the event, most tutors were unable to organise this since they were also teaching at the same time and of those who were able to make such arrangements, few were able to produce reports of any significant value. In 2004, it is suggested that academic coordinators should conduct these longitudinal studies on 10 students. Attempts to involve district officials in a school-based assessment and/or mentorship role for the NPDE, have so far proved unsuccessful.

Crucial to students' successful completion of the programme is that they receive study materials that are appropriate and accessible. The NPDE was launched in the same period that Unisa had to incorporate Sacte and Sacol, and accreditation for Unisa's NPDE proposal was received in September 2001 for a programme start in 2002. Thus, in servicing the proposed curriculum in 2002 and 2003, Unisa chose to make use of the best available Unisa, Sacte and Sacol materials or materials published elsewhere and to develop in 2002 for 2003 only those materials for which no suitable source material could be found. During 2003, complementing the national NPDE evaluation process, Unisa embarked on its own internal review of the NPDE study materials. As a result of this process, three of the five first year modules have been replaced for 2004, about 50% of specialist modules have been substantially revised and eight new modules have been developed so that the Unisa NPDE now caters for all three primary school phases and all eight learning areas in the senior phase. In the student evaluation cited earlier, 15,8% (112/707) of students said that they had found **all** of their NPDE modules helpful in improving their practice and an astonishing 42,4% (300/707) indicated that **none** of their modules could be classified as "least" helpful. As one student commented, "All the modules were useful and brought a great change in my career. The modules are not separable because all of them they built a teacher in totality (in all aspects of teaching)."

At Unisa, examinations are managed separately by specialised staff in the Examinations Department. For the Unisa NPDE programme, examinations are open-book since this seems a more appropriate way to examine applied competence and the examinations count for 50% of the final module mark with the other 50% coming from assignments (thus reinforcing the programme's message of finding a balance between formative, continuous assessment and summative assessment for reporting purposes). There were a few problems in 2002, when some invigilators were not aware of the open book nature of the NPDE examinations, when NPDE students found that a 2-hour exam did not give them sufficient time (subsequently it was changed to 3-hours) and when some very mature NPDE students felt offended when asked to be quiet in

and when leaving the exam room.

However, since the January 2003 supplementaries there have been no further problems in this regard. Students have to get a final mark of at least 45% to qualify for a supplementary exam and most final results that are not good are due either to the fact that students performed poorly in both assignments and examinations or that not all assignments were submitted. The Unisa NPDE team have an open-door policy with regard to querying of final marks. Any assignment can be submitted for remarking and any examination paper can be re-marked for a fee.

The expectations of the planning phase that teacher-learners would be largely under-prepared for independent study at tertiary level has, in general, been confirmed. In 2004, tutors will need to be able to make more use of the guidelines provided in the NPD001-4 module in helping teacher-learners to engage meaningfully with their study material and will need to provide much more guidance and support to teachers in managing their study time. The general tutorial letters for the NPDE programme will be integral to their process. At the same time, however, it will be necessary to guard against spoon-feeding of content since one of the purposes of the NPDE is to provide teacher-learners with an alternative path-way for studies at a higher level. Whilst continuing to provide motivational support and offering more systematic academic study skills development, the programme needs to retain an explicit agenda of fostering independent studying by empowering individual teacher-learners and their peer study groups to engage “reflexively” with the materials provided.

2. Support related to access and information processes/needs

In general, Unisa’s systems are predicated on an individual adult learner, who registers and pays for him/her self and who is highly self-motivated. Generally, students are required to pay half their study fee on enrolment and the balance in August, and students in arrears may be barred from their final examinations and/or may have their results blocked. In most Unisa programmes, submission of a number of assignments is a pre-requisite for exam entry and the final mark for a module is the exam mark.

Although, an increasing number of Unisa programmes offer some form of contact support and Unisa does have a Department of Student Support which offers general guidance and counselling services and can organise contact classes where significant numbers of students request them and are willing to pay an additional fee, the NPDE, with the help of the Departments of computer services, student affairs, assignments and examinations needed to establish new systems and procedures for dealing with extensive decentralised support and assessment and for reporting on groups of students.

For 2002 and 2003, students were registered under three different account codes for Gauteng and Mpumalanga bursary holders and self-financed students and reports were generated on a quarterly basis which summarised information on individual assignment submission and performance in examinations.

The vast majority of students were able to progress through the programme with few problems, but there were some anomalies, such as:

- Students whose results were withheld because their application process was non-standard or their registration forms were incomplete so that they were not allocated to the bursary cohort and their accounts appeared to be in arrears;
- Bursary students who registered for the second year programme before getting their supplementary results and whose accounts were accordingly reported as in arrears and whose results were withheld even after they had paid their supplementary exam fees;
- Students who did not understand that their bursary did not cover repetitions of any kind and accordingly left it till very late to pay the outstanding supplementary exam fee and so access their results.
- Students who assumed that payment of the supplementary exam fee meant that if they were not successful that they would automatically be registered to repeat the module(s).

To accommodate these kinds of problems, the registration deadline for the NPDE was officially extended until the end of March 2003 (the registration period at Unisa usually closes at the end of the first week of February) and students who worked through the NPDE office directly were able to be helped back into the programme until the end of May. After the end of May 2003 it was no longer possible to accommodate late registrations because the student system needed to be closed for auditing purposes.

In their study packages, Unisa students receive a booklet entitled “Policies and Procedures” which outlines what to do and whom to contact with respect to issues such as changing an exam centre. In addition, the general NPDE letters contain contact details for all NPDE staff (including cell phone numbers in most cases) as well as for the support services departments of registration, assignments and examinations. Unfortunately, it has been the Unisa NPDE experience that many students do not consult these resources and become frustrated telephoning Unisa generally for queries that could be better handled by contacting the relevant department or authority. Although the first contact session each year includes a session which focuses on these issues, some 30% of registered students each year choose not to attend the contact sessions.

In recognition of the fact that most NPDE students will be teachers working in rural areas with limited access to information resources, Unisa has tried to make its NPDE programme as self-contained as possible. All resources required for assessment are supplied as part of the study package and no NPDE students are required to purchase additional study material. However, like all other Unisa students, NPDE students have complete access to the Unisa library and services.

In the general tutorial letters, NPDE students are provided with a timetable of contact sessions for the year, whilst the module specific tutorial letters contain assignment deadlines. Each student also receives an individualised examination timetable.

All Unisa registration points provide information on fees and Edu-Loan financial support services.

Students who visit the main campus or one of the main satellite campuses have access to information technologies (in Pretoria there are regular free training sessions for registered students on how to use these facilities).

In the NPDE programme, career planning is built into the compulsory first year module NPD052-G which deals, among other things, with the new qualifications framework for educators and guides teacher-learners through the Developmental Appraisal process.

3. Support related to social and personal needs:

In general, Unisa relies on its calendars which are updated annually, to convey information about its programmes. In addition, there are staff at all the Unisa regional offices and learning centres who have been trained to offer general guidance on Unisa programmes, there is a call centre for general enquiries and contact numbers and email addresses for the NPDE staff are freely available. Within the NPDE offices, there is always at least one person available for students who turn up to make enquiries without an appointment. If the junior programme administrator is unable to assist them, he can facilitate making an appointment to speak to the Programme Administrator or Coordinator or one of the Academic Coordinators.

Unfortunately, students very often refuse to speak to any one other than the person whose name they know.

Once students are registered on the NPDE programme they have the option, as noted above, of attending contact sessions and receiving the guidance of a tutor. Students also receive the contact details of all the academic coordinators with whom they can discuss issues that they were not able to address locally with their tutor. Since most staff have also provided their personal cell-phone numbers, there should be no problem with contacting NPDE staff and, if necessary setting up an appointment for an individual consultation. NPDE staff also respond to

individual letters and enquiries that have been posted, faxed or emailed.

A review of the contact details of Unisa NPDE students reveals that only 2-3 students a year have an email address and, possibly, easy access to the internet.

Nonetheless, for 2004 all tutorial letters have been PDFed and are available on-line as is some additional support material for the Intermediate Phase module *NPD012-8 Numeracy I*. Because the Unisa NPDE programme uses a wide variety of venues for contact sessions, the programme has been designed primarily as a print-based learning experience. However, for 2004, the first year study package will involve a video. The video will not be supplied to all students but rather to their tutors. The tutors will be responsible for either making arrangements for the video to be shown during a contact session or to manage a process of circulating the video among the study groups at the centre.

One of the purposes of contact sessions is to help students to form peer support or study groups. The programme has found that these groups rarely continue outside the contact sessions, but there are some exceptions, and the main reasons seem to be conflict in time commitments and transport problems. This could be addressed if teachers could be encouraged to register in groups from the same school. In the student evaluation cited earlier, several students said that they valued the engagement with their peers, as one student noted:

“I liked and enjoyed the contact session period, whereby our self-esteem were enhanced when we were together sharing ideas in different groups as old didactic educators.”

Unisa has a special unit devoted to promoting ease of access to students who need to overcome various barriers to learning. In 2003, for example, the NPDE had one student on the programme who was blind and was teaching both blind and partially-sighted learners in the Foundation Phase. For such a learner it is intended that study materials should be supplied either on audio-cassette or typed into Braille. Although this process was started, the student concerned did not receive her converted study materials timeously and indeed, with the help of her colleagues, did much of the work of the conversion herself.

Despite the challenges she nevertheless managed to complete 9 of the 10 first year assignments, to submit both integrated assessment and RPL portfolios and to pass three of the five first year modules. In recognition of the particular challenges faced by this student, she was invited to Pretoria for a week and offered the opportunity of an oral examination for the two modules she had not been able to complete successfully on her first attempt due to inadequacies in the materials supplied. Similar alternative assessment arrangements were made for other students who had a good case to make for not having been able to meet the normal requirements of the programme. The Unisa NPDE has demonstrated that even in a large scale distance programme, it is still possible to cater for individual needs when the programme is offered by people who share a common commitment and in which learners and staff are willing to meet each other half-way. As noted previously, however, a minority of students will attempt to exploit what they see as loopholes in a very flexible programme and so each case needs to be carefully scrutinised before any departures from the norm are sanctioned and create a precedent for subsequent engagements.

In general, the NPDE has been designed with the understanding that the target audience are mature people, with many years of practical classroom experience but probably limited academic study skills, that most will be studying in a language that is not their first language and that they represent a diverse range of cultures and contexts. In seeking to address these issues, the Unisa NPDE curriculum has an overt academic language skills development programme incorporated into the main stream course; in selecting tutors preference is given to mature people who are able to code-switch when it is useful to do so; contact sessions emphasise the use of small group discussion (which can be conducted in students' mother-tongue/home language); case studies and scenarios included in the materials try to be broadly representative and assessment emphasises reflection on the teacher-learners' own classroom and context.

Running parallel to the standard process of assignments and examinations, Unisa NPDE teacher-learners are also engaged in the development of professional portfolios for integrated assessment and RPL purposes (and to anticipate the DAS and SACE processes). The focus

of these portfolios is lessons that are planned, taught and reflected upon and which are subjected to self-, peer- and tutor assessment. For some students, the development of a professional portfolio was a particularly enriching experience, both personally and professionally, with one student commenting in her evaluation report:

“Apart from the structure of Assignments which were so challenging and interesting, compiling the integrated assessment portfolio was very interesting to me. At first I thought it would be simple to do it, but I found it very challenging and it was really an eye-opener. It was as if I was a new teacher entering the profession. I would look at the learners portfolios and selecting their best work was always fascinating. It inspired them and they would all try their best to write neatly and correctly.”

Conclusion to case study

In the Unisa NPDE programme, teacher-learners are required to pass three or more of the five first year modules before entering the second year of the programme. This is to ensure that they meet the University's general requirements for a minimum number of credits passed in a particular period, to ensure that there is sufficient general groundwork done on which to build the second year specialist programme and to ensure that they do not carry so many modules that they become overburdened with academic commitments during their second year, which has the added workload of finalising one or more portfolios. Some 67% of the 2252 NPDE teacher-learners who registered for their first year in 2002 successfully met the requirements for entry into the second year programme in 2003. While the final marks of all students have not yet been compiled for 2003 because some wrote supplementary examinations, it is expected that some 75% or more will also be successful in their second year of study. These are throughput figures which would be considered good even on a full-time, contact-based programme and which are quite exceptional internationally for a distance programme.

There are many factors which have contributed to the actual and anticipated high throughput rate but the way in which learner support has been designed into the curriculum from its inception is arguably the most significant contributing factor.

From the experience of the first two years of the Unisa NPDE, it is clear that in 2004 more attention will need to be given to the selection, training and monitoring of tutors; the development of teacher-learners' academic study skills and time management; the selection and management of centres; the quality of feedback on assessment and on strengthening the partnership with the Department of Education so that there is increasing synergy between what the Department expects and what the programme delivers and so that learner support functions can be optimised.

The last word is left for one of the 707 2003 NPDE students who submitted an anonymous evaluation form:

“What I learned is correlated with what I am teaching. I’ve changed totally and I feel great.”

It would thus seem that there is a high correlation between the Unisa NPDE curriculum as plan and the curriculum as practice and between the Unisa NPDE curriculum and the overall purposes of the NPDE as a national qualification.

3.2 Materials review

One of the key characteristics of distance education is the development and supply of study materials.

Whilst increasing use is being made of audio-visual and information and communication technologies, the dominant medium for distance education materials remains print.

Rowntree (1992:134-5) identifies the following common forms which printed distance education study material can take:

Reflective action A term coined by Derek Rowntree to describe an approach to
guide materials design in which most of the learning takes place in activities

outside of the self-instructional package and for which the outcomes cannot necessarily be pre-determined.

Tutorial-in-print

A term coined by Derek Rowntree to describe an approach to the design of self-instructional material which emphasises the course as a printed expression of what would happen in an ideal contact tutorial with the learner.

The following table, adapted from a 1993 workshop run for Saide by Fred Lockwood of the Open University UK, summarises some of the main differences between traditional textbooks and self-instructional study materials. It is interesting to note that as resource-based learning gains ground, so more and more textbooks reflect self-instructional principles.

Table 7: Comparison between textbooks and self-instructional courses

| Some differences between textbooks and self-instructional materials | |
|--|--|
| Textbooks | Self-instructional courses |
| Assume interest | Arouse interest |
| Written for teacher use | Written for learner use |
| No indication of study time | Give estimates of study time |
| Designed for a wide market | Designed for a particular audience |
| Rarely state aims and objectives | Always give aims and objectives |
| Usually one route through | May be many routes through |
| Structured for specialists | Structured according to needs of learner |
| Little or no self-assessment | Major emphasis on self-assessment |
| Seldom anticipate difficulties | Alert to potential difficulties |
| Occasionally offer summaries | Always offer summaries |
| Impersonal style | Personal style |
| Dense layout | More open layout |
| Readers views seldom sought | Learner evaluation always conducted |
| No study skills advice | Provide study skills advice |
| Can be read passively | Require active response |

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Aim at scholarly presentation | Aim at successful learning |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|

In order to fulfill the teacher's role in the text, it is important that the writer of a distance education course establishes an ongoing and personal dialogue with the learner. In the classroom, the teacher talks to the learners: she will explain the goals of a particular lesson, introduce topics, ask questions and answer them, guide learners through difficult topics and ideas, give feedback, and motivate and encourage her learners. Distance education learners are as much in need of this ongoing dialogue as the learners sitting in the classroom.

In the table below are some examples of attempts to establish and maintain this sort of dialogue in printed self-instructional material (adapted from Lewis 1981). The setting of objectives or outcomes and the inclusion of summaries are an important part of this ongoing dialogue.

Table 8: Comparison between classroom talk and DE dialogue

| Function | Classroom talk | DE dialogue |
|--|--|---|
| Indicating what the learner should be able to do <i>before</i> tackling a particular project | 'Go on to Chapter 6 of the book, but only if you've finished the work I set last week...' | Before starting this unit, you need to be able to ... Complete the following activity which revises the work you need to know before ... |
| Stating what should be learned from a particular section | 'This section deals with vertebrates. When you've finished it you should be able to list four main characteristics...' | By the end of this unit, you should be able to: discuss the use of dialogue in self-instructional course materials ... |
| Practising so that the learners can see whether or not they have successfully reached the objectives | 'OK. Now answer the questions on the sheet I've given you...' | This activity should help you to ... Answer each of the questions in the spaces provided ... Suggested answers can be found on page |
| Feedback on the learner's performance | 'I'll hand back the essays you did last week ...' | In answering the question you may have thought of the following points ... This assignment was well done and I like ... but you could have.... |
| Motivation and stimulation | 'It's tough going but it's worth struggling over, and it gets easier later on ...' | If you disagree strongly with the commentaries, you can contact your tutor on ... Do not worry if you still feel a bit uncomfortable with this idea, we will be exploring it again from a different point of view in Unit 5 ... |

| Function | Classroom talk | DE dialogue |
|--|---|---|
| Unpacking the often difficult language of the textbook so that it makes sense to the student | 'What it means is this ...' | We must write in such a way that the material always makes sense to the learner ... Another way of thinking of this could be to ... |
| Relating concepts to the learner's experience... | 'You know when you cut your finger ...' | In the space below, describe a lesson you taught recently which went particularly well. What preparations on your part do you think contributed to the success of the lesson? |

Over the course of several years of research into distance education and interaction with distance education providers, the South African Institute for Distance Education (Saide) has developed suggested criteria for the development of quality distance education study material. These guidelines were updated by the author of this dissertation in 2000 and used as the basis for Quality Courseware Awards processes for the National Association of Distance Education Organisations of South Africa (Nadeosa) in 2000 and 2002. It is these criteria which will be used as the basis for the review of Unisa NPDE materials.

The key review categories are as follows:

- Orientation to programme, introductions, aims & learning outcomes
- Selection and coherence of content
- Presentation of content
- View of knowledge and use of learners' experience
- Activities, feedback and assessment
- Language
- Layout and accessibility.

As noted previously, the full Unisa NPDE curriculum comprises some 79 modules. Since it was not possible to include a review of each module in this report, it was necessary to select a sample of the study materials for comment.

The tables on the next three pages outline the Unisa NPDE programme for the year 2003. The modules marked ✓ were reviewed by the author of this dissertation and inform the comments that follow. Twenty-five modules were reviewed and eight new modules were co-developed (for Economic and Management Sciences, EMS, and Arts and Culture, A&C) as part of the review process.

Table 9: Curriculum for Foundation Phase educators

| Compulsory modules | Modules for which RPL can be given | Evidence required |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Year one NPD001 - 4 Language and Learning Skills ✓ NPD043 - F The Teacher in the Classroom ✓ NPD047 - K Continuous Assessment ✓ NPD048 - L Understanding OBE ✓ NPD052 - G School and profession ✓</p> <p>Year two NPD004 - 8 Numeracy 1 NPD006 - A Introduction to the LLC learning area NPD007 - B Teaching and learning LLC in the Foundation Phase NPD009 - D Life Skills 1 NPD011 - 6 Reception Year</p> | <p>Fundamental learning NPD002 - 5 Thinking skills and numeracy NPD003 - 6 Additional language (second language)</p> <p>Elective/specialist learning NPD005 - 9 Numeracy 2 NPD008 - C Language and Literature: children's literature NPD010 - 5 Life Skills 2 NPD044 - G Teaching and learning in the Foundation/Intermediate Phase</p> <p>Core learning NPD046 - J Classroom Management ✓ NPD049 - M English communication for education ✓ NPD050 - E Specialised Education ✓ NPD051 - F Educational media ✓</p> | <p>Competence test against component 1 outcomes</p> <p>Portfolio evidence meeting requirements of component 2 outcomes</p> <p>Portfolio evidence plus direct classroom observation meeting requirements of component 3 outcomes</p> |

Table 10: Curriculum for Intermediate Phase educators

| <i>Compulsory modules</i> | <i>Modules for which RPL can be given</i> | <i>Evidence required</i> |
|---|---|--|
| Year one NPD001 - 4 Language and Learning Skills NPD043 - F The Teacher in the Classroom NPD047 - K Continuous Assessment NPD048 - L Understanding OBE NPD052 - G School and profession | Fundamental learning NPD002 - 5 Thinking skills and numeracy NPD003 - 6 Additional language (second language) Elective/specialist learning NPD008 - C Language and Literature: children's literature NPD013 - 9 Numeracy 2 NPD016 - C Life Skills 2 NPD044 - G Teaching and learning in the Foundation/Intermediate Phase Core learning NPD046 - J Classroom Management NPD049 - M English communication for education NPD050 - E Specialised Education NPD051 - F Educational media | Competence test against component 1 outcomes Portfolio evidence meeting requirements of component 2 outcomes Portfolio evidence plus direct classroom observation meeting requirements of component 3 outcomes |
| <i>Compulsory modules</i> | <i>Modules for which RPL can be given</i> | <i>Evidence required</i> |
| IP Year two NPD006 - A Introduction to the LLC learning area NPD012 - 8 Numeracy 1 ✓ NPD014 - A Principles of learning and language teaching ✓ NPD015 - B Life Skills 1 NPD017 - D Human and Social Sciences in the Classroom ✓ OR NPD018 - E Natural Sciences in the Classroom ✓ | | |

Table 11: Curriculum for Senior Phase educators

| Compulsory modules | Modules for which RPL can be given | Evidence required |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Year one NPD001 - 4 Language and Learning Skills NPD043 - F The Teacher in the Classroom NPD047 - K Continuous Assessment NPD048 - L Understanding OBE NPD052 - G School and profession</p> <p>Year two Any 5 of 8 specialist modules in 21 combinations of Mathematics ✓, Natural Sciences ✓ or Technology ✓ with the learning areas of Languages, Life Orientation ✓ and Social Sciences ✓.</p> | <p>Fundamental learning NPD002 - 5 Thinking skills and numeracy NPD003 - 6 Additional language (second language)</p> <p>Elective/specialist learning Any 3 of 8 specialist modules</p> <p>Core learning NPD046 - J Classroom Management NPD049 - M English communication for education NPD050 - E Specialised Education NPD051 - F Educational media NPD045 - H Teaching and learning in the Senior Phase</p> | <p>Competence test against component 1 outcomes</p> <p>Competence test plus portfolio evidence meeting requirements of component 2 outcomes</p> <p>Portfolio evidence plus direct classroom observation meeting requirements of component 3 outcomes</p> |

It will be noted from the above tables that a distinction is made between compulsory and RPL-able modules and that all students take the same five modules in their first year on the NPDE programme. What the tables do not indicate is that from 2004, the programme will be extended to also include the learning areas of Economic and Management Sciences and Arts and Culture.

The review considered the following materials:

- General tutorial letters dealing with the programme as a whole (Tutorial Letters 301, 302, 303, 304 etc.)
- Module specific tutorial letters (Tutorial Letters 101, 102 etc.)
- Assignment tasks, marked assignments and feedback thereon
- Examination papers
- Study material supplied to students.

3.2.1 Orientation to programme, introductions, aims & learning outcomes

This category for review is about the way that clear and relevant information can motivate and direct learners effectively in their study. Learners need to understand from the outset the requirements of the various components of the course. As learners, they need to be motivated by relevant introductions and overviews within each individual module/unit. 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 course.

Detailed criteria

1.0 Introductions to programmes/modules/units/sections

- 1.1 Explain the importance of the topic for the learner and create interest in the material
- 1.2 Provide an overview of what is to come
- 1.3 Forge links with what the learners already know and what they are expected to learn

- 1.4 Point out links with other lessons/sections
 - 1.5 Provide some indication of intended learning outcomes in ways that are directly relevant and useful to the learners
 - 1.6 Give indications of how long the learner should spend on the material in the lesson so that the learners can pace themselves.
- 2.0 Learning outcomes
- 2.1 Are stated clearly and unambiguously
 - 2.2 Describe what the learners need to demonstrate in order to show their competence
 - 2.3 Are consistent with the aims of the course and programme
 - 2.4 The content and teaching approach support learners in achieving the learning outcomes.

Orientation to the NPDE programme begins with the relevant calendars which, as noted in 3.1.15 above, were not particularly useful for 2003 and were revised for 2004. Once students have registered they receive a series of general tutorial letters. In 2003 there were six general tutorial letters dealing with issues such as a programme overview, a detailed guide to the assessment strategy, details about content sessions, general study skills and orientation to exams and subsequent years of study. Tutorial letter 301 is useful in outlining the overall structure of the programme and the expected learning outcomes of the qualification as registered on the NQF but this is not carried through into the module specific tutorial letter 101s. In general the links between the overall programme, the specific modules and the specific assessment tasks require strengthening so that teacher-learners are better able to see the programme as a whole rather than as isolated parts. Most of the study guides contain advance organisers of some kind but these are not always expressed as intended learning outcomes. In some cases (e.g. NPD043-F, NPD017-D, NPD018-E) the terminology is dated and could cause confusion.

3.2.2 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 learners should also be able to see how the content is related to the learning outcomes and goals of the course. Coherence is also important. If the components of a course are contradictory or unrelated to each other, the impact of the course will be considerably lessened.

3.0 Selection of content

- 3.1 Content is contemporary and reflects current thinking and recent references
- 3.2 Content is appropriate both to the intended outcomes of the programme as well as recognising prior learning
- 3.3 Content builds on learners' experience where possible
- 3.4 There is appropriate variety in the selection of content.

Among the first year modules the material for NPD001-4, NPD047-K, NPD048-L and NPD052-G is contemporary and reflects current practice. The material for NPD043-F predates the introduction of Curriculum 2005 and whilst useful is potentially confusing, especially in the area of learning programme design. Much of the material used in the programme, both in-text and in assessment (see Section 3.3) provides opportunities for reflection on own practice and experience. However, the content of NPD012-8 does not seem appropriate for Intermediate Phase learners in not being sufficiently challenging; the content of NPD031-B seems to assume too much prior knowledge to be flagged as a recommended general module for a minor study option in the senior phase; the content of NPD036-G is dated and didactic in presentation and the content of NPD039K and NPD040-C focuses too narrowly on the history of KwaZulu-Natal.

3.2.3 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 learners to process new concepts, rather than merely learn them off by heart.

4.0 Presentation of content

4.1 Concepts are developed logically

4.2 Concepts are explained clearly using sufficient and relevant examples

4.3 New concepts are introduced by linking to learners' existing knowledge

4.4 Ideas are presented in manageable chunks

4.5 A variety of methods are used to present the content and succeed in keeping the learners' interest alive

4.6 Theories are not presented as absolute – debate is encouraged

4.7 The course materials model the processes and skills that the learners are required to master – i.e. they practise what they preach.

There is a wide variety of styles of presentation in the materials that were reviewed. In general in most modules the material is presented coherently and in logically sequenced chunks. However, there is no consistent in-house style and some materials lean towards being overly didactic and closed (e.g. NPD036-G and much of the Senior Phase Mathematics material) whilst others have the form of an ongoing open-ended conversation which requires fairly sophisticated reading skills which one would perhaps not expect of learners at NQF Level 4/5 where the NPDE is pegged (e.g. NPD048-L). Some materials begin with an inductive learning approach but then seem to find themselves changing style half-way through and becoming much more didactic (e.g. NPD043-F).

3.2.4 View of knowledge and use of learners' 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 we would wish to promote is that knowledge should be presented as open and constructed in contexts, rather than merely received in a fixed form from authorities. Learners should be given opportunities to interrogate what they learn, 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 workplace, where relevant, should be provided, but this should be done in a reflective rather than mechanical way.

5.0 View of knowledge and RPL

- 5.1 Learners' own experiences and understanding are seen as valid departure points for discussion
- 5.2 Knowledge is presented as changing and debatable rather than as fixed and not to be questioned
- 5.3 Learners are encouraged to weigh ideas against their own knowledge and experience and to question ideas/concepts that do not seem to be adequately substantiated
- 5.4 Learners are helped to contextualise new knowledge appropriately and a concerted effort is made to empower learners to use theory to inform practice.

Not all of the printed study material seemed to acknowledge that teacher-learners come to the programme with twenty to thirty years of life and teaching experience (e.g. Senior Phase Life Orientation; NPD047-K); others seems to expect overly much from students at this level (e.g. NPD043-F; NPD031-B, NPD032-C; NPD048-L).

However, nearly all of the assessment tasks reviewed in the form of assignments and examinations acknowledged teacher-learners' experience and offered opportunities to reflect on that experience in light of the study material.

3.2.5 Activities, feedback and assessment

A major strategy for effective teaching in course materials is the provision of a range of activities and strategies to encourage learners to engage with the content.

If the course designer provides feedback or commentary on these activities, then learners will experience a form of the discussion that takes place in lively classrooms.

Furthermore, because learners work through the materials largely on their own, they need some means of assessing their own progress. Comments on the activities in the materials can help to do this. The assessment criteria for the programme as a whole should be made clear to learners and should be appropriate to the intended learning outcomes.

6.0 Activities

- 6.1 The activities are clearly signposted and learners know where each begins and ends
- 6.2 Clear instructions help the learners to know exactly what they are expected to do.
- 6.3 The activities are related to the learning outcomes.
- 6.4 Activities reflect effective learning processes
- 6.5 Activities are sufficient to give learners enough practice
- 6.6 Activities are distributed at fairly frequent intervals throughout a section
- 6.7 Activities show a range of difficulty
- 6.8 Activities are sufficiently varied in terms of task and purpose

- 6.9 Activities are life/work related
- 6.10 Activities are realistic in terms of time indications and resources available to learners.
- 7.0 Feedback to learners
 - 7.1 Feedback to learners is clearly indicated
 - 7.2 Feedback is offered in the form of suggestions and is only prescriptive where necessary
 - 7.3 The learners are able to identify the errors they have made, and they are able to assess their progress from their responses
 - 7.4 Where calculations are required, the stages in the working are displayed and explained.
- 8.0 Assessment
 - 8.1 There is an assessment strategy for the course as a whole
 - 8.2 The assessment tasks are directly related to the learning outcomes
 - 8.3 Formative and summative assessment strategies are employed
 - 8.4 Assessment criteria are made known to learners and feedback is provided on interim assessments which helps learners to improve
 - 8.5 Mechanisms exist for learners to respond to feedback on assessment and these are clearly explained in the courseware.

All of the materials reviewed contain activities for learners to do in-text as they engage with the study materials. Some of the activities are presented as add-ons rather than helping learners to

engage with the content in a formative way (e.g. NPD047-K) whilst for other materials the number of activities and the way in which they have been made essential to a proper understanding of the text, raise concerns about the workload in relation to a module weighting of 12 credits (= 120 NLH) (e.g. NPD001-4; NPD043-F; NPD048-L; NPD052-G).

As noted in 3.1.15 above, useful formative feedback to learners is limited and the programme has not yet managed to fully exploit assignment feedback as a key learning and teaching tool.

The general assessment strategy is outlined in tutorial 303 for 2003 and discussed in some detail in Section 3.3 of this evaluation. In general, although the assessment tasks set seemed appropriate in level, some of the exam papers perhaps focussed too much on higher level skills (e.g. NPD047-K; NPD048-L) whilst others contained a preponderance of lower level skills (e.g. NPD043-F and Foundation Phase exam papers).

3.2.6 Language

Aside from the obvious importance of clear, coherent language at an appropriate level for the learners, the kind of style that is used is crucial. The style can alienate or patronise 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.

9.0 Language level

- 9.1 New concepts and terms are explained simply and these explanations are indicated clearly in the text
- 9.2 The language used is friendly, informal and welcoming
- 9.3 Learners are not patronised or 'talked down to'
- 9.4 The discourse is appropriate to the learning intended
- 9.5 The language is sensitive as far as gender and culture are concerned

9.6 The language takes cognisance of the multilingual reality of South Africa

9.7 The language is active and sufficiently interactive.

In general, the language level of most of the materials seems appropriate to the level and target audience, especially given that all teacher-learners work through NPD001-4 to sharpen their academic study skills in English. A review of assignments and exam scripts, as well as engagement with teacher-learners who have not understood some tutorial letter material suggests that particular care needs to be taken in the wording of assessment tasks. It should be noted that the medium of instruction in the programme is English, so all materials are printed in English. Only NPD001-4 makes a token reference to the multi-lingual nature of South African society.

3.2.7 Layout and accessibility

Effective layout of printed materials maintains a creative tension between consistency and variety. It is important that learners are able to find their way through the various units and sections by the provision of contents pages, concept maps, headings, 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.

Where the course is presented through another medium, or where other media are used to support printed course materials, similar issues of accessibility need to be applied to the other media employed. The medium chosen, and the way it is used, should be appropriate for the intended learning outcomes and target audience.

10.0 Learning skills

10.1 Summaries and revision exercises are included at frequent intervals to assist the

- learners to learn
- 10.2 Skills for learning (such as reading, writing, analysing, planning, managing time, evaluation of own learning needs and progress) are appropriate to the outcomes of the course and integrated into the materials
-
- 11.0 Access devices (in texts; corresponding features will be looked for in other materials, e.g. videos)
 - 11.1 The numbering/headings system makes it easy for learners to find their way through the text
 - 11.2 The text is broken up into reasonable units
 - 11.3 Headings and sub-headings are used to draw attention to the key points of the lesson. This makes it easy for the learners to get an overview of the lesson at a glance. It also makes it easy to find parts the learners want to refer to.
 - 11.4 There is a contents page
 - 11.5 Pre-tests are used wherever feasible to help the learners know what skills or knowledge they need to have before starting the lesson/section
 - 11.6 Links with previous knowledge and experience, with other parts of the same lesson and with other lessons are indicated.

 - 12.0 Visual aids (pictures, photographs, diagrams and cartoons) (in texts)
 - 12.1 The visual aids used complement the written text
 - 12.2 Line pictures, cartoons are well-drawn and appropriate for target learners. They are gender and culture sensitive.
 - 12.3 Where appropriate, concept maps and diagrams are included to help the learners to get an overview of the material and to assist the learning process.
 - 12.4 Captions and explanations accompanying visual aids are adequate and give the learners a clear idea of what their purpose is.
 - 12.5 Instructions/explanations accompanying diagrams are clear and learners know what they are expected to do.

- 12.6 Visual aids are well placed in the text.
- 12.7 Visual aids are of suitable size.
- 12.8 Where printed materials are supported by other media, use of the other media is clearly indicated in the materials and appropriate for the intended learning outcomes.

Although there is no common in-house style, in general the study materials reviewed were engaging and provided a variety of ways to engage with the text, including graphics (a notable exception is the study guides accompanying NPD017-D). Study skills developed in NPD001-4 are not carried across to other modules. Of all the modules reviewed in 2003, all were print-based and none made use of any other kind of learning resource such as audio-cassettes, videos, laboratory equipment etc.

3.3 Assessment strategy

Both the Unisa NPDE programme outline (Unisa 2001) and the national NPDE programme outline (SGB05 2001) foreground the role of assessment in the implementation of the NPDE. This accords well with international recognition of the central role of assessment in curriculum design, as reflected in the following oft-quoted assertion from the influential distance education writer, Derek Rowntree:

If we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must look into its assessment procedures. What student qualities and achievements are actively valued and rewarded by the system? How are its purposes and intentions realised? To what extent are the hopes and ideals, aims and objectives professed by the system ever truly perceived, valued and striven for by those who make their way within it? The answers to such questions are to be found in what the system requires students to do in order to survive and prosper. The spirit and style of student assessment defines the de facto curriculum. (Rowntree 1977/87:1)

As Rowntree asserts, the nature of the assessment practice has profound implications for the

actual nature of the programme that is offered. The kinds of choices made in this regard are influenced by underpinning educational beliefs and values, often unarticulated, as well as the purposes the programme designers had in mind.

This section explores the way in which the implementation of the Unisa NPDE has forced the programme team to re-think the nature and role of assessment in a programme aimed at developing the professional competence of teachers at a distance.

This section explores the following issues:

- philosophical and epistemological underpinnings
- the impact of OBE on assessment practice
- Unisa’s understanding of the role of assessment in the NPDE
- examples of ways in which Unisa has sought to practise what it preaches with regard to assessment on the NPDE programme.

3.3.1 Philosophical and epistemological underpinnings

In order to be able to explain and justify the programme’s assessment practice, it is necessary to articulate the underpinning assumptions about education and learning. Lockett (1996) offers insight into the ways in which a particular philosophical perspective can influence choices about assessment strategies. Building on the work of Habermas, she identifies three dominant perspectives. The table below isolates from Lockett’s own those aspects of her thinking which seem germane to the current discussion:

Table 12: Perspectives on assessment choices

| | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| | Traditional (technical interest) | Hermeneutic (practical interest) | Critical (emancipatory interest) |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|

| | | | |
|------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Teacher-learner relationship | An authority figure who controls the learning process in a hierarchical relationship: status = power | A leader who progressively yields control of the learning process to learners within a mentoring relationship; status and power based on merit | A co-ordinator with emancipatory aims who emphasises commonality of concerns within an open and democratic relationship; deliberately aims at power-sharing and participatory control |
| Dominant theory | Behavioural | Constructivist | Social constructivist |
| Role of learners | A receiver of transmitted knowledge who can produce correct information within the framework of what is taught; often instrumentalist attitude to learning; tends to adopt a surface approach to learning | An active constructor of his/her knowledge who builds it via experiential and enquiry-based learning activities; tends to adopt a deep approach to learning | A co-learner who participates in socially significant collaborative projects with a view to furthering social justice and critiquing and reconstructing received knowledge |
| Assessment strategy favoured | Tests the 'what'; summative; exams to test acquisition of propositional knowledge and mastery of skills; feedback often limited | Tests the 'how'; summative and formative; varied procedures – open book, projects, orals, etc. to assess learner growth and effectiveness of teaching; emphasises feedback as part of the learning process; encourages a deep approach to learning | Negotiated assessment; peer assessment; goal-based assessment – i.e. learners' critical response and contribution to action |

The above table represents a useful and salutary framework of reference. In practice the three dominant positions are not mutually exclusive and any curriculum offering, both in planning and implementation, will draw on the different perspectives at different times, which is why broken rather than solid lines have been used in making the distinctions suggested by Lockett.

The value of the table lies in forcing the reader to think about what is believed about learning and

how this should manifest itself in practice, particularly with regard to assessment practice. A 'truth', if such exists, probably lies somewhere in an eclectic/pluralist consideration of the range of human thought and experience but a particular stance will likely dominate the thinking underpinning any particular programme.

After reflection on these issues, it is possible to conclude that the Unisa NPDE is probably positioned somewhere towards the right of centre of the table and this has influenced the decisions made about how to assess the Unisa NPDE programme. There are clearly times when it is necessary to lead the learning process in the NPDE, and to share a body of knowledge that appears to have stood the test of time; also in a programme directed towards improved classroom practice there are certain skills which can usefully be developed and where repetition of similar activities reinforced by feedback and reflection can guide teacher-learners through a Brunerian spiral of increasingly higher levels of competence.

However, learning is more likely to be effective and bring about change if the learner is him/herself involved in the construction thereof (as was discussed in Chapter 2).

In addition, the construction of knowledge can be facilitated through engagement with structured activities in printed text (and other media) but finds its culmination only in the direct exchange of ideas between people. Hence the fact that the NPDE is built around regular contact sessions, during which assessment practices and feedback, and their underpinning assumptions can be questioned – and sometimes changed.

In addition to the influence of the dominant educational philosophy, which will impact on all educational choices, decisions about assessment will be further influenced by the particular purposes identified at a particular time and in a particular context. Raggatt (1994) neatly summarises the possible nature and purposes of an assessment practice as follows:

[Assessment] may be formative, enabling a learner or you to check the response against criteria; it may be diagnostic, enabling at least an initial identification of strengths and potential areas of learning difficulty; it will be used to provide guidance and feedback; it may be summative, providing a grade which contributes to the final award; and it may be the source of necessary external discipline without which a learner would fall too far behind in his or her studies. Assessment can also motivate learners through the admission of personal experience as a relevant source of learning and of data for assignments and through the feedback from which you can help learners to develop self-esteem and confidence in their development. (Raggatt in Lockwood 1994:138).

Given the centrality of assessment practice in the NPDE, any evaluation of the programme will necessarily entail examining the design, implementation and impact of its assessment policy. The following general criteria against which to evaluate an assessment strategy, were suggested by participation in the year 2000 conference of the Association for the Study of Evaluation in Education in South Africa (ASEESA). At this conference, many speakers put forward the same kinds of criteria for quality assessment practice and these have influenced the decisions that have been made in the Unisa NPDE:

- **Outcomes-oriented:** assessment should measure the significant learning that learners should actually be able to demonstrate
- **Standards:** detailed descriptions of the quality of learning that is to be demonstrated should be made clear and shared between educators and learners. This will include descriptions of the content, context and competence that have to be considered when demonstration of an outcome is being judged.
- **Validity:** the assessment procedures should assess what they are designed to assess.
- **Reliability:** the assessment procedures should allow standards of achievement to be interpreted consistently from learner to learner and over time (even when the judgements are made by different assessors).
- **Fairness:** the assessment procedures should not disadvantage any particular learners. For example, they should not be influenced by any irrelevant factors such as the learner's cultural background.

- **Comprehensiveness:** assessment should cover the content, contexts and outcomes adequately.
- **Practicality:** assessment processes should be cost-effective, administratively efficient and allow for maximum ease of scoring where appropriate.
- **Interpretation:** the results of assessment should be meaningful for the intended audience.
- **Authenticity:** assessment should require demonstration of learning in congruent real-life contexts. (Mays 2000)

As Kenyon et al. (2000) note, teacher-educators need to ensure that they can practise what they preach with regard to their assessment practices, if they wish to bring about real change. In order to bring about such change, it will be necessary to help the teacher-learners on the programme reflect on their and Unisa's practices and underpinning assumptions. That is the programme needs to address educator's "sense of plausibility" (Prabhu 1990) if it wishes to influence change for the better. If the programme's own assessment practice contradicts the approaches it is asking educators to adopt in the classroom, then it should come as no surprise if the programme has little or no impact on classroom assessment practice.

The central focus of the NPDE on changing classroom practice in general would, in terms of the kinds of criteria outlined above, appear to militate against the exclusive use of traditional examinations as an assessment strategy. Kenyon's (et al., 2000) assertion also speaks to the need for a variety of assessment processes so that the way the NPDE is delivered models the kind of practice that should be seen in classrooms.

However, moving a whole or part of the assessment practice away from a controlled examination environment, inevitably raises questions about the reliability and authenticity of these alternative forms of assessment. On this issue, the following observations are useful:

To bring balance to this issue it is worth remembering that we are working largely with adult open and distance learners whose reasons and motivations for study are such that cheating is anathema to them. We need to examine our own thinking and values regarding students and cheating, and whether they continue to apply in ODL contexts. In the process of providing for authentication, are we limiting or undermining the learning experiences of the vast majority? What balances should be struck?

Benson (1996) offers some practical suggestions to minimise the problems of authentication:

- *Link assignments so that each one builds upon the former, preferably with some application to individual student circumstances.*
- *Individualise topics as far as possible with use of students' own workplaces, lives and values as the source of discussion.*
- *Use self-directed forms of learning such as learning contracts.*
- *Use work-based mentors, supervisors or assessors to report on*

- *work-based learning projects and performance-based assessments.*
 - *Use video- and audio-based presentations as an alternative to print.*
 - *Undertake oral assessments by use of the telephone.*
 - *Adapt or change assignment topics regularly (but without losing the alignment between objectives, content, teaching and learning activities).*
- ... If ... we come to know our students by assessments that engage us with their worlds, then authentication is far less likely to be a problem.”*
(Morgan & O’Reilly 1999:80)

Interestingly, having assessed several thousand assignments for NPDE candidates, Unisa tutors have encountered very few cases where teacher-learners have blatantly copied, or at least submitted the same assignment, despite the fact that there are multiple opportunities for this to happen. In discussions with teacher-learners on the programme, a deliberate attempt has been made to articulate the purpose of each assignment and module and to distinguish between exploring an assignment together (one of the key purposes of contact sessions) and submitting the same work, since there are currently no group projects in the Unisa NPDE programme. In the few instances where tutors have encountered this problem, they have reminded the teacher-learners of these discussions and have invited the teacher-learners concerned to resubmit their assignments; separately and differently. To date, therefore, the Unisa NPDE experience would appear to support the assertion made by Morgan & O’Reilly.

Coats (1998) sums up the current debate on assessment practice as follows: “The overall message would seem to be that assessment is now more about learning than testing; assessment for the benefit of the learner and their teacher rather than for accountability to some outside body or programme.”

3.3.2 The impact of OBE on assessment practice

The NPDE is registered on the NQF and is directed at classroom-based educators who are at the forefront of implementing new curriculum approaches.

The move towards outcomes-based education has therefore had a profound impact on the design of the NPDE programme and in particular its assessment practices.

Geysler (2000) outlines some of the ways in which the move to outcomes-based assessment practices has required changes. He presents his perceptions in the form of a dichotomy between 'conventional' and outcomes-based practices:

Table 13: Assessment paradigms

| Conventional assessment | OBET assessment |
|---|---|
| Single attribute assessment: isolated knowledge or discrete skills | Multi-dimensional assessments: knowledge, abilities, thinking processes, meta-cognition and affective factors |
| Behavioural approach to learning and assessment; accumulation of isolated facts and skills; assessment activity separate from learning; discrete, isolated knowledge and skills | Cognitive approach to learning and teaching; application and use of knowledge, assessment integrated with learning and training; integrated and cross-disciplinary assessment |
| Assessment focuses on retention of knowledge | Assessment is broad, covering a number of assessment criteria that include skills, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values and disposition |
| Assessment by teachers/trainers and external examiners who mark work and calculate the final result in numerical terms | Assessment includes assessment by the teacher, self-assessment, peer-assessment, resulting in a descriptive statement of what the learner has achieved |
| Major assessment is individual assessment: learners are assessed individually with much secrecy surrounding the test | Assessment criteria are discussed with the learners; group, peer- and self-assessment; co-operative learning and products; collaborative skills |
| A largely predefined curriculum structure with an assessment and accreditation system in place | Training programmes, instruction and assessment are viewed as flexible and alterable means for accomplishing clearly defined learning outcomes |
| Curriculum and assessment systems are treated as ends in themselves | Assessment based on clearly defined framework of performance outcomes |
| Comparative (norm-referenced); test/exam driven | Criterion-referenced assessment; continuous assessment |
| Assessment by a test or an example determines the amount that the learner remembers | Assessment/evaluation over time, includes practical demonstration of what learners know and can apply |
| Permanent records | Performance profiles |
| Single case assessments | Samples over time, e.g. portfolios |
| Marks as achievement | Performance as achievement |
| Time-based credits | Performance-based credits |
| Pen-and-paper testing; textbook based knowledge, academic exercise, and implicit criteria | Authentic testing: use of knowledge in real life; meaningful contexts, explicit criteria for assessment |
| Testing and grading every step of the way. All mistakes become part of a permanent record that accumulates and constantly reminds of past errors | Mistakes are treated as inevitable steps along the way when learners develop, internalize and demonstrate high-level competencies. |

(Mda & Mothata 2000:29-30)

Although it is possible to have reservations about the notion of a dichotomy, the thinking summarised in Table 13 provides a useful framework for the design of assessment practice on the NPDE programme.

Underpinning many of the ideas in the table is a sense of the need to guard against an atomistic approach to outcomes-based assessment and to ensure that there will be opportunities for integrated and holistic assessment in which groups of related, inter-dependent competences are considered simultaneously (Lubisi et al 1998a) .

3.3.3 The role of assessment in the Unisa NPDE

It is through the programme's approach to assessment that it will have the greatest chance of forging a change in teacher's practice.

The approach to assessment in the NPDE should model the practices the programme is seeking to have teacher-learners implement in their own classrooms: in other words the programme must seek to practise what it preaches.

The assessment strategy must be consistent with outcomes-based approaches and hence should be directed towards empowering the teacher-learners and affirming them through the provision of formative feedback (including the opportunity to re-submit on occasion).

Lubisi (1999:17) contends that assessment in education

entails making sense of a learner's knowledge, skills and values in a process of direct or indirect human interaction.

The Department of Education (1996) sees assessment as an integrated and essential part of any learning programme and that the assessment system will, of necessity, comprise three overlapping elements:

- formal summative assessment

- ongoing formal continuous assessment
- ongoing informal formative assessment.

Finally, the assessment approach must be rigorous enough to stand the test of external moderation so that successful graduates from the programme are assured that their qualification will be recognised and portable.

3.3.4 Examples of ways in which Unisa has sought to practise what it preaches with regard to assessment on the NPDE programme

Overall structure of the programme

Ongoing formal continuous assessment

Teacher-learners complete two assignments for each of the five modules taken in one year (i.e. 10 assignments during the year). These assignments count for 50% of the final mark for the module and therefore it is essential that teacher-learners complete them. Usually, they will hand in the assignments during contact sessions. If they cannot attend a contact session, they are expected to make arrangements to get the assignments to their tutor by the time of the contact session or failing that to post them to Unisa. Assignment deadlines are staggered so that feedback from one assignment can be used to improve performance on the next.

Formal summative assessment

At the end of the year, teacher-learners write an open-book exam for each module (i.e. five exams of 2-3 hours each). The exams count for 50% towards the final mark for each module. Teacher-learners are entered for the examination automatically. The examinations follow the model set by the assignments and serve an important purpose in assuring both teacher-learners and external moderators of the integrity of the programme.

By the end of the year, teacher-learners will therefore have accumulated marks for five modules. The minimum mark for a pass is 50%.

Integrated assessment

Teacher-learners complete their formal assessment by submitting a portfolio.

A portfolio is a selection of their own work, and some of the work completed by their learners, during the course of the year. Tutors have a key role to play in advising teacher-learners on how to compile their portfolios.

As noted below, assessment involves various participants and although assessment is eventually reduced to percentages for recording-keeping purposes, assessment is usually against descriptive criteria as illustrated below.

Ongoing informal formative assessment

A key purpose of regular contact sessions is to facilitate discussion around questions such as the following:

- What progress have we made since we last met?
- What have we learned in this process?
- To what extent does our own experience confirm or contradict the ideas we have discussed and read about?
- To what extent are contradictions generalisable?
- What problems, if any, are we having and how can we overcome them?

Central to these discussions is that teacher-learners receive ongoing feedback from their peers and their tutor and are guided towards reflecting on their own practices and beliefs.

3.3.5 Portfolio assessment

As noted above, all teacher-learners on the NPDE programme are required to compile a portfolio.

What is a portfolio?

A portfolio is a collection of work that is organised and presented as evidence of learning achievements over a period of time.

Why include a portfolio?

Assignments and examinations by their very nature cannot reveal everything that the teacher-learners know and can do. Although, as noted above, many of the assignments are classroom-focussed, each focuses on a particular issue connected with a particular module. In order to get a better picture of teacher-learners' overall achievements, it is necessary to offer additional opportunities for them to demonstrate what they can do.

In addition, the NPDE qualification, as recognised in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), requires the inclusion of some "integrated assessment". This is in recognition of the fact that there has often been a big difference between the work that teacher-learners submit for assignments and examinations and what actually happens in the classroom. In the classroom educators have to use their understanding of how learners learn, their classroom management skills, their assessment strategies etc. within the same lesson in an integrated way.

Provided it contains appropriate evidence, a portfolio should help to meet this requirement.

Overall, it is hoped that an appropriate portfolio will:

- encourage self-reflection and self-assessment
- encourage the application of applied competence (an issue explored in detail in the *School and Profession* module)
- offer an opportunity to demonstrate the depth and breadth of learning
- demonstrate growth in educators' competence over the duration of the programme
- and, with some additions, possibly provide evidence for additional RPL (TL303).

What should go into the portfolio?

The focus of the NPDE is improved classroom practice. Teacher-learners' portfolios should therefore primarily consist of evidence of what is actually happening in their classrooms.

The first item in the portfolio is some evidence of a lesson that the teacher-learners taught just before starting the NPDE programme.

They are asked to think back to what they were teaching earlier in the year. They are then asked to select a lesson that went well, and then include the following in their portfolio:

- their lesson plan/notes and a description of what actually happened (including where they departed from their plan and why)
- any materials that they prepared for the lesson
- examples of work that their learners did during this lesson
- details of their assessment strategy and examples of their marking and record-keeping; and finally but most importantly
- a written discussion of **why** they think this lesson went well, explanations for any departures from what they had planned and their ideas for teaching this lesson more effectively if they repeat it again in future. As they progress through the NPDE programme, we will expect them increasingly to be able to justify their decision-making and evaluation in terms of the theory presented during the programme.

Teacher-learners are then required to repeat this exercise for each module during the course of the programme. This will mean that by the time of the contact session in September of their first year, their portfolio will consist of six sets of evidence:

1. A lesson they taught prior to or right at the start of the NPDE programme
2. A lesson they taught that was influenced by their work on the module *Language and Learning Skills* (NPD001-4)
3. A lesson they taught that was also influenced by their work on the module *The Teacher in the Classroom* (NPD043-F)
4. A lesson that they taught that was also influenced by their work on the module *Understanding OBE* (NPD048-L)
5. A lesson that they taught that was also influenced by their work on the module *School and Profession* (NPD052-G)
6. A lesson that they taught that was also influenced by their work on the module *Continuous Assessment* (NPD047-K).

Thus their final set of evidence should demonstrate what they have learned cumulatively across the entire first year of the NPDE.

During the course of their second year on the programme, teacher-learners are asked to compile similar sets of evidence for the modules that they will complete in their specialist area.

Thus by the end of the second year, when most teacher-learners will be completing their NPDE programme, their portfolio will comprise eleven sets of evidence (plus anything additional which the teacher-learners themselves feel is necessary to demonstrate their competence).

How will the portfolio be assessed?

As noted previously, the integrated assessment portfolio is a requirement for qualification – it is therefore essential that teacher-learners complete the portfolio.

Teacher-learners will notice during the course of the programme that assessment issues come up again and again. This is an indication of the central importance of transforming assessment practice in seeking to transform and improve the quality of the education system as a whole.

They will have read how the trend is towards involving other people, including the learners themselves, in the assessment process. This helps the programme to avoid any bias and offers a better overall picture of what learners are capable of. It could be argued that the intention is to practise what is preached on this programme.

The portfolio assessment therefore involves four levels of assessment:

- self-assessment
- peer assessment
- tutor assessment
- external moderation.

Self-assessment

Teacher-learners are asked to assess their own portfolio against the criteria prior to presenting it to others.

Peer assessment

Teacher-learners are then be asked to present their portfolio to their peers who will also assess them against the criteria. In their presentation they use the evidence in their portfolio to demonstrate how their classroom competence has developed over the course of the programme. They must negotiate with their peers so that both the teacher-learners themselves and they are satisfied with the overall assessment.

Tutor assessment

Once the teacher-learners and their peer group have agreed on an assessment category, their tutor will award a final mark from within that category. The tutor can award a mark only within the category they have agreed; however they must be prepared to justify their decisions. The tutor must play a mediating where consensus has not been reached.

External moderation

Experts from outside the normal tutorial group are asked to moderate the quality of the assessments made. Moderators' comments can influence the final assessment grades globally.

Peer and portfolio assessment are key components of the University of Fort Hare B.Prim.Ed programme, which has had a profound impact on the classroom practice of teacher-learners in the Eastern Cape (Mays 2001; SAIDE 2001). The Unisa NPDE programme draws on the Fort Hare experience in implementing the NPDE programme.

What are the assessment criteria?

The assessment criteria are as set out below.

1. The portfolio contains six sets of evidence at the end of 2002 and eleven sets of evidence at the end of 2003 which contain all the elements set out above.
2. The portfolio is presented in an organised and systematic way and the educator is able to use the evidence in the portfolio to demonstrate his/her applied classroom competence.
3. Taken as a whole, the portfolio must demonstrate evidence of applied competence in the following seven roles outlined in the *Norms and Standards for Educators* (DoE 2000) policy document:

3.1 *Learning mediator*

The portfolio presentation provides evidence of the educator's ability to mediate learning in a manner which is sensitive to the diverse needs of learners, including those with barriers to learning; to construct learning environments that are appropriately contextualised and inspirational; to communicate effectively showing recognition of and respect for the differences of others; to demonstrate sound knowledge of subject content and various principles, strategies and resources appropriate to teaching in a South African context.

3.2 *Interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials*

The portfolio presentation provides evidence that the educator can understand and interpret provided learning programmes; design original learning programmes; identify the requirements for a specific context of learning and select and prepare appropriate suitable textual and visual resources for learning; select, sequence and pace the learning in a manner sensitive to the differing needs of the subject/learning area and learners.

3.3 *Leader, administrator and manager*

The portfolio presentation provides evidence that the educator can make decisions appropriate to the level; manage learning in the classroom; carry out

classroom administrative duties efficiently; participate in school decision-making structures (e.g. lessons that result from a group planning process). This competence will be performed in ways which are democratic, which support learners and colleagues, and which demonstrate responsiveness to changing circumstances and needs.

3.4 *Scholar, researcher and lifelong learner*

The portfolio presentation provides evidence of the educator's ability to achieve ongoing personal, academic, occupational and professional growth through pursuing reflective study and research in their learning area, in broader professional and educational matters, and in other related fields.

3.5 *Community, citizenship and pastoral role*

The portfolio presentation provides evidence that the educator practises and promotes a critical, committed and ethical attitude towards developing a sense of respect and responsibility towards others; upholds the constitution and promotes democratic values and practices in schools and society; is able to build supportive relationships with other role players and addresses critical community and environment development issues including HIV/AIDS.

3.6 *Assessor*

The portfolio presentation provides evidence that the educator understands that assessment is an essential feature of the teaching and learning process and knows how to integrate it into this process; has an understanding of the purposes, methods and effects of assessment and is able to provide helpful feedback to learners; can design and manage both formative and summative assessment in ways that are appropriate to the level and purpose of the learning and meet the requirements of accrediting bodies; keeps detailed and diagnostic records of assessment; understands how to interpret and use assessment results to feed into

processes for the improvement of learning programmes.

3.7 *Learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist*

The portfolio presentation provides evidence that the educator is well grounded in the knowledge, skills, values, principles, methods, and procedures relevant to the discipline or occupational practice; knows about different approaches to teaching and learning and how these may be used in ways which are appropriate to the learners and context; has a well-developed understanding of the knowledge appropriate to the specialism.

Clearly, in planning how to present their portfolios, teacher-learner will need to draw attention to their achievements in these seven areas.

Table 14: Assessment grading

| Excellent | Very good | Good | Fair | Weak |
|---|--|------------------------------|--|--|
| Surpasses the minimum criteria in every respect | Meets all the criteria well and is excellent in some areas | Meets all the criteria well. | Just meets most of the criteria in a minimum way | Does not yet meet the minimum criteria |
| 76-100% | 61-75% | 51-60% | 26 - 50% | 0 - 25% |

When will the portfolio presentations happen?

Time is made available during the final contact session for teacher-learners to present their portfolios to their peers and their tutor. They should therefore bring their portfolio to the final contact session.

Portfolio presentations have been scheduled in the last contact session for the first year of the programme for formative purposes only and do not contribute to teacher-learners' final mark.

The purpose is to ensure that everybody fully understands the criteria and process so that during the ensuing year, teacher-learners will have a chance to augment their portfolios where necessary in order to make a more convincing case for the competence they have acquired.

3.3.6 Ensuring rigour in the assessment process

Designing appropriate assessment tasks

Ensuring rigour in the assessment process begins with designing tasks that promote applied competence in line with the overall purpose of the qualification. Below are three examples of where the Unisa NPDE programme has attempted to devise tasks of a varied and authentic nature in order to meet these requirements.

Assignment tasks are discussed during contact sessions prior to teacher-learners' attempting them and again when tutors provide feedback on the marked assignments.

Table 15: Reflection on practice: example of an open-ended assessment task

NPD048-L Assignment 2: Question 3

In this question, we want you to reflect upon your **own** practice.

- 3.1 In your assignment, paste in the lesson plan for one of the lessons you taught this week. The lesson plan should cover at least **one hour** of teaching time (possibly covering more than one period).
- 3.2 Now number each step in your lesson plan.
- 3.3 For **each** step you have numbered, answer the following questions:

- 3.3.1 How did you expect this step to **contribute** to the outcomes you had planned for this lesson?
- 3.3.2 **Why** did you choose to teach in this way? (4)
- 3.4 What factors influenced your choice of outcomes for this lesson? (2)
- 3.5 Did you achieve the outcomes you had planned? Explain how you know. (3)
- 3.6 Now write down a description of **what actually happened** in the lesson. Try to be as honest and as detailed as possible. (4)
- 3.7 Now answer the following questions:
- 3.7.1 Did the actual lesson depart from what you had planned in any way? If yes, why do you think this was so? (2)
- 3.7.2 Did your learners learn anything in this lesson **additional** to what you had planned.
If yes, why do you think this was so? (2)
- 3.7.3 Having taught this lesson, will you do anything **differently** the next time you teach this topic? If yes, say what you will change and try to explain why. (2)
- 3.8 Briefly describe the ways in which your participation in this module has influenced your classroom practice, if at all. Try to explain how or why this was so. (4)
- [23]

Table 16: Response to a case study/scenario

NPD052-G Assignment 2: Question 4

As an education partnership, the organised teaching profession consists of teaching councils, teachers' associations and teachers' unions, all of which promote the professional interests of their members in a structured way. In this question we explore **why** there needs to be such a partnership.

It is Monday morning at the beginning of October. Seven days previously, salary negotiations between public service unions and the Ministry have deadlocked and SADTU, NAPTOSA and SAOU have called for a strike.

Not surprisingly, therefore, when Mr Sibande, the principal, arrives at the school at 10am on Monday morning (having first gone to the traffic department to pay a speeding fine), there seem to be few educators in attendance and learners are wandering around all over the place.

Mr Sibande arrives at his office to be confronted by a group of very angry learners from the college's LRC, who complain that missing any classes at this late stage in the year will impact badly on learners' preparations for the coming examinations. They threaten that if the teachers are not back at the school by the afternoon, the learners will trash the grounds and will refuse to write examinations if they are not postponed.

Once in his office Mr Sibande finds several letters and memoranda on his desk:

- *a circular from the Department requesting his attendance that afternoon at a symposium on the new curriculum framework*
- *a letter of resignation from the Head of the HSS department which takes the principal completely by surprise*
- *a letter from a female member of staff accusing her HoD of sexual harassment and*

threatening legal action

- *a memorandum from two of the Maths educators saying they will not be at the college all week because they are attending an AMESA (Association for Maths Educators in SA) conference.*

As Mr Sibande finishes reading this pile of papers, there is sudden frantic knocking at the door. It appears that some learners, excited by the lack of supervision, have gone into the science laboratory and begun experimenting with some chemicals they have found on the desk outside the locked store room. One of the learners has been badly burned by acid. Mr Sibande calls an ambulance and then phones the chairperson of the SGB to inform her of what has happened ...

4.1 In a case like the above, whom would you say is at fault regarding the injury to the learner? Why do you say this? (2)

4.2 You will notice that several different levels of management and governance are featured in the case study and together comprise what could be called the *organised teaching profession*.

Make a table like the one below in which you try to identify:

- the different role players
- their functions within the system
- how they have contributed, if at all, to the situation outlined in the case study.

One has been done as an example.

| Role-player | Function | Contribution to situation |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Government | Sets out a policy and legislative framework, as well as funding and provisioning the education system. | Inability to come to an agreement, has resulted in union action which in turn is responsible for the lack of adequate supervision in the school. |
| Unions | 4.2.1 | 4.2.2 |
| Associations | 4.2.3 | 4.2.4 |
| SGB | 4.2.5 | 4.2.6 |
| SMT | 4.2.7 | 4.2.8 |
| 4.2.9 Any one other | 4.2.10 | 4.2.11 |

(22)

Table 17: Response to a newspaper article/real-life event etc.

| |
|---|
| <p>NPD052-G Assignment 2: Question 2</p> <p>In this question we want you to think about what you understand to be the characteristics of a professional educator.</p> <p>On the last page of the assignment is an advertisement that was placed by the national Department of Education in the national media.</p> <p>We would like you to write a motivation for someone you know, or someone you would like to know, to receive a ‘national teacher award’.</p> <p>You must be able to describe the kind of professional behaviour that the person demonstrates in order to be able to justify your nomination.</p> |
|---|

Establishing criteria for assessment

Having attempted to design authentic assessment tasks, it is necessary to provide appropriate assessment criteria and to discuss these. The necessity for transparent assessment criteria is a key aspect of outcomes-based assessment practices. An example of assessment criteria directed to learners is provided in the discussion of the portfolio above. However, it is equally important to develop criteria against which to assess other aspects of the programme. For example, feedback on assignments is a crucial aspect of the learning and teaching process in the NPDE programme. Therefore, Unisa NPDE tutors are introduced to the following criteria for marking during their first training session.

In a subsequent training session, tutors were invited to evaluate some of their own marked assignments against these criteria.

Assignment marking criteria derived from SAIDE, 1998.

Look for **evidence** of the following in assignments and assignment feedback:

Do the assignments and feedback help to:

1. Consolidate the learning?
2. Provide a progress check (for learners and tutors)?
3. Provide academic support (i.e. guidance on writing, editing, pacing themselves, accessing/using/acknowledging information ...)?
4. Motivate the learner (even if he/she has not done very well)?

Look at the comments made and try to find evidence of:

5. a system for giving feedback that is consistent across all the assignments and easy to understand
6. comments that demonstrate that the tutor has read the assignment and that establishes and maintains an empathetic/supportive dialogue

7. comments that indicate errors or simple misunderstandings with reference to course material, so that the learners can check and make their own corrections
8. comments about the relevance or appropriateness of the content and approach used by the learner in answering the assignment
9. comments which offer support and encouragement
10. comments on assignment writing skills and advice on study skills techniques and strategies
11. comments that explain the grade/mark they have been given
12. a general summative comment on the assignment at the beginning or end which indicates whether the intended outcomes were achieved, as well as specific comments next to relevant sections of the assignment itself
13. a consistent system for providing useful formative feedback on language issues relating to meaning, coherence, cohesion, language of discourse/discipline, general accuracy ... reference skills
14. comments which extend outstanding learners
15. a system for flagging at risk learners
16. efficient record keeping
17. provision of model answers
18. benchmarking (Assessment criteria/ norm referencing?)
19. respect for adult learners

Look for a structure in the feedback such as the following:

- 20.1 Start with positive comments on the assignment, and build on the strengths of the assignment
- 20.2 Follow this with constructive criticism, giving examples of weaknesses and possible ways to overcome them.
- 20.3 End off with encouragement to motivate the learners
- 20.4 Comment on accuracy in calculation of marks.

Sampling and feedback

Unisa's NPDE tutors have been encouraged to mark assignments in teams against guiding criteria and suggested memoranda.

However, in 2002 and again in 2003, team marking was not always financially feasible due to the distances involved between some centres (36 centres in 5 provinces in 2002). Tutors are therefore required to submit samples of marked assignments with their marksheets and claims and receive feedback from the Faculty if there are any problems.

Discussion during contact sessions

Tutors facilitate discussion on the marked assignments during subsequent contact sessions. During these sessions teacher-learners are invited to compare assignments and marking and to challenge the assessment against the agreed criteria. In one or two cases, these discussions have led to assignment marks being changed.

Exam setting and marking

As noted previously, exams form part of the assessment strategy, primarily to assure teacher-learners and external moderators of the rigour of the programme but also to help motivate and direct learning (Ebel 1979 in Gultig et al 1998b:43- 48). Each exam paper is developed by an expert in the field and reviewed by a second examiner. As with assignments, exam tasks are designed to try to yield evidence of applied competence rather than regurgitation of factual content. Due to the different kind of task set in keeping with an attempt to assess applied competence, the examinations are open book sessions.

In order to ensure rigour during the exam-marking, the following process is followed.

Exam marking process

- 1.1 Examiner(s) prepare draft memoranda and team review all papers.
- 1.2 Team meets to discuss memos:
 - 1.2.1 Examiner(s) lead discussion through draft memo
 - 1.2.2 Team contribute possibilities around differing interpretations and responses.
- 1.3 After exam has been written, markers receive copies of paper to review.

- 1.4 Examiners collect exam scripts, mark a sample, revise memorandum if necessary, make 12 copies of 10 scripts for training purposes.
- 1.5 Examiners conduct a training session:
 - 1.5.1 Examiners lead discussion through draft memorandum and marking team contribute possibilities around differing interpretations and responses.
 - 1.5.2 Marking team mark the 10 prepared scripts according to the memo and then discuss and resolve any differences.
 - 1.5.3 Examiner allocates 100 - 125 scripts to each marker (who signs for same).
 - 1.5.4 Each examiner marks first 5 scripts from his/her batch.
 - 1.5.5 One script is moderated by another member of the team. Any differences must be resolved, with the help of the examiner if necessary, before proceeding.
 - 1.5.6 Another 5 scripts are marked and moderated (by another team member).
 - 1.5.7 This process continues until the examiner is satisfied.
 - 1.5.8 A schedule is agreed for the following Saturday when markers meet with the examiner on a one-to-one basis to return scripts and mark schedules and for moderation purposes.
- 1.6 Examiners conduct moderation session 1:
 - 1.6.1 Examiners meet with each marker on a 1 to 1 basis for 30 - 45 minutes.
 - 1.6.2 Anomalies identified by the marker are first discussed and resolved.
 - 1.6.3 Some scripts are moderated by the examiner and differences discussed and resolved.
 - 1.6.4 A second and final batch of scripts is taken by the marker (and signed for).
- 1.7 Examiners conduct moderation session 2:
 - 1.7.1 Examiners meet with all markers for 1-2 hours.
 - 1.7.2 Anomalies identified by markers are first discussed and resolved.
 - 1.7.3 Scripts are collected in and claim forms submitted:
 - 1.7.3.1 Markers claim for R15/ script marked (200 - 250/marker)
 - 1.7.3.2 Three return visits to/from the marking centre.

3.3.7 Portfolio for RPL purposes

In addition to the use of the portfolio for integrated summative (and formative) assessment purposes, Unisa has needed to respond to the Department of Education's desire for RPL for REQV11 candidates by extending the existing programme portfolio with additional evidence. This is discussed in section 3.4.

3.4 RPL strategy

The NPDE qualification as registered on the NQF is a 240-credit programme at NQF Level 5. However, the qualification stipulates a minimum of 120-credits of new learning and allows that up to 120-credits may be offered in the form of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

In June 2002, the Department of Education hosted a national workshop on RPL for stakeholders involved in the implementation of the NPDE programme.

During this workshop it was made clear that providers were expected to develop RPL processes that would allow both REQV11 and REQV12 educators to receive the maximum 120-credit recognition so that all educators currently enrolled would have the opportunity to complete the qualification in two years of distance education study. It was argued by various interest groups at this workshop that:

- there is no professional difference between an REQV11 and an REQV12 educator
- holding a matric is largely irrelevant to classroom practice at the level of GET
- that blanket recognition should be given for all informal in-house DoE training e.g. for OBE
- that students should be assessed against the programme outcomes not against their completion of a certain number of modules or credits.

In addition, it was made clear that apart from some possible support from the Department of Education for the initial training of RPL assessors, the cost of the RPL process should be borne by the providers themselves.

During the workshop it further emerged that there was a national consensus on allowing an exemption of 120-credits to all REQV12 educators and that the proposed new RPL processes would therefore apply only to REQV11 educators.

The workshop and the ensuing discussions raised the following questions about RPL policies in general and Unisa practices in particular:

- What exactly is meant by RPL?
- What is RPL offered for?
- What evidence will be required and what processes need to be followed?
- What are the implications for existing practice?
- How does Unisa attempt to meet the challenge?

3.4.1 What exactly is meant by RPL?

According to the *National Standards Bodies Regulations No. 18787 of 28 March 1998* (quoted in SAQA 2002:6):

recognition of prior learning means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements ...
... which concept includes but is not limited to learning outcomes achieved through formal, informal and non-formal learning and work experience.

From this definition RPL can be seen as a central pillar of the NQF in seeking to give reality to notions of equity, access, redress and lifelong learning through affirmation of learning that has taken place in a variety of contexts and situations. However, questions arise about the equivalence

of these different learning experiences and RPL processes in Higher Education may then be contested.

It can be argued that experiential learning is characterised by subjectivity and a very narrow contextual focus in contrast to an academic learning experience which, ideally, provides a broader and more objective perspective. However, as Osman and Castle observe:

As university educators, we accept that experiential knowledge is distinct from academic ways of knowing, and that learning that occurs in a variety of contexts is not always transferable, but we believe the epistemological challenges in RPL relate to whose knowledge is valued and privileged, and whether knowledge outside disciplinary boundaries can be recognised by those within the discipline. Different kinds of knowledge and learning may complement each other. They may be independent rather than exclusive. Furthermore, we suggest that the university can be both a site which defines and constructs knowledge and a site which examines and engages critically with different contexts of knowledge creation. (2002:65)

SAQA argues that RPL is a **process**

requiring a high degree of flexibility, sensitivity and specialisation, giving as much weight to the provision for learner support and preparation as it does to the preparation of assessment methods, instruments and administrative systems to record and protect the integrity of the results (SAQA 2002:8).

The Committee of Technical Principals (CTP) outline the following ten standards based on internationally accepted benchmarks for RPL assessment, in particular the work of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL):

- *Credit should be awarded only for the learning which has occurred and not for experience alone.*
- *Credit should be awarded only for relevant levels of learning.*
- *Credit should be awarded only for learning that has a balance, appropriate only to the subject, between theory and practical application.*
- *The determination of competence levels and of credit awards must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic experts.*
- *Credit should be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted.*

- *Credit awards should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.*
- *Policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available.*
- *Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.*
- *All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should receive adequate training for the functions they perform, and there should be provision for their continued professional development.*
- *Assessment programmes should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served and in the state of the assessment arts. (Du Pré & Pretorius Eds 2001:14-16)*

SAQA further argues for a holistic approach to RPL based on the following principles (SAQA 2002:9-10):

- *subscription to the principles and values of human development and lifelong learning and in particular the need for access, equity and redress*
- *learner centred support systems that address contextual factors affecting the RPL process*
- *a standpoint of critical theory which challenges current practice and the assumptions on which it is based*
- *flexibility in the use of assessment methods and instruments*
- *maintenance of the integrity and standards of the NQF as a whole*
- *a learner-centred and developmental approach*
- *RPL as the first step into a learning programme*
- *the recognition of different purposes for RPL assessment*
- *a process that benefits all stakeholders.*

There would seem to be congruence between SAQA's standpoint, the CTP guidelines and that of Unisa as articulated in its *Policy Document on Assessment and Accreditation of Experiential Learning*. Unisa's policy document distinguishes between two forms of RPL (Unisa 2001: 4):

- *transfer of academic credit (i.e. recognition of studies completed at another institution)*
- *experiential learning assessment and recognition (i.e. recognition of learning acquired through work/life experiences against intended learning outcomes).*

Osman & Castle (2001:55 - following the classification of Butterworth and McKelvey (1997)) equate the latter approach with a developmental model of RPL and suggest the following comparison:

The developmental model of RPL is valuable because it stimulates personal reflection which contributes to personal and professional development. It has the potential to advance students' perceptions of past experiences to a new level, enabling them to declare their reasons for study and also enhancing their sense of self-worth. This contrasts sharply with the credit exchange model which requires no reflection on the significance of these experiences and no emphasis on personal or professional development (Butterworth & Mckelvey 1997; Harris 1999).

Both forms of RPL apply to the NPDE and herein lies a problem regarding the question of what RPL is offered for.

3.4.2 What is RPL offered for?

As noted previously, the NPDE caters for the needs of underqualified classroom-based educators at REQV11 or REQV12.

The distinction between REQV11 and REQV12 rests in the fact that the latter have completed matric and the former have not. In order to access the NPDE programme, REQV11 and 12 educators will both have undertaken the same duration and level of professional development e.g. PTC, STC etc. However, REQV12 candidates, with matric plus PTC or equivalent, receive exemption from 120 credits of the NPDE programme by national consensus, whereas REQV11s, with the same degree of professional development, do not.

If the programme evolved an RPL strategy geared towards recognising Level 4 (FETC equivalence) learning acquired from work or life experience, it would create a just means of comparison between

REQV11 and 12 educators, but undermine the professional development focus of the NPDE which is primarily concerned with improving classroom practice. It also raises questions about what remedial programme should be offered if the candidate for RPL is found to be not yet competent in one or more areas.

If, on the other hand, the programme developed an RPL strategy linked to the intended learning outcomes of the NPDE, it would remain faithful to the intent of the qualification but would not really offer comparable learning pathways to both types of candidate. In Unisa's case this means that there would be an anomalous situation in which the programme would require evidence from an REQV11 candidate that he/she can demonstrate applied competence with respect to specialised education and overcoming barriers to learning and development (NPD050-E), but would have exempted an REQV12 candidate from this module on the basis of having completed a matric!

In fact, both REQV11 **and** REQV12 educators would probably benefit from completing most of the full NPDE programme as the concerns raised by research emanating from the President's Education Initiative apply equally to both categories of educator. The PEI research found that:

- there was generally not a culture of reading among South Africa's educators
- many educators had themselves not mastered the conceptual understandings of the learning areas they were required to teach; and
- many educators were still locked into a didactic, transmission style of teaching (Taylor and Vinjevold 1999).

However, it is necessary to be pragmatic and accept that it will not be possible to require educators to complete a full 20-module programme (or provide detailed evidence of prior learning thereof): it is surely better to try to make a small difference than to make no attempt to improve classroom practice at all.

A further tension exists between a commitment to RPL in policy and the practice of offering a contact-supported mode of delivery. A commitment to RPL suggests that teacher-learners should be able to

apply for RPL against **any** component of the programme, subject to completing a minimum of 120 credits of new learning:

Institutions will need to find ways of becoming more flexible in design and delivery of the curriculum to allow for learner participation in the final selection of courses and modules in a qualification (SAQA 2002:18).

On the other hand, the logistical arrangements involved in offering a contact supported programme favour the notion of a compulsory core curriculum and limited options. For example, the NPDE curriculum offered by Unisa at present involves 24 different study options in an attempt to meet the variety of needs identified by the Department of Education (and that is without offering courses in two learning areas in 2002/3). The result of greater choice is that decentralised contact support will no longer be economically viable in 2003 in most centres that have been used to support a core programme in 2002. If it is accepted that each learner might in fact follow his/her own individual learning pathway then either it will be necessary to centralise provision or the programme will need to substantially raise fees. Thus an RPL process aimed at overcoming one set of barriers to access can result in others being raised.

Currently, Unisa offers a curriculum within which there is some choice and some opportunity for RPL but which also involves modules considered compulsory and not subject to RPL.

This means that for each specialisation offered, currently there are only **some** modules for which educators may apply for RPL.

3.4.3 What evidence will be required and what processes need to be followed?

There is congruence between Unisa's (2001) RPL policy and SAQA's (2002) draft policy document on RPL with regard to the fact that learning needs to be demonstrated through the provision of suitable evidence to this effect. The Unisa policy document (Unisa 2001:5) argues that "Credit is awarded only for learning, and not for experience [alone]." The need to provide quality evidence for what has been learned is also emphasised by SAQA, but with some provisos:

Quality of evidence relates to reliability, validity, authenticity, sufficiency and currency. Particularly in RPL assessment, the latter two issues of quality are important. In the case of sufficiency, it is not only a question of whether enough evidence has been gathered. Sometimes, in an attempt to ensure rigour, assessors require too much evidence (e.g. extensive triangulation) and thus make the assessment process very onerous for candidates. (SAQA 2002:16)

There are four components to the NPDE curriculum with exit level outcomes attached to each:

- *Component 1: Fundamental learning*
- *Component 2: Specialist roles*
- *Component 3: General learning and teaching processes*
- *Component 4: School and professional issues (SGB05:2001).*

Clearly, evidence will need to be gathered which demonstrates that learning has happened against those outcomes of the programme which are not addressed as part of the compulsory curriculum (if such exists).

A review of the literature on RPL practice in general and in teacher programmes in particular suggests that such evidence might include:

- Portfolios
- Lesson observations
- Micro teaching
- Interviews e.g. oral exam, one-to-one dialogue, panel interviews, leaderless group discussions
- Reflective accounts of experience
- Journals
- Work samples
- Simulations e.g. role plays, responses to case studies etc.
- Controlled written responses e.g. essays, challenge exams, basic literacy/numeracy tests
- Free written responses e.g. logs, reports, diaries, assignments, CVs
- Testimonials/ letters of validation.

Of these various kinds of evidence, portfolios are the most widely favoured for RPL practice. According to Unisa's standard RPL policy document, "Portfolios require the submission of *evidence* of skills and knowledge claimed by the applicant. Such evidence might include:

- *Certificates from previous education and training courses*
- *Licences*
- *Annotated bibliographies*
- *Challenge examinations*
- *Standardized tests*
- *Written tests and assignments*
- *Products of any nature relevant to the courses offered at the university: art portfolios; publications*
- *Samples of completed work such as copies of documents or reports*
- *Employment related documents such as resumés, performance appraisals, business books etc.*
- *A statutory declaration outlining previous types of work and experience*
- *References from current and past employers, supervisors and colleagues*
- *Testimonials from persons holding relevant qualifications in the area being assessed*
- *Photographs of completed work certified by a referee or accompanied by a statutory declaration*
- *If self-employed in the past, evidence of running a business using the skills and knowledge being claimed". (Unisa 2001:12)*

The question thus arises as to what kinds of evidence are best suited to demonstrate competence against different kinds of outcome?

As noted above, the NPDE comprises four components. For the Unisa NPDE programme, component 4 is addressed as part of a compulsory core programme. However, it is necessary to offer RPL opportunities for each of the other three components.

Component 1: Competences relating to fundamental learning

This component is concerned with the educator's own basic language and numeracy skills. The exit level outcomes related to this component are as follows.

Exit level outcome 1.1

Candidates demonstrate competence in reading, writing and speaking the language/s of instruction in ways that facilitate their own academic learning and their ability to facilitate learning in the classroom.

Competence is evident when candidates are able to:

- use their main language of instruction to explain, describe and discuss key concepts in their area of specialisation;
- use a second language to explain, describe and discuss key concepts in a conversational style;
- read and interpret with understanding written and graphic materials relating to their area of specialisation;
- read academic and professional texts critically, in order to integrate and use the knowledge in their own studies and in their teaching;
- convey the content of their area of specialisation in written, graphic and other forms which are appropriate to the development level/s and language ability of the learners in their care;
- use basic information and communication technology to further their own learning and facilitate the learning of others;
- select and use study methods appropriate to their own needs as well as the demands of the specialisation.

Most of the above outcomes have been built into Unisa's core NPDE programme through an introductory module on *Language and learning skills* (primarily in English, the language of instruction). However, a process needed to be developed to assess competence in using another language to explore classroom and professional issues in a conversational way. The language of the qualification is ambiguous in this area and the Unisa programme has assumed that if English is taken as the medium of instruction, then it would need to provide opportunities for educators to try to engage with the issues raised by the programme using their mother tongue (i.e. their first language in reality, but their second language for the purposes of the programme).

Exit level outcome 1.2

Candidates demonstrate competence in interpreting and using numerical and elementary statistical information to facilitate their own academic learning and their ability to administer teaching, learning and assessment.

Competence is evident when candidates are able to:

- apply their understanding of numerical and statistical information to educational issues, cross-curricular activities and their own learning
- apply their understanding of numeracy and statistics to manage classroom resources and monitor learner attendance;
- apply their understanding of numeracy and statistics to record, interpret and report on the academic progress and achievement of their learners.

For both the conversational use of a second language and for demonstration of the above competences in the area of numeracy, development of portfolio evidence seems likely to prove both difficult and more onerous than actually taking the relevant modules. It would therefore seem more appropriate initially to offer candidates the opportunity to attempt a challenge test. In the event that the challenge test suggests they are not yet competent, the candidates should then be given the choice of trying to put together relevant evidence for a portfolio or enrolling for the relevant module. It is assumed that some students will come to the programme with the expected language and numeracy skills required at Level 4 and that a competence test to provide evidence of these skills will provide sufficient evidence in order for learners to be exempted from fundamental learning modules. The competence tests, which will need to involve a combination of both oral (which could be done through informal observation by peers and tutors during discussion sessions, portfolio **presentations** and classroom observations) and written assessment will need to provide evidence that the student has achieved a level of competence equivalent to the exit level outcomes 1.1 and 1.2 of the NPDE qualification as set out above.

Component 2: Competences relating to subject and content of teaching

The focus of this component is on the role of interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials, the role of learning mediation as well as on the specialist role. Unisa believes that insight in these areas can, to a large extent, be deduced from the ways in which educators plan and reflect upon their classroom interactions. All students on the Unisa NPDE programme are required to develop a portfolio of classroom-based evidence during their two years on the programme (see NPDE tutorial letter 303). It is felt that REQV11 educators should be encouraged to supplement the basic compulsory portfolio with the following additional evidence of achievement:

- lesson plans and materials developed during the year prior to the programme which exemplify the depth and range of the educator's specialist role
- certificates of attendance at departmental and other workshops together with a brief description and some evidence of how participation in these workshops has influenced their teaching

- copies of any reports emanating from any development appraisal that the educator may have been involved in
- testimonials to the educators' competence from peers and line managers e.g. a letter thanking the educator for playing a leading role in a curriculum development initiative, etc.

It is felt that the onus rests on the RPL candidate to provide sufficient evidence to satisfy the assessor that the necessary competence exists.

Sufficient evidence must be produced that the candidate has achieved the degree of competence as set out in the exit level outcomes of the qualification below.

Exit level outcome 2.1

In their area/s of specialisation (phase and subject/learning area), candidates demonstrate competence in planning, designing, and reflecting on learning programmes appropriate for their learners and learning context.

Competence is evident when candidates are able to:

- evaluate, select and adapt learning programmes appropriate for the learners, context and specialisation;
- select and use appropriate materials and resources in the design of learning programmes and lessons;
- plan lessons within teaching programmes, selecting appropriate teaching and learning strategies;
- justify selection and design in ways which show knowledge and understanding of the specialisation, teaching and learning strategies, child development and curriculum design.

Component 3: Competences relating to teaching and learning processes

The focus in this component is on the roles of the specialist, the learning mediator, assessor, manager/administrator/leader, interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials, as well as on the pastoral role.

It is assumed that considerable insight into the candidate's competence in the above areas can be deduced from the candidate's portfolio and the ways in which the candidate speaks and/or writes about the evidence presented therein.

However, it may be necessary, especially with borderline educators whose performance in other aspects of the NPDE programme casts doubt on their overall classroom competence, to augment the portfolio presentations with some direct classroom observation. Ideally, these observations would be undertaken by the candidate's tutor with whom a relationship of trust and mutual respect has hopefully already been established, however, the sheer number of NPDE students may militate against this and it may be necessary in some cases to delegate some classroom observations to departmental officials.

Whatever the case, the observation criteria and purpose must be made clear from the beginning and the educator must be reassured that they cannot "fail" the classroom observation. The observation must be seen within the Education Labour Relations Council's broader Developmental Appraisal policy (ELRC, undated) which identifies the following five broad areas of expected competence:

- curriculum development
- creation of a learning environment
- lesson presentation and methodology
- classroom management
- learner assessment.

The observation must consider the context in which the educator is working and how this limits or supports his/her teaching. A discussion of the observed lesson(s) should help the educator to see where he/she might benefit from completing additional modules in the programme in specific areas and where he/she clearly has the necessary competences and so can be exempted from pursuing additional modules and given RPL credit for them.

Together, the candidate's portfolio and, where necessary, the guided observation of the educator in his/her classroom must provide evidence that the candidate has satisfied the following exit level outcomes of the NPDE qualification.

Exit level outcome 3.1

In their area of specialisation, candidates demonstrate competence in selecting, using and adjusting teaching and learning strategies in ways which meet the needs of the learners and the context.

Competence is evident when candidates are able to:

- select and use teaching and learning strategies which motivate learners and encourage them to take initiative;
- in the planning and use of teaching and learning strategies, accommodate differences in learning style, pace and ability;
- identify and assist learners with special needs and barriers to learning and development;
- facilitate occasions where learners are taught in groups, pairs and as individuals;
- make judgements on the effect that language has on learning and make the necessary adjustments to the teaching and learning strategies;
- use teaching and learning support materials to facilitate learner progress and development;
- assess the teaching and learning strategies used in a particular context in the light of the extent to which the objectives of the learning experience have been achieved;
- explain the success or otherwise of teaching and learning strategies with reference to key educational concepts, the needs and abilities of the learners and demands of the specialisation.

Exit level outcome 3.2

Candidates demonstrate competence in managing and administrating their learning environments and learners in ways that are sensitive, stimulating, democratic and well-organized.

Competence is evident when candidates are able to:

- create and maintain learning environments which are safe as well as conducive to learning;
- manage learning environments democratically and in ways that foster creative and critical thinking;
- discipline learners in ways that are firm, growth-promoting but fair;
- create a learning environment that is sensitive to cultural, linguistic and gender differences;
- resolve conflict situations within classrooms in an ethical and sensitive way;
- perform administrative duties required for the effective management of the learning environment;
- assist learners to manage themselves, their time, physical space and resources;
- take appropriate action to assist learners in the solution of personal or social problems;
- evaluate and, where necessary, adjust their own actions in ways that show knowledge and understanding of management and administration.

Exit level outcome 3.3

Candidates demonstrate competence in monitoring and assessing learner progress and achievement in their specialisation.

Competence is evident when candidates are able to:

- select, adapt and/or design assessment tasks and strategies appropriate to the specialisation and learning context;
- explain the link between the method of assessment, the overall assessment purpose and the outcomes being assessed;
- use a range of assessment strategies to accommodate differences in learning style, pace and context;
- justify choice and design of assessment strategies, methods and procedures in ways which show knowledge and understanding of valid, reliable and fair assessment practice;

- use assessment results to provide feedback on learner progress and achievement;
- use assessment results to inform teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

Unisa (2001), the CTP (2001) and SAQA (2002) all point to the need for ongoing learner support during the RPL process. Comparing the three documents, it is possible to deduce the following key steps in this process:

- *Pre-entry*: training of staff involved in the RPL process and notification to potential learners that an RPL process exists and what steps need to be followed to apply
- *Entry*: trained advisors offer guidance to learners on what to request RPL for, how to apply for it and what to do if the application is unsuccessful
- *During*: learners require ongoing support throughout the programme - some may find that they could in fact benefit from taking a module they have received RPL for; others may find that they in fact have the competences required for a particular module for which they have not yet applied for RPL; many (in a programme like the Unisa NPDE which currently has “compulsory” modules) will be putting together evidence, perhaps in the form of a portfolio, of their learning experiences and will need support and guidance on how to select and present appropriate evidence
- *After*: providing guidance for planning of future career and learning pathways.

Inherent in this notion of a negotiated process is the training of staff to:

- guide
- assess; and
- moderate.

Ideally, these would be three different sets of people, but economic constraints suggest that the first two roles may need to be conflated in some instances.

3.4.4 What are the implications for existing practice?

Van Rooy (2002) observes that committing to an RPL strategy and then implementing a suitable process involves changes not only to the ways in which higher education conceptualise and offer curricula but also ongoing reflection on the RPL model itself:

*Adopting the principle of RPL represents a shift of emphasis from the instructional inputs of institutions and teaching staff to the learning process, the outcomes of learning and the outputs of learners ... (2002:76)
... and ... models of RPL would need to be conceptualised and implemented that cater for the particular relationships between field, policy, institution, curriculum, programme and learners – in context (Harris 1999: 38 in van Rooy 2002:78).*

Although there would seem to be broad agreement between the approach to RPL adopted by Unisa and SAQA, there are a number of areas in which the standard Unisa policy document does not address the particular needs of the NPDE and where flexibility and adaptation has been required.

The broad Unisa policy has needed to be adapted with respect to the following issues:

- Centralised processes
- Focus on module outcomes
- Amount of evidence required
- Focus on university level learning
- Cost.

Centralised processes

The standard policy document requires learners to submit their portfolios and other evidence to a centralised point. The process is then generally handled internally and involves a number of different inputs. While rigorous in approach, centralising the process does not sit well with the scale of the need within the NPDE programme nor does it take cognisance of the fact that the NPDE is a contact-supported programme. Local tutors are better placed to understand the context within which educators on the programme are learning (there is an enormous amount of difference in putting together copies of documentation and then getting it all to a central point if teacher-learners are in a well-equipped ex-model C school in Pretoria and if they are in a severely under-resourced school in rural KwaZulu-Natal, divorced from the context there is a real danger in the assessment being of the school rather than the individual educator). More importantly, the focus of the NPDE is on improving

classroom practice. Centralising the process denies educators the opportunity to defend their portfolios of evidence to their peers and assessors: this would involve them in a social learning practice which we hope they would find valuable enough to subsequently implement in their own classrooms.

As Osman and Castle (2001:56) observe after reflecting on their own practice:

The value of group process for RPL is corroborated by Fraser who asserts that “learning operates at the interface between the individual and the social ... and it is a group process [which enables us] to unravel the ‘cliches’ upon which our sense of our experience is based” (1995:144).

Opportunities to give an oral defence of one’s competence would seem to be particularly necessary in a context in which the majority of learners are required to learn in a language other than their first or home language and whose competence in writing in the language of learning may therefore be more limited. The achievements of the University of Fort Hare distance education BPrimEd programme are a testament to the impact that face-to-face negotiation of assessment can have (Kenyon et al 2000; Mays 2001).

Focus on module outcomes

The standard Unisa policy document foregrounds RPL against module outcomes. For the NPDE this is problematic in a number of respects. First there is the sheer scale of the work involved. Educators engaged on the NPDE programme will already, during the course of the year for which the RPL process will be running, be studying 5 modules, completing 10 assignments, writing 5 exams, adding 5 more sets of evidence to complete a 2-year portfolio comprising 11 sets of evidence for integrated assessment purposes and attending 8 full-day classes whilst teaching full-time and managing a typical adult life. Second, each of the providers offering the NPDE has interpreted the qualification slightly differently in practice and uses different modules, combining outcomes in different ways. A module-based form of assessment militates against the key NQF notion of portability of credits. In addition, certain outcomes occur again and again throughout the programme e.g. the ability to demonstrate applied competence in the role of assessor recurs to a greater or lesser extent in every module within the Unisa NPDE programme. For these reasons, it seems more appropriate to assess against the exit level outcomes of the programme rather than against specific module outcomes.

Amount of evidence required

On p.6 of the standard Unisa RPL policy, reference is made to the need for sufficient breadth of the evidence provided: e.g. ‘a year’s work of writing, number of types of samples of writing’. For the kinds of reasons outlined above, it was felt that for the NPDE it would be necessary to place less emphasis on quantity and more on the quality of evidence and whether or not a convincing case had been made that the programme outcomes had been achieved. In addition, the possibility exists that evidence collected for the standard portfolio and assessed against the particular assessment criteria for this, might also provide evidence for RPL purposes as well. As noted in the CTP/CAEL guidelines presented earlier, there is potential here for double counting: on the other hand it is surely possible for the same material to provide evidence against two different sets of criteria and preparing evidence against one set of criteria may well involve demonstration of competence against another set of criteria. For example, the very act of completing a portfolio of largely written evidence against the outcomes for components 2 and 3 of the qualification will surely require demonstration of competence against component 1 outcomes for fundamental learning.

Focus on university level learning

Unisa’s standard RPL policy document was premised on students applying for RPL against normal university courses, whereas 108 credits of the 240 credit NPDE programme can be offered at Level 4, which is pre-university level. This is particularly the case with respect to the fundamental learning component.

Cost

Unisa’s standard RPL policy attaches a cost to the RPL process which reflects the amount of work involved. The cost is approximately **b** of the standard course fee for the portfolio course and then **a** for the actual assessment for each module: for ten modules this amounts to a significant sum. However, as indicated above, the Department of Education had warned that providers would need to absorb the cost of the RPL processes themselves since the funding made available in the form of national bursaries would not cover more than two years of tuition per educator. Given that the institution receives no subsidy for modules that students do not take as a result of getting RPL nor for the RPL process itself, and given that the NPDE is aimed at underqualified educators who, by virtue of both

their profession and lack of qualified status earn very little, it was therefore necessary to consider a model for managing the RPL process that would be equally rigorous but less costly.

3.4.5 How does Unisa attempt to meet the challenge?

For the short-term, it has been recommended to Faculty that the Unisa NPDE should be treated as a special target for RPL purposes and that the following principles should apply for RPL of REQV11 candidates:

- RPL against programme outcomes (with module outcomes reflected against programme outcomes)
- that RPL be in the form of an extension of the existing integrated NPDE portfolio and that the extended portfolio will provide sufficient evidence of competence in the areas covered by the modules being RPLed
- that direct classroom observation and interviews be used for borderline cases only
- that the RPL assessment process should be decentralised and completed by the NPDE tutors; NPDE tutors will (1) in the role of RPL advisors give guidance to RPL candidates and (2) in the role of RPL assessors do RPL assessment subject to the understanding that:
- the Faculty of Education has to (1) verify the selection of candidates for the RPL NDPE modules; (2) ensure that assessors will be trained through the Office for Experiential Learning and that (3) Faculty will moderate at least 15% of the RPL Portfolio assignments (during the portfolio presentation process): and
- that the Office for Experiential Learning will verify the process as implemented by the NPDE staff (e.g: student guidelines, criteria, assessment report format) and also
- that the Office for Experiential Learning will do the RPL registration and the processing of the RPL results.
- finally, that there be no additional cost to teacher-learners for the RPL process.

In the medium term to long term, it will be necessary to give thought to the structure of the curriculum itself. Between CHE, the HEQC, the SGB, SAQA, the ELRC, SACE, the DoE and providers, it will be necessary to resolve the confusion between professional development and academic achievement at FET level.

It might be in the interests of all stakeholders to consider an NPDE curriculum comprising 120 credits of new learning and a compulsory portfolio development programme, weighted at 120 credits, which all educators complete over a two-year period. Thought will also need to be given to the needs of candidates, especially national bursary holders, who are judged not yet competent. Such a judgement implies the need for remedial support, but there does not seem to be funding available to cover the cost of this further study.

3.5 Portfolio development

As noted above, all teacher-learners on the NPDE programme are required to develop an integrated assessment portfolio and some students need to compile an additional RPL portfolio. While tutorial letters 303 and 305 for 2003 contain some guidelines, there are only two sessions formally built into the NPDE programme to assist with portfolio development. This comes at the end of year one with a mock review process and again at the end of year two when completed portfolios are submitted for a self-, peer- and tutor assessment process for final marks. The programme needs to offer more explicit guidance with regard to the development of learner portfolios and to ensure that these are linked with the DAS and SACE processes so that the resulting product will have a dual purpose and teacher-learners will be more likely to commit time and effort to the task.

3.6 Tutor recruitment, training and development

All tutors for the NPDE programme are required to meet the following criteria:

- professional and academic qualifications of REV14 or above
- teacher training, ABET or previous tutoring experience or be in a position in which they provide a professional leadership role for other educators whether formal e.g. HoD, Principal or informal e.g. leading an in-school curriculum development team
- must be mobile

- must have some experience of OBE
- preference given to tutors able to code-switch appropriately.

Tutors for the NPDE were recruited from ex-Sacte, Sacol and Promat Colleges, personal contacts and through advertisements placed in the national press.

As noted in 3.1.15, some tutor training, moderation and development is costed into the programme but this is considered insufficient. On the other hand, in 2003 many tutors were in their second year of tutoring and so would have received on average 5 days of training over the two-year period. There is an obvious tension between training and monitoring tutors adequately and containing costs to keep the programme affordable. Appendix D contains a sample of an observation report on an NPDE contact session led by a tutor.

In general, it is felt that tutors play an essential motivational and guidance role in the NPDE programme but are not necessarily appropriate assessors. Stricter selection and moderation is suggested for 2004 and beyond.

3.7 Conclusion

There is sufficient evidence to conclude that in terms of both design and delivery, the Unisa NPDE programme has sought to provide a learning and teaching experience that takes cognisance of the broad underpinning issues discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. However, there are clearly some tensions between the policy in theory and the practice in reality. Cost is clearly a constraining issue, but nonetheless it seems clear that some materials require re-thinking and that tutors, who are integral to the quality of delivery of the programme, need more systematic training, ongoing support and monitoring.

In addition, portfolios play a central role in the assessment of teacher-learner's performance and it will be necessary both to monitor carefully the processes of portfolio evaluation as they unfold and to provide teacher-learners with more structured support in the compilation of their portfolios.