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

The Unknown Citizen

(To JS/07/M/378
This Marble Monument
Is Erected by the State)

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be

One against whom there was no official complaint,

And all the reports on his conduct agree

That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint.

For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.

Except for the War till the day he retired

He worked in a factory and never got fired,

But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.

Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,

For his union reports that he paid his dues,

(Our report on his union shows it was sound)

And our Social Psychology workers found

That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.

The Press are convinced that he bought a newspaper every day

And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.

Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,

And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.

Both Producers Research and High Grade Living declare

He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Instalment Plan

And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,

A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.

Our researchers into Public Opinion are content

That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;

When there was peace he was for peace; when there was war, he went.

He was married and added five children to the population,

Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation.

And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.

Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:

Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

<div align="right">W H Auden (1907 – 1973)</div>

The way in which a distance education programme is managed and administered probably has as much of an impact on student performance as the learning package itself. Many students come to distance education only because they have not been able to access full-time study, for a variety of reasons. If it is difficult to get reliable information and advice; if registration processes are lengthy or alienating and if materials arrive late or are incomplete, students may well drop out of the programme even before they have actually started to study. Attention therefore needs to be given to the systems that underpin the learning environment and the extent to which these are appropriate for the target audience and to the programme's intended outcomes.

This chapter therefore begins by offering a basic understanding of systems theory and applies the ideas of Bronfenbrenner to attempt to gain insight into the nature of the rural environments from which NPDE teacher-learners are typically drawn. It then explores a distance education systems model and tries to link this to an understanding of the dynamics that need to be addressed in offering distance education in a rural context. Finally, the chapter considers the actual experiences of the NPDE with respect to the following issues:

- Programme management

- Programme costing

- Impact and throughput analysis.

4.1   Systems theory and rural contexts

Systems theory is posited on the notion that people do not exist as isolated beings but rather as members of social groups within different systems. Often, people play different roles within these different systems and the different roles and systems will impact on one another. Failure to take

account of the interconnectedness of these different systems in planning is in fact planning to fail.

As Fullan(1993 in Gultig et al. 1999:83) in writing on school reform notes:

> ***Change is systemic***
> *Political pressures combine with the segmented, unco-ordinated nature of educational organizations to produce a 'project mentality'. A steady stream of innovations – such as co-operative learning, effective schools research, classroom management – come and go. Not only do they fail to leave much of a trace, but they also leave teachers and the public with a growing cynicism that innovation is marginal and politically motivated.*
>
> *What does it mean to work systemically? There are two aspects:*
> *Reform must focus on the **development and interrelationships of all the main components of the system simultaneously** – curriculum, teaching and teacher development, community, student support systems, and so on.*
> *Reform must focus not just on structure, policy, and regulations, but on deeper issues of the **culture of the system**.*
>
> <div align="right">[Own emphasis.]</div>

The first paragraph of the above quotation points to the need to address attitudinal issues in relation to education innovation. If the intention is to introduce something new, it will be necessary to create a culture that is receptive to the innovation, and will not see it as just another passing fad.

The second part of the quotation offers key pointers towards ensuring acceptance and longevity: planning that takes cognisance of the complexity of innovation, in terms of the interrelationship between the many subsystems that make up a particular society; as well as the need to place the innovation within its cultural context. If it is intended to implement something that works and is sustainable, it has to be meaningful for the intended participants and must be driven by their needs, rather than decided for them by 'outsiders'. Overall, as Holmberg (1995) notes, systems thinking can be linked with a holistic approach to educational service provision.

Bronfenbrenner (1979 in Pettigrew and Akhurst 1999:210-225) points out that learners are themselves embedded in several environmental systems which can impact on the quality of their learning. He identifies the following four levels:

- *Microsystem:* immediate family and home environment which can have a direct impact on learning

- *Mesosystem:* system elements which are one step removed from the learner but can have a direct impact on learning e.g. immediate neighbourhood, church, learning centre etc.

- *Exosystem:* the third environmental layer consists of settings that the learner may not experience directly but which might nevertheless impact on the learner, e.g. spouse's place of work, friends of other family members, governmental and non-governmental organisations working in the area

- *Macrosystem:* the cultural or sociopolitical context consisting of dominant beliefs, values, customs, laws and resources of a particular culture.

It is important to spend some time thinking about this because traditionally in South Africa, distance education interventions have been characterised by very low throughput and high drop out rates often related to institutions' inability to grapple with the **individual needs** of learners. High drop out figures in distance education interventions are often associated with family, workplace, financial and other militating environmental factors which traditionally DE institutions have not seen as being their concern to address (SAIDE[2] 2000).

What then are the characteristics of rural areas in South Africa that it will be necessary to take into account?

Census 96 offers the following definitions of urban and non-urban areas:

! An urban area is one which has been legally proclaimed as being urban. Such areas include towns, cities and metropolitan areas.

! A semi-urban area is not part of a legally proclaimed urban area, but adjoins it. Informal settlements are examples of these types of areas. In this publication semi-urban areas have been included with urban areas.

! All other areas are classified as non-urban or rural, including commercial farms, small settlements, rural villages and other areas which are further away from towns and cities.

Rural areas in South Africa tend to have the following characteristics:

- geographical isolation from other communities and services

- poor infrastructure – often few or no permanent roads, lack of piped water and sewerage, lack of electricity, lack of access to telecommunications

- strong community identity – more emphasis on collective rather than individual needs and processes and on direct human contact rather than other forms of communication

- high rates of unemployment and illiteracy

- disproportionate numbers of very young and very old people as the economically active youth and adults increasingly migrate to the urban areas in search of work

- high numbers of people living at or below a subsistence level standard of living

- higher mortality rates and health problems related to malnutrition, malaria, HIV-AIDs and lack of access to medical facilities and medicine.

Applying Bronfenbrenner's model, the following barriers to learning success can be anticipated:

- at the *microsystemic* level potential learners whose home environment may not be conducive to formal learning: the home environment may well lack stimulating sources of information such as books, radio and TV; there may be few role models within the home able to offer encouragement and support to those who may wish to learn; the demands of basic day-to-day survival may militate against uptake of learning opportunities that are not seen to have immediate benefits in improving the quality of life or which bear financial implications;

- at the *mesosystemic* level, there is likely to be a similar lack of access to information; it may well be that potential learners have to walk long distances to access even potential learning sites such as an existing primary school, church or clinic; related to this, might be limited access to potential role models and tutors/mentors – it is often the case, for example, that un- and underqualified teachers will be concentrated in rural areas as their better qualified colleagues migrate towards urban areas; traditional practices, such as initiation schools, are likely to have a greater impact on the "academic" year;

- at the *exosystemic* level, the remoteness and lack of infrastructure is likely to limit the number of individuals and organisations able and willing to work in and create development opportunities in

rural areas; relatives who have migrated to urban areas in search of work may well have left their young children with their grandparents in rural areas, placing an even greater burden on already impoverished rural homes; there may be a tendency for those who left rural areas to look down on those they left behind, thus creating a misplaced sense of inferiority among members of rural communities, and hence a lack of motivation to engage with educational and other development opportunities;

- at the *macrosystemic* level, there will be questions about whether the rhetoric about rural development can and will be manifested in action, with the mobilisation of resources and the creation of incentives for rural development initiatives.
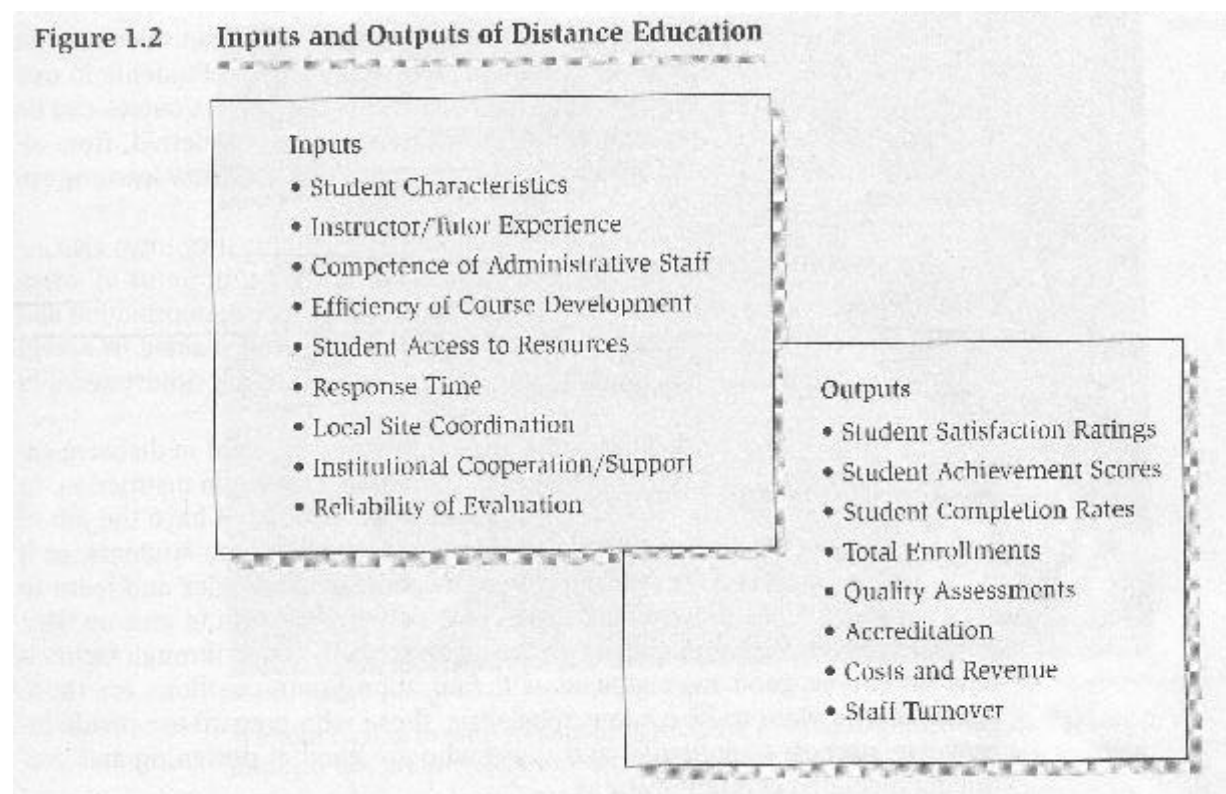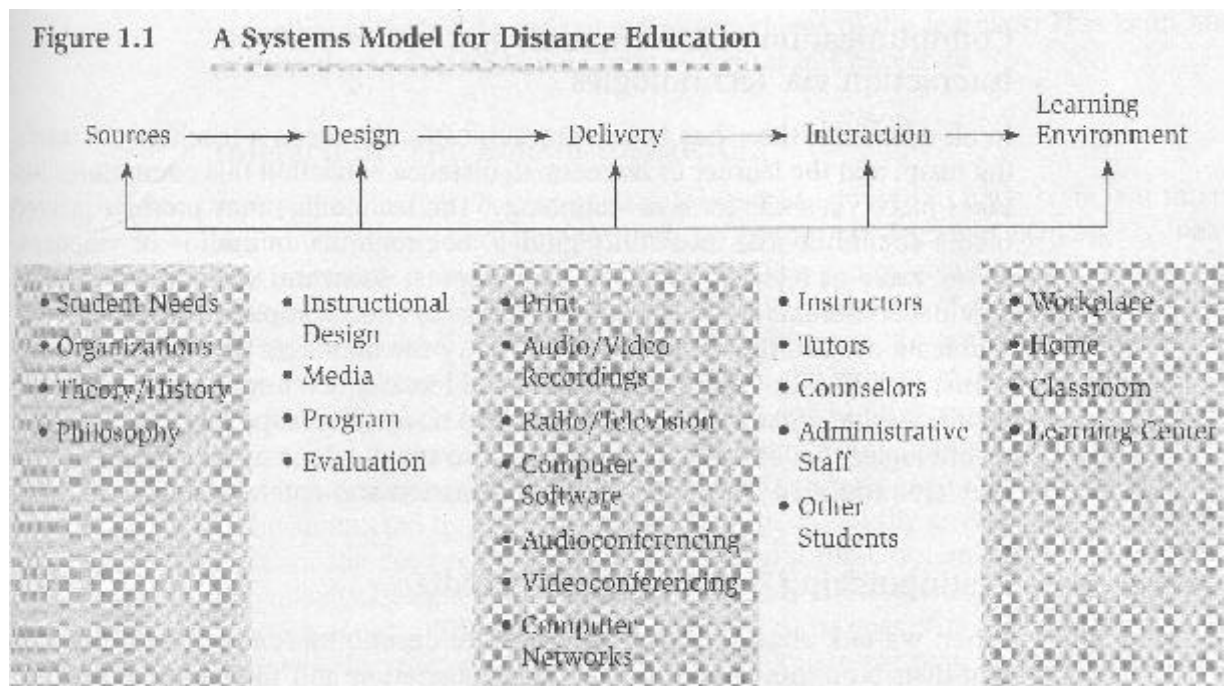
Offset against these potential barriers is that a teacher is more likely to be a community leader and any programme which offers the opportunity for advancement and recognition may be more eagerly taken up. An existing community spirit may more easily be manifested in a professional community of learning and practice.

4.2   Systems theory and distance education

Distance education has been hailed as one means of opening access to meaningful educational opportunities for people in rural areas (and others, of course).   Moore and Kearsley (1996:5) define a **Distance Education (DE) system** in particular as follows:

> *A distance education system consists of all the component processes that make up distance education, including learning, teaching, communication, design, and management, and even such less obvious components as history and institutional philosophy. Within each of these broadly named components are subsystems …While we may choose to study each of these systems separately, we must also try to understand their inter-relationships.*

They illustrate these sub-systems as follows (1996:9,15)

Figure 1.1   A Systems Model for Distance Education

Sources ⟶ Design ⟶ Delivery ⟶ Interaction ⟶ Learning Environment

Sources	Design	Delivery	Interaction	Learning Environment
• Student Needs	• Instructional Design	• Print	• Instructors	• Workplace
• Organizations	• Media	• Audio/Video Recordings	• Tutors	• Home
• Theory/History	• Program	• Radio/Television	• Counselors	• Classroom
• Philosophy	• Evaluation	• Computer Software	• Administrative Staff	• Learning Center
		• Audioconferencing	• Other Students	
		• Videoconferencing		
		• Computer Networks		

Figure 1.2   Inputs and Outputs of Distance Education

Inputs
- Student Characteristics
- Instructor/Tutor Experience
- Competence of Administrative Staff
- Efficiency of Course Development
- Student Access to Resources
- Response Time
- Local Site Coordination
- Institutional Cooperation/Support
- Reliability of Evaluation

Outputs
- Student Satisfaction Ratings
- Student Achievement Scores
- Student Completion Rates
- Total Enrollments
- Quality Assessments
- Accreditation
- Costs and Revenue
- Staff Turnover

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The former Centre for Education Technology and Distance Education (CETDE:1998) divides the education and training system in South Africa into three broad sub-systems:

- the physical system

- the management and administration system

- the learning systems,

and then provides 13 guiding criteria for the provision of quality distance education:

- Policy and planning

- Learners

- Programme development

- Course design

- Course materials

- Assessment

- Learner Support

- Human Resource strategy

- Management and Administration

- Collaboration and Relationships

- Quality Assurance

- Information and Marketing

- Results.

It is not difficult to see the relationships between these different perspectives.

4.3   A systems overview for quality distance education in rural areas

The discussion that follows attempts to draw out some of the implications of the systems theory for distance education provision in general, and then for interventions in rural areas in particular, which is where most NPDE teacher-learners are located..

At the **macrosystemic** level, the emphasis is on creating an enabling environment. Three key systemic needs are highlighted at this level, but not in any particular order of importance since they

need all to be addressed simultaneously:

- *National information and marketing of DE, development, learning and related issues:* Large numbers of South Africa's population still feel marginalised from education provision and wary of distance education approaches, often seen as a second best option because so few learners are prepared for independent study by the formal education system. It is necessary to promote information about educational opportunities and the benefits thereof, and particularly target those who have traditionally been denied access. Advocacy for the NPDE as an opportunity to enjoy success whilst being able to continue to work and earn a salary needs to be emphasised.

- *National policy and planning:* Policy and planning at national level needs to complement the above marketing and information campaign. Policy, including financial policy, should encourage flexible, needs-driven interventions on the one hand but provide quality practices on the other. In particular, funding policy needs to take cognisance of the fact that for quality distance education provision there are high up-front costs and that a distance education system only becomes cost-effective when it can take advantage of economies of scale using courses that have been developed by teams of specialists and which ideally are then taken by many students across a large number of institutions (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). In addition, there needs to be recognition of the fact that policies related to health care, employment opportunities, crime and violence, political stability etc. all impact on education provision.

- *Infrastructural development:* At the heart of good distance education practice is interaction and communication. Thus the quality, extent and accessibility of road, rail and transport systems; electricity and other basic services; telecommunications and postal services will all impact on the extent to which distance education methods will be able to address educational development needs.

At the **mesosystemic level**, the emphasis is upon quality issues at the level of institutional and programme policy, planning, design, development, delivery and review.

The CETDE quality criteria (an updated version of which will be published by Nadeosa in August 2004) should be considered as minimum guidelines in this regard and cannot be considered in

isolation in a kind of checklist fashion, but need to be considered together simultaneously and in a holistic way.

Particular attention needs to be given to learner support practices that are driven by a need to reduce high drop out and low throughput rates. As indicated previously, this implies greater concern with the needs of the individual learner and the various subsystems that might have a direct impact on individual learning, especially given the challenges presented by the lack of infrastructure, financial limitations and the distances between communities in rural areas.

As with any educational provision, decision-making needs to be based on sound learning and teaching theory. How to tackle the distance element is actually a secondary question, which can be informed by specific distance education theory such as Moore's (1993; 1996) notion of 'transactional distance' and Keegan's (1993; 1996) analysis of different distance education models.

At the **microsystemic level** the focus is on the interactions between a particular cohort of learners, educators, administrators and courseware. There is clearly a tension between the macro-level concern for creating a system that is cost-effective by achieving economies of scale through centralised production of quality courseware that can be used by large numbers of learners and, on the other hand, the need to nurture higher retention and throughput through addressing the needs of individual learners. This is where learner support practices become crucial in creating possibilities for flexible and varied mediation of generic materials. It also points to a possible key role for computer-based technology that allows for the possibility for a certain amount of adaptation of generically produced materials at the level of local implementation.

4.4   Implications for distance education interventions in rural areas

Young et al (1980:80) pointed out that "For millions of people, education means primary school". Research into the potential of distance education for rural areas undertaken by SAIDE for the Kellogg Foundation suggests that this perception is largely true in rural areas of South Africa even today.

Until the, fairly recent, legislation making schooling compulsory, many parents either did not send

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their children to school at all or allowed them to drop out after acquiring at best a very low level of functional literacy and numeracy. Anything more than this was seen as unnecessary; as adding no value to the lives of a rural community. Clearly any educational intervention must be seen to be driven by the rural development needs identified at the local level.

Although more children are now going to school, many adults still see education as something for school children, with men in particular choosing not to be involved even where opportunities are made available, and many women still being denied access by men in traditional patriarchal systems. Even where educational opportunities of various kinds are taken up in rural areas, be they informal sewing programmes offered by a local resident or formal literacy programmes offered by a visiting NGO, the dominant model, both in terms of expectations and actual delivery, is contact-based and teacher-centred. This again points to the need for a marketing campaign that illustrates practically some of the advantages of education offered through distance methods and hence a probable process of weaning people off of contact support onto more independent, resource-based learning.

Young et al go on to note that distance education practices in rural areas tend to have been aimed at developing literacy and agricultural extension. They point out that in an environment characterised by limited infrastructure and low levels of literacy, the radio can be a prime medium for effecting change:

> *… in the last few decades the most important step taken has been to connect radio with organised but informal groups. the radio is used to arouse interest and to convey information; the information and the ideas are then discussed by group members; often the local extension officer serves as a group leader. The combination seems to be a powerful one. It allows the technical knowledge of the teachers or experts, usually from outside, to be combined with and adapted to the local knowledge and environment of the students or forum members.* (1980:87)

To date the Unisa NPDE has not made significant use of radio, although NPDE tutors have appeared on local radio talk shows in Limpopo Province.

Young et al conclude as follows:

> *… we have learnt of the importance of personal advice and human contact, and the limitations placed upon them by having too few people, too little training and too much bureacracy. … we have learnt that study groups, without expert instructors, can become the interpreters and users of new knowledge, but that such a process requires support and servicing beyond the capacity of any individual institution … They also illustrate the limitations of private organisations … without government support and commitment.* (1980:103)

The foregoing discussion provides a backdrop for reflection on the pecular experiences of the Unisa NPDE programme, which was designed to meet the needs of underqualified teachers drawn mostly from rural areas.

4.5   The Unisa NPDE experience

4.5.1 Programme management

As reported in Chapter 1, the Unisa NPDE Programme was conceived by a programme committee comprising representatives of Unisa, Sacte, Sacol and SAIDE. This programme committee was effectively disbanded by the end of 2002 when the Sacte/Sacol incorporation process came to an end. In November 2003, the NPDE programme which had been loosely associated with the Department of Secondary Teacher Education, was formally located in the Department of Further Teacher Education.

In 2002, the programme was staffed by a programme manager seconded from SAIDE on an 80% of work-time basis, a full-time materials developer seconded from Sacol and for part of the year a part-time administration assistant. Approximately 60 part-time tutors helped to deliver the programme to 2252 registered students involved in the same core programme of 5 first year modules.

In 2003, the programme was staffed by the same programme manager on an 80% work time secondment, 10 academic coordinators, an adminimistration assistant and from April 2003 an

administration manager.

Some 90 part-time tutors were involved in offering the NPDE programme to 2318 students studying 39 different modules in two cohorts (first and second year) and in three main groupings (Gauteng bursary holders, Mpumalanga bursary holders, self-financed students).

Detailed below are the agreed job descriptions of these staff.

A: Programme manager

Currently a SAIDE secondment but a permanent post was advertised towards the end of 2003.

S/he will be expected to

1.   Identify, lead and manage a team for the development and delivery of the Unisa NPDE.

2.   With the team, and in cooperation with relevant authorities at UNISA, develop, implement and continually refine strategic and operational plans for the delivery of the NPDE.

3.   Develop and maintain sound working relationships with the Faculty of Education and relevant subject departments, so that there is an evolving coherence between the various other Unisa teacher education and development programmes and the NPDE.

4.   Be responsible for quality assurance of the programme so that the programme not only meets the requirements of the relevant ETQA, but is delivered in ways that are continually self-improving.

5.   With the NPDE team, the education faculty at large, and other agencies where appropriate, design, implement and manage a research and evaluation process for the NPDE.

6.   Engage with the national and provincial Departments of Education, the ELRC, SAIDE and other relevant bodies with respect to financial and other support for various aspects of the programme.

7.   Engage in imaginative and businesslike ways with other providers wanting to use Unisa materials, or wanting to collaborate with Unisa in the delivery of the NPDE.

8.   Coordinate the marketing of the programme.

9.   Coordinate the smooth integration of ex SACTE and SACOL students into the NPDE.

10. Support the development of the proposed Centre for Teacher Development and School Governance at Unisa.

B. Programme administrators

One senior, mobile administrator and one more office-bound junior administrator sharing the following responsibilities.

Key Performance Areas:

To assist the NPDE programme manager with the following:

- improving communication between relevant stakeholders
- maintaining and expanding the Faculty tutor database
- communicating and liaising with centre managers
- processing of tutor and centre claims and necessary follow up
- logistical planning for expansion of the NPDE programme
- quality assurance of contact support sessions.

Expansion of duties:

- improving communication between relevant stakeholders
  - N identify and build a contact database for tutors, centre managers, district, provincial and national education authorities, ELRC and union representatives with a stake in the NPDE
  - N institute a monthly fax newsletter between the above role-players
  - N participate in provincial and steering committee planning and evaluation committees
  - N respond positively and helpfully to telephonic enquiries of an administrative nature from various stakeholders including learners
- maintaining and expanding the Faculty tutor database
  - N ensure that there are sufficient tutors to meet the programme requirements
  - N ensure that for each tutor there is a complete CV and properly completed and current contract and letters of appointment and acceptance
- communicating and liaising with centre managers

- N build a database of available centres and contact details for appropriate managers to meet the expanding needs of the NPDE programme
- N ensure that centres are aware of contact session schedules and that they are open on the days and during the hours required
- N ensure that sufficient rooms are allocated and that the rooms are communicated to tutors timeously and signposted at the entrance to the venue at the time of the contact session
- processing of tutor and centre claims and necessary follow up
  - N ensure that invoices are submitted as per contractual agreement, that claims are genuine and that they are processed in a timeous fashion
- logistical planning for expansion of the NPDE programme
  - N plan for the roll out of the programme which will necessitate making provision for multiple cohorts of learners undertaking different elective options and larger numbers of learners
- quality assurance of contact support sessions
  - N visit centres during contact sessions to assess the quality both of the centre facilities, the possibilities for expansion, ease of access issues and the quality of the contact support provided.

The above duties must be seen as a minimum set of performance criteria. The Programme Administrator must be flexible enough to support the overall development of the NPDE as a quality programme.

C.   Ten (10) academic course coordinators

Course co-ordinators were needed in the following specialist areas:

- Foundation Phase
- Intermediate Phase
- Senior Phase: Eight learning areas.

Table 18:   Responsibilities of academic coordinators in 2004

•	Contribute to the evolving vision of the NPDE	
•	Materials coordination in a specific area, including induction and support of new writers and tutors, review and planning meetings	6 days
•	Annual review of study materials to ensure they are contemporary and meet the needs of the NPDE	6 days
•	Update tutorial letter 101/102/103 etc. information and assignments annually x 6	30 days
•	Respond to learners' academic enquiries that cannot be answered by tutors	10 days

•	Induct, organise and monitor tutors and tutoring sessions:
	    guidelines for contact sessions
	    occasional visits to contact sessions
	    assignment marking memoranda
	    moderation of 10% of assignments marked (bottom, middle, top)
	    RPL and portfolio assessment processes
		30 days

•	**Tutor centralised contact sessions for 60 second year students including marking of 600 assignments**	40 days
•	**Mark assignments sent in by correspondence students**	8 days
•	Undertake some school visits for support and quality assurance purposes	6 days
•	Write additional tutorial letters as required	
•	Write main exam paper/memo annually and have it moderated x 6	15 days
•	Write supplementary exam paper/memo annually and have it moderated x 6	15 days
•	Organise exam marking sessions: train and monitor markers x 2	6 days
•	Participate in portfolio/integrated assessment	3 days
•	**Publish at least one article per year related t the NPDE/field of specialisation.**	10 days
		185 days

D.   Tutors (numbers proportionate to enrolment)

Delivery of the programme is through study materials and contact sessions. Some centralised contact sessions can be tutored by academic co-ordinators, but the Academic Coordinators (ACs) will not be able to tutor all the students in a decentralised system involving all nine provinces and SADC countries.

As student numbers grow, it is inevitable that the ACs will spend increasingly more of their time on training and monitoring and correspondingly less on direct tutoring.

As student numbers increase, it is likely that some tutors will be asked to assume an additional co-ordination/management role for a tutor team or a contact support centre.

Responsibilities:

- Facilitate contact sessions according to guidelines: must model appropriate practice
- Mark assignments in teams according to memoranda and submit samples for moderation
- Attend training sessions as required
- Participate in exam marking and/or portfolio/integrated assessment if required
- First line of enquiry for learners' queries locally: refer to course co-ordinator/ administration where unable to answer (available during one mid-week evening).
- Track learner attendance, completion of assignments and assignment performance and follow up telephonically on anybody who looks in danger of dropping out.

E. Tutor /Centre managers (numbers proportionate to enrolment)

Responsibilities:

- As for tutors; and
- Responsibility for a team of 10: training, co-ordinating marking sessions, moderating, ensuring marking deadlines and standards met;
- Training with course co-ordinators;
- Involved in ongoing programme evaluation, including school visits.

It is notable that in 2002 and 2003, the Unisa NPDE programme was staffed entirely by contract appointments. With the exception of the Programme manager whose contract expires in October 2004, all the other staff members' contracts were due to expire at the end of 2003.

This raised questions about meeting commitments to Departments of Education and to pipeline learners in 2004 and beyond. In Mpumalanga, in particular, it was made clear that there would be no new provincial bursary students for 2004 unless Unisa staff were directly involved in tutoring the programme.

The following section includes a SWOT analysis for the Unisa NPDE programme based on experience in 2002-3.

4.5.2   SWOT analysis

A   **Strengths**

- Unisa is the oldest DE institution offering NPDE and has a generally well-established reputation for high academic standards.
- The Unisa NPDE has the support of established sub-systems for registration, despatch, assignments, examinations and research.
- Unisa offers the broadest NPDE curriculum which, from 2004, covers all eight learning areas in the senior phase.
- By the end of 2003, Unisa will have good quality study material for all the modules that comprise the programme.
- Unisa has offered NPDE to over 2000 learners and most have had a positive experience, with 66% qualifying from the first year programme to enter the second year programme.
- Unisa has established a network of decentralised contact support centres and developed a database of potential tutors.
- Unisa has established a pilot project in Botswana and enjoys the support of the Ministry of Education in Botswana. There are potentially 10 000 NPDE students for the Unisa programme in Botswana.
- Other SADC countries have requested Unisa's assistance with teacher development.
- Unisa has an RPL policy already in place.

- Reflective practice is an integral design feature of the Unisa NPDE as reflected in a paper trail of reporting on identification of weaknesses and action taken.
- The Unisa NPDE is staffed by a representative team with diverse talents and skills and a willingness to accommodate the needs of its clients.

B.   Weaknesses

- Unisa's size means that it is not able to react quickly to changing needs.
- Unisa's systems are premised on individual self-financed students whereas the NPDE requires group reporting.
- Unisa has lost the support of the provincial departments of education in Gauteng and Mpumalanga (although the latter could be resolved in 2004).
- Unisa's systems are based on WordPerfect products whereas the ELRC and the Department of Education work with MSWord products.
- 17 students have complained about the programme in KwaZulu-Natal.
- Some NPDE tutors and centre managers have proved occasionally unreliable.
- There have been some breakdowns in Unisa's standard sub-systems: a key problem seems to be with the fact that bursary-holders are registered on the system as owing fees.

C.   Opportunities

- There are still approximately 44 000 teachers in South Africa who need to be upgraded.
- There are similar teacher upgrading needs in other SSA countries where Unisa enjoys a good reputation for quality e.g. Botswana ($\pm$ 10 000), Namibia ($\pm$ 8 000), Swaziland ($\pm$ 2 000).
- Unisa's NPDE model is highly replicable and could reach those areas which are currently under-serviced by the existing preferred providers, especially in Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern-Cape.
- From the time of writing, Unisa has a person favourably disposed towards the Unisa NPDE programme based in the teacher directorate of KwaZulu-Natal.

- There have been complaints from provincial DoEs regarding the NPDE services provided by

some of the other providers: there appears room for negotiation regarding DoE expectations and needs.

- The Unisa NPDE programme has established a paper trail of reporting to show how it has attempted to meet changing needs and to solve emerging problems.

D.   Threats

- Potchefstroom University and Technikon Northern Gauteng have both marketed themselves aggressively and appear to have been more flexible in catering for provincial DoE needs and expectations.

- The University of Natal has developed some excellent material (although it has the drawback of being based on a 16-credit model).

- There are some very negative perceptions of the Unisa NPDE programme among some (but not all) district co-ordinators in Gauteng/Mpumalanga.

- There is lack of clarity around articulation within the Faculty between the NPDE and the BEd and ACE programmes.

- The Unisa NPDE lacks a workable entry level programme for potential students who lack professional qualifications. Most do not qualify to register for the first year of a BEd but Unisa does not offer a separate Certificate in Education programme. This is one area in which Potchefstroom appears to have outperformed Unisa and has been contributory to the loss of enthusiasm generated earlier in 2002.

- There is continuing confusion between the general NPDE and the Department of English/READ NPDE programme.

- NPDE staff members are temporary contract appointments and do not have the same access to Unisa's sub-systems and office/research facilities as full-time appointments.

4.5.3   Particular problems and suggested solutions

Discussions with Gauteng and Mpumalanga Department of Education representatives, as well as letters from students, indicates a high level of dissatisfaction and/or queries regarding the following aspects of the Unisa NPDE programme:

A.   Centres for 2003

B.   Incorrect year marks

C.   Supplementary examinations

D.   De-registered students (and threats thereof)

E.   Selection, training and monitoring of tutors

F.   Registration processes

G.   Unavailability of programme manager

H.   Withheld results

I.   Final results

J.   Subsidy of 2nd year self-financed students in Gauteng

K.   RPL processes

L.   Exam duration

M.   Duplication of modules.

A.   Centres for 2003

The Unisa NPDE programme budget is premised on an average tutor : learner ratio of 1 : 30.

The profile of specialist areas in the NPDE as a whole is:

•   Foundation Phase 50%

•   Intermediate Phase 30%

•   Senior Phase 20%.

This means that in an average group of 30 learners:

•   15 will teach in the FP

•   9 will teach in the IP

•   6 will teach in the SP (and specialise in two of the six learner areas available).

This means that in general, tutorial groups which were viable in the first year of the programme are no longer financially viable in the second year of the programme. It has been necessary, therefore, with IP and SP groups in particular, to centralise the tutorial provision for 2003. However, the programme management is constantly analysing the registration data and attendance figures to optimise the decentralised support.

There was an additional problem in that tutorial letter 301 (written in August 2002) outlined the proposed year programme for 2003 assuming registration would close in February and contact sessions would start in March. Despite the fact that no venues were indicated in tutorial letter 301, some students went to centres used in 2002 on the dates mentioned in tutorial letter 301. As soon as the NPDE programme manager had agreed with the provincial departments of education to extend registration to the end of March and to postpone the start of contact sessions to April, venues were booked and a tutorial letter 304 with revised dates and venues was sent to students. Some students say they did not receive this tutorial letter but despatch said that it had been issued.

Solution: tutorial letter 301 for 2004 and beyond should not indicate dates or venues for contact sessions because similar delays are anticipated each year due to uncertainty with provincial bursary processes.

B.   Incorrect year marks

It is true that some students had incorrect year marks due to the fact that not all of their assignments were recorded on the system. It should be noted that this circumstance applied to a minority of students on the programme.

There are three main causes of this:
*   late submission of assignments by students (main reason)
*   late submission of marks by tutors (true of four tutors)
*   lost mark sheets (at leasst two were possibly lost).

The primary cause of the missing year marks for some candidates was the late submission of assignments. Due to the late start to the programme in 2002, the programme management allowed some leeway regarding assignment deadlines. However, by the end of August 2002, many students had submitted less than half the expected number of assignments.

A report on this issue was delivered to the ELRC, and the Department of Education at both national and provincial level. Although the programme continued to accept late assignments through October, the year mark programme was uploaded at the end of September in preparation for the capturing of examination marks, and so some of these late submissions had not been captured on the system by the time the results were released.

In four cases tutors were remiss in submitting assignment marks late, and in these cases the programme manager reprimanded the tutors concerned and manually submitted corrected year marks.

In one or two cases, year marks were received but the marksheets appeared to have been mislaid in the system. Whilst this is regrettable, given that the NPDE programme alone processed close to 20 000 assignment marks, it is inevitable that on rare occasions things do go astray.

As soon as it became clear from student enquiries that there was a problem, copies of marksheets were collected from tutors and the situation corrected.

All students who queried their year marks and who were able to produce evidence that the assignments had been completed and marked, were assisted with corrected year marks and with the re-registration process. For queries on results from October 2002/January 2003, this process was continued through to the end of March 2004.

Solution: Due to problems with the year marks and subsequent delays in issuing of results, see 2 below, registration was extended till end March 2003/4.

A letter has been sent each year to all students and faxed to NPDE co-ordinators outlining the revised programme for the year. In this revised programme, fixed deadlines have been set for the submission of assignments and for the return of marked assignments to students. Tutors will be regularly monitored with regard to the deadlines for submission of marked assignments and penalised financially for missing any of these deadlines. The tracking of assignment submission and marking needs to be watched carefully as it may be necessary to revert to Unisa's standard practice of centralised submission and marking.

C.   Supplementary examinations

Unisa's normal policy regarding supplementary examinations is that students should obtain at least 45% on their first attempt in order to qualify for a supplementary. For the NPDE programme, it was requested that the sub-minimum should not apply in 2002.

Students therefore received two letters from the Unisa examination section at the ened of 2002: the first based on Unisa's standard policy in this regard and the second inviting students to write supplementary examinations even in instances where they would not normally qualify. Both letters were despatched more than two weeks before the first supplementary examination on 15th January, 2003.

Unisa feels that it cannot be held responsible for postal delays given that an ordinary letter should not take more than three days to reach anywhere in the country. However, a few students did encounter problems and were assisted with alternative supplementary examinations and oral examinations during the exam period.

Just over 4000 supplementary papers were written during the second half of January 2003 and the results of the supplementary examinations were released on 27 February, 2003. Given the extended registration period, 2nd year students should not have encountered any further problems with registering for their second year of study. Mr Martin Van Staden (Student Affairs) requested that a second set of partially completed registration forms be sent out to Mpumalanga students.

Where students wrote supplementary examinations unnecessarily, and the fault seemed to lie with Unisa, a request was made and implemented that the students be refunded their supplementary exam fees.

Solution: Tutors will track assignment submissions for those students who attend contact sessions and students will be required to sign on submission of their assignments. All assignment results should be in and correct year marks uploaded before the start of exams. Results for the NPDE exams in 2003 will be released earlier. Students who wish to query their results should ideally do so before registering for the supplementary exams.

As a result of a Tuition Commitee of Faculty decision, a zero sub-minimum will not apply for the NPDE from 2003 onwards.

D.   De-registered students (and threats thereof)

The entry requirements for the NPDE are spelt out in the qualification as registered on the NQF and are not set by Unisa. The entry requirements are as follows:

1.   Students must be practising teachers in their specialist phase

2.   Students must have at least Grade 10

3.   Students must have at least a PTC, and STC or 120 credits of an uncompleted 3-year teacher's diploma.

Despite these requirements, some students who came to Unisa via the provincialised bursary process were inappropriately qualified. Some already had degrees, others had incomplete or no teacher qualifications. Most of these students were de-registered before Unisa submitted its claim for payment of bursary funds to the ELRC and the Department of Education.

Students whom the provincial departments insisted had the necessary qualifications but who had not supplied all the necessary documentation were allowed to register, and given time in which to furnish the necessary evidence. Only if that evidence was not forthcoming were they then de-registered or barred from registering for their second year of study. Unisa has a statutory obligation in this regard.

If the student had completed the first year of study, then no refund of fees would be due. If the student was de-registered during the course of the year, then Unisa's standard cancellation policy would apply. Both the ELRC and the Department of Education received copies of this policy.

Examples of de-registered students and advice/explanation offered:

1.   Std No. 3425/820/5

        This student needed one more module SCPA 10-4 to complete her PTC but withdrew from the examination.

        Since the module is no longer offered, she should apply for RPL for this module so that she could re-register for the NPDE programme.

2.   Std No. 3426/321/7

        This student had a Certificate for Assistants in Pre-School Institutions. The Department of Education informed Unisa that they did not recognise this as an REQV11 qualification so Unisa was not allowed to register her for the NPDE since she did not meet the entry requirements.

A further complication was that during the course of their year of study, bursary holders received several standard letters threatening that they would be de-registered for non-payment of fees, despite the fact that payment was not the students' responsibility.

Solution: In subsequent years, students will not be allowed to register until they provide all the necessary documentation. A process must be found to de-link bursary students from computer-generated fees-demand letters.

E.   Selection, training and monitoring of tutors

All the tutors on the NPDE programme meet the following requirements:

1.   Educational qualifications of at least REQV14

2.   Teacher education, tutoring, ABET or staff development experience

3.   Mobile and able to travel to and from designated centres

4.   Familiarity with OBE

5.   Preference is given to equity appointments and multi-lingual tutors able to code-switch to assist students better during the contact sessions.

Tutors for the NPDE programme are not supposed to teach the content of the modules. The tutor's role is to orientate students to the programme/module and the assessment practice and to facilitate discussion of any problem areas.

All tutors on the NPDE programme in 2002 were involved in 3 training sessions:

1.   Orientation to the programme, the role of the tutor and the first few contact sessions and assignments

2.   Reflection on practice based on observations of contact sessions and a review of the first marked assignments

3.   Training for the marking of exam papers.

Provincial officials were invited to sit in on these workshops as well as NPDE steering committee meetings designed to discuss and solve problems. Mr Khubeka (of GDE) sat in on one of the training sessions in Pretoria and Mrs Pedro (Mr Ntombela's predecessor at GDE) participated in two of the Unisa NPDE steering committee meetings, whilst Ms Mxenge (Mpumalanga DoE) participated in one of these meetings.

In addition, district officials had an open invitation to sit in on contact sessions. Several contact sessions were visited by district officials but no major complaints about the quality of the service provided were directed to the NPDE office. The programme manager also visited several contact sessions in Gauteng and Mpumalanga.

Solution: An open invitation is extended each year to district officials to sit in on contact sessions and to report any irregularities to the NPDE office.

In addition, more sessions will be observed in subsequent years by Unisa academic staff in an effort to ensure consistency in the quality of the service provided.

F.   Registration processes

In 2003, students were able to register in person at Unisa's offices in Pretoria, Nelspruit and Durban or by post. For re-registration, Unisa required a completed registration form, submission of outstanding proof of qualifications, a letter confirming that the student was still in the employ of the department and therefore still eligible for the national bursary and success in at least 3 first year modules.

The NPDE programme management is aware of an incident which took place earlier in 2003 where a district official came in person to try and register students in her district and had an altercation with the registration official concerned.

This was unfortunate, but it is understood that the matter was resolved after the intervention of Mr Van Staden. It is understood that the registration halls at Unisa's main campus service all Unisa students and that there are not designated staff dealing with any particular programme. To ensure that all the correct documentation and information is captured, a particular process needs to be followed. In the incident in question, the district official arrived late in the afternoon, at about 3.30 pm, and wished to register in excess of 30 students and became impatient with the process involved.

Solution: Students should ideally register individually, and in person where possible. If the district official wishes to register a batch of students, they should rather make arrangements with the NPDE office to drop off the necessary paperwork and let the NPDE office call the district official when the process is complete and all the study materials are ready for collection. The process goes much more quickly when the registration forms are correctly completed and the necessary supporting documentation is supplied. Unisa registration staff are involved in ongoing training regarding their interactions with students to try to continually improve communication skills and provide a more supportive service.

G.   Unavailability of programme manager

The current programme manager is seconded to the Unisa NPDE programme from the South African Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE).

Part of the secondment agreement entails that the programme manager will be available for SAIDE and National Association of Distance Education Organisations of South Africa (NADEOSA) duties on average one day a week. Due to the late and uncertain start to the programme in 2002 and lack of certainty about registration numbers through provincial and national bursary processes, it was initially extremely difficult to justify staff appointments for the NPDE programme. However, since December 2002, whenever the programme manager has been out of the office, there has been somebody available to take messages and these are followed up on when the programme manager is back in the office. Due to the high volume of enquiries made, however, the programme manager will usually make only two attempts to return a call not marked as urgent. It is not always possible to get hold of people when returning calls.

From mid January to mid March 2003, the programme manager interacted directly with some 300 students, and while busy with students who had come in person to the NPDE office, would then redirect the telephone for messages to be taken. It should be noted that the cell number used by many students and officials is a personal cell phone and that calls will usually only be returned when the programme manager is back in the office.

If the programme manager is away from the office for more than 1 or 2 days, such as in the period 06 March to 18 March, 2003, arrangements are made for the office to be staffed by another person. Many of the calls that come to the NPDE office are incorrectly directed thus. At Unisa, key sub-systems such as registration, examinations and despatch are handled for all Unisa offerings by specialised staff. NPDE staff do not have access to these sub-systems and can usually only redirect enquiries to the appropriate department.

Solution: For 2003, staff have been appointed to work exclusively on the NPDE programme. This includes an appointment from 01 April of an educational administrator so that the NPDE office will always be staffed. Unisa is about to advertise for a permanent appointment for the post of NPDE programme manager. Key contact details have been supplied to provincial departments of education.

H.   Withheld results

Results are automatically withheld by Unisa's computerised system if the student's account is in arrears. For the NPDE, there is usually one of three main reasons for this:

1.   The student has not yet paid supplementary exam fees

2.   The student registered for the 2nd year of study before the release of the supplementary results

3.   The student's first year fees have not yet been resolved.

In a meeting with Messrs Khubeka and Ntombela of GDE, the following student numbers were given as examples:

3427/087/6 (problem 2: statement of results supplied)

3427/002/7 (problem 2: statement of results supplied)

3427/079/5 (problem 2: statement of results supplied)

3370/222/5 (problem 2: statement of results supplied)

3426/669/0 (problem 2: statement of results supplied)

0421/158/8 (problem 2: statement of results supplied)

3428/756/6 (problem 2: statement of results supplied)

3425/449/8 (problem 2: statement of results supplied)

3427/533/2   (problem 3: the student was not registered as a bursary holder and therefore no claim was made. This student was included in the claim for 2003. A statement of results to date was supplied. The re-registration block was lifted and the student's registration was expedited by faxing the registration form directly to Martin Van Staden).

Once matters like the above are brought to the attention of Mr Van Staden, they can usually be very quickly resolved.

I.   Final results

Unisa's systems are premised on single student registration and reporting. Whilst it is possible to quite quickly provide individualised academic records, this would mean close to a thousand pages for GDE bursary students alone, which is not all that useful.

For the October results, Unisa computer services developed a special report which consolidated the results in the form of an Excel spreadsheet and this was made available to the ELRC and the Department of Education at both national and provincial level.

An updated and final version of this spreadsheet was supplied to the NPDE programme manager on 13/05/03, and analysed and forwarded to DoE and Faculty representatives on the same day.

J.   Subsidy of 2ⁿᵈ year self-financed students

Messrs Khubeka and Ntombela raised the possibility of GDE sponsoring the balance of the accounts of self-financing 2ⁿᵈ year students in Gauteng.

The report prepared for point I above included the details of self-financed 2ⁿᵈ year students. However, Unisa has no way of identifying which of these students actually work for GDE. Many will be living in GDE but working in Mpumalanga, Limpopo, North West etc.

If GDE can identify those students whom it wishes to support from the information provided by Unisa, it should be possible to provide an appropriate invoice for payment of these outstanding balances.

K.   RPL processes

During and at the national RPL workshop for NPDE providers held in June 2002, Unisa tabled its general RPL policy and its plans for a revised form of this for the NPDE. In its report to the ELRC and the Department of Education in October 2002, Unisa tabled its RPL strategy again, together with a budget.

However, there has been no response from the Department of Education on this issue, a fact commented on in Unisa's January report to the ELRC and the Department of Education.

On 11 and 12 March, 2003, the ETDP SETA hosted another national workshop on RPL for NPDE providers. From this meeting it emerged that there was an expectation that RPL for REQV11s should be a process of providing evidence of learning, probably in a portfolio, and that RPL simply on the basis of years of experience would be unacceptable.

Unisa's understanding is that the ETDP SETA will consider the information shared at the workshop and respond with national guidelines in this regard. However, at the time of writing, these national guidelines had not been finalised, although the CEPD national evaluation process suggested some minimum standards in this regard. Unisa will therefore continue with its planned RPL portfolio development process as outlined for students in Tutorial Letter 303 and as discussed in Section 3.4 above.

L.   Duration of exams

In line with Unisa's standard practice, NPDE examinations were weighted for 100 marks over a two-hour period. However, NPDE students are very mature and may not have studied for some years. As a result, and despite the fact that the examinations were open-book, many students were unable to complete the papers.

Solution: From 2003 onwards, Unisa has extended the exam duration for NPDE to 3 hours.

M.   Duplication of modules

The NPDE course material was initially based on various modules provided by Unisa mainstream programmes, Unisa-SACTE and Unisa-SACOL. The approved curriculum outlines those modules which are considered compulsory and those which can be RPL-ed. Some ex-SACOL students have consequently been required to use the same course material as they have used in the past with SACOL.

Solution: The NPDE programme team has planned to change the source material for NPD043-F *The Teacher in the Classroom*. Most of the other material is being revised to meet the changed needs of the RNCS and both the purposes of the modules within the NPDE curriculum as well as the assessment practices are different. It is therefore anticipated that there will be fewer causes for complaint on this issue in future.

Conclusion

There have been problems with the implementation of the Unisa NPDE to date. Some of these problems can be attributed to a mismatch between Unisa's normal practice and the different requirements of the NPDE and some problems have arisen from various delays and misunderstandings at provincial and national level. However, most of these problems have been or are being addressed in 2003 and it should be noted that the problems have affected less than 5% of the registered students. Sixty tutors offered 64 hours of face-to-face contact in 36 venues in five provinces in 2002; nearly 20 000 assignments were marked and processed; 10 000 exam papers were written and marked at the end of 2002 and just over 4 000 supplementary papers were written and marked during the first two months of 2003. 95% of students have proceeded through the programme with minimal problems. In addition, Unisa has/is developing a curriculum which offers 30 different study options for all three phases of GET and is doing so **at a cost that is less than half that charged by most NPDE providers**.

4.6 Programme costing

When the Unisa NPDE curriculum was presented to Senate, it was not accompanied by a budget. The seconded programme manager drew up a draft budget in October 2001 for 2002 and discussed the same with Messrs Herman Visser (subsidies) and Willem Du Plessis (budgeting). However, due to some breakdowns in communication, the draft budget was not formally adopted by Faculty and presented to Senate. This resulted in a crisis early in 2002 when Mr Du Plessis put a stop on all NPDE expenditures until a budget had been approved by senior management.

A series of meetings involving Prof Mothata (then Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Education), the seconded Programme Manager and Profs Cronje and Swanepoel from senior management, were then held to resolve the problem. The formal re-location of the NPDE within the Department of Further Teacher Education subsequently helped to clarify the line management and budgetary requisition processes.

Although detailed feedback on the finances of the NPDE programme have not been forthcoming, and have been complicated by the late payment of bursaries, Mr Du Plessis has reported that the programme has been running at between 1a and 1b of student fees. Taking the subsidy income into account, the Unisa NPDE appears to be paying its own way despite the extra investment in decentralised contact support.

The investment in student support (see also Section 3.1.15) was expected to be justified by higher throughput rates and findings in this regard will be discussion in Section 4.7 below. **Appendix E** contains an illustrative draft budget for 2005 based on the experiences of 2002-4.

4.7   Impact and throughput analysis

4.7.1   Statistics

In the first year of the NPDE, all students followed the same core programme. Approximately 10 000 exam papers were written and marked with the following initial results for the **October/November 2002** exam session.

NPD001-4   *Language and learning skills*

89,24% of those registered actually wrote the open-book exam

75,68% of those who wrote the exam passed

Average year mark: 59,27%

Average exam mark: 47,32%

NPD043-F   The Teacher in the Classroom

89,4% of those registered actually wrote the open-book exam

57,6% of those who wrote the exam passsed

Average year mark: 52,82%

Average exam mark: 41,96%

NPD047-K   Continuous Assessment

88,8% of those registered actually wrote the open-book exam

32,81% of those who wrote the exam passed

Average year mark: 52,68%

Average exam mark: 30,23%

NPD048-L   Understanding OBE

90% of those registered actually wrote the open-book exam

53,5% of those who wrote the exam passed

Average year mark: 51,28%

Average exam mark: 44,73%

NPD052-G   School and profession

89,2% of those registered actually wrote the open-book exam

49,49% of those who wrote the exam passed

Average year mark: 55,05%

Average exam mark: 37,12%.

In January 2003, approximately 4000 supplementary exam papers were written. From these results it is possible to deduce the following:

- 26,9% (278/1034) Mpumalanga bursary holders passed all 5 first year modules.
- 58,6% (606/1034) Mpumalanga bursary holders passed 3 or more first year modules and so qualified for the second year of the programme.
- 41,4% (364/878) Gauteng bursary holders passed all 5 first year modules.

- 78,6% (690/878) Gauteng bursary holders passed 3 or more first year modules and so qualified for the second year of the programme.
- 21,8% (54/248) self-financed students passed all 5 first year modules.
- 57,7% (143/248) self-financed students passed 3 or more first year modules and so qualified for the second year of the programme.
- 96% (2160/2252) of all students were retained in the programme for one or more assessment results.
- 32,2% (696/2160) of all retained students passed all 5 first year modules.
- 66,6% (1439/2160) of all retained students passed 3 or more first year modules and so qualified for the second year of the programme.

The 20% discrepancy in the final results for first year bursary students in Gauteng and Mpumalanga is particularly interesting in light of the discussion that headed this chapter and the particular challenges for distance learners in rural contexts. This is an issue which needs follow up research.

The following table summarises the results of the 2003 cohort of students as at 08 March 2003. There have been adjustments since then but an updated report will be available from the Bureau for Management Information only after this dissertation is due to be submitted. The results take into account both the October/November 2003 examinations as well as the January 2004 supplementaries.

Table 19: Summary of NPDE results for 2003 cohort as at 08 March 2003

First year students						
Module	Code	No. Reg.	No. Wrote	No. Pass	%Pass/Reg	%Pass/Wrote
Language & Learning skills	NPD001-4	497	456	339	68.2	74.3
Teacher in the Classroom	NPD043-F	526	492	347	66	70.5
Continuous Assessment	NPD047-K	724	681	441	60.9	64.8
Understanding OBE	NPD048-L	662	614	420	63.4	68.4
School and Profession	NPD052-G	531	491	381	71.8	68.4

Second year students						
Module	Code	No. Reg.	No. Wrote	No. Pass	%Pass/Reg	%Pass/Wrote
Foundation Phase						
Numeracy 1	NPD004-8	620	611	589	95	96.4
Teach and learning lang	NPD007-B	617	608	582	94.3	95.7
Life Skills 1	NPD009-D	617	608	587	95.1	96.5
Reception Year	NPD011-6	616	607	591	95.9	97.4
Intermediate Phase						
Numeracy 1	NPD012-8	498	473	424	85.1	89.6
Principles of lang teaching	NPD014-A	553	529	476	86.1	90
Life Skills 1	NPD015-B	497	474	431	86.7	90.9
HSS in the Classroom	NPD017-D	348	330	288	82.8	87.3
NS in the Classroom	NPD018-E	200	191	174	87	91.1
Shared module: FP/IP/SP						
Intro to languages	NPD006-A	1178	1144	1066	90.5	93.2
Senior Phase						
Lang & Literature	NPD008-C	44	41	39	88.6	95.1
Teaching and learning NS	NPD019-F	152	141	123	80.9	87.2
Practical Science	NPD020-8	61	56	45	73.8	80.4
Biochem & Physiology	NPD021-9	11	10	7	63.8	70
Plant Studies	NPD022-A	86	80	64	74.4	80
Animal Studies	NPD023-B	96	89	72	75	80.9
Matter and Materials	NPD024-C	56	49	34	60.7	69.4
Earth and Beyond	NPD026-E	26	24	18	69.2	75
Teach. and learning Maths	NPD027-F	50	46	39	78	84.8
Number development	NPD028-G	45	40	30	66.7	75
Geometry	NPD029-H	36	34	27	75	79.4
Basic Algebra	NPD030-A	30	28	22	73.3	78.6
Teach and learning Tech	NPD031-B	121	112	96	79.3	85.7
Tech know & underst. 1	NPD032-C	73	66	49	67.1	74.2
Tech know & underst. 2	NPD033-D	55	48	43	78.2	89.6
Tech & Society	NPD034-E	63	57	46	73	80.7

Module	Code	No. Reg.	No. Wrote	No. Pass	%Pass/Reg	%Pass/Wrote
Teach & Learning LO	NPD035-F	67	65	60	89.6	92.3
Religious Aspects	NPD036-G	26	24	22	84.6	91.7
Health & Human Movem.	NPD037-H	43	42	40	93	95.2
Career Guidance	NPD038-J	57	55	53	93	96.4
History 1	NPD039-K	36	33	30	83.3	90.9
History 2	NPD040-C	22	20	17	77.3	85
Geography 1	NPD041-D	29	28	24	82.8	85.7
Geography 2	NPD042-E	12	12	8	66.7	66.7
Portfolios						
Integrated assessment	NPDEP1-3	1345	1249	1242	92.3	99.4
RPL	NPDEP2-4	215	158	140	65.1	88.6

Final graduation statistics were not available at the time at which this dissertation had to be submitted but an analysis of the results available suggests that about 50% of registered students will complete the NPDE in the minimum time of two years. Given the relatively large number of teacher-learners repeating modules in 2003, it should be possible to graduate 70% of teacher-learners within three-four years of initial registration. Throughput rates will need to be monitored very carefully over the lifetime of the programme and the reasons for drop-out rates will need to be explored given the high rate of success among teacher-learners who actually complete the assessment tasks. The following throughput statistics emanating from research conducted for the Committee for Higher Education by the South African Institute for Distance Education in 2003 (SAIDE 2004), provide some perspective from which to evaluate the Unisa NPDE throughput data:

- Unisa B Com

  9.5% cohort of 1991 completed by 1999; 12% cohort of 1992 completed in 2000; 10,7% cohort of 1993 completed in 2001

- Unisa BA Psychology

  20,6% cohort of 1991 completed by 1999; 24,8% cohort of 1992 completed in 2000; 21,5% cohort of 1993 completed in 2001

- University of KZN - Durban 1 year certificate in Community Nursing

85% average throughput over the past three years

- University of Fort Hare B Prim Ed

68% average throughput over the past two years.

Although learner support in the form of face-to-face contact sessions is offered in all four programmes listed above, it is significant to note that in the first two examples courses are primarily a correspondence experience for 90% of the candidates while in the latter two examples, the programmes are characterised by weekly/bi-weekly Saturday classess reaching virtually all learners. With the NPDE offering 10% of notional learning hours in the form of face-to-face contact and reaching approximately 70% of teacher-learners, the estimated throughput figures are not unexpected. Every effort needs to be made to prevent teacher-learners from dropping out of the programme before completing assessment.

Of course, final results are not in themselves an indication of impact, given the fact that apart from helping in-service educators get to REQV13, the NPDE was supposed to have a positive impact on classroom practice and also provide an alternative pathway into studies at a higher level. Accordingly, this section of this chapter will explore the ways in which the Unisa National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE), has sought to develop a community of practice among learners on the programme.

The discussion will consider the ways in which the NPDE qualification could and should have been able to make a significant contribution to developing a common vision of good teaching practice among education stakeholders at national, provincial, Higher Education Institution and local school level through the manner in which the curriculum has been designed and is being delivered. The discussion will attempt to evaluate the ways in which the potential for developing common understandings and practice has been realised in implementation.

The discussion will be structured in the following way:

- An overview of the context of the NPDE programme
- An evaluation of the NPDE design from the perspective of an epistemological framework for developing communities of practice
- Lessons of experience from the macro management level

- Lessons of experience from the meso level management/implementation interface
- Lessons of experience from the micro level: a limited analysis of the impact of the Unisa NPDE on the 2000+ classroom-based educators on the programme through a triangulation of data supplied from student evaluations, student responses to formal assessment and limited classroom observations
- Conclusions and recommendations for building communities of practice among educators in South and Southern Africa.

4.7.2 Context for analysis of impact

Within South Africa, as part of the overall reconstruction of its society, there has been and continues to be considerable debate about whether the education system, at all levels, is meeting the educational needs of the country. This has resulted in a proliferation of policy documents seeking to change fundamentally the way that the system is governed and managed, the way it is financed, the curriculum that is offered, the pedagogies that are employed and the ways in which learners and the system are assessed and evaluated.

It is ordinary classroom-based educators in schools and colleges who are at the forefront of all this change. If countries cannot get basic education right; if they cannot empower educators with the competences they need to in turn empower their learners, then governments will continue to pour resources into systems that are fundamentally unable to meet the challenges that have been identified. As noted by the Department of Education (DoE 1998), bringing about change in educational institutions is, however, no easy matter:

> *Schools, in particular, serve a distinctive constituency and play a particular educational and socialising role with respect to young people. They provide a foundation of general education, as well as more specific knowledge and skills to pre-employed youth. They also tend to occupy a distinctive place in the minds of parents, young learners and educators, which reflect deep-rooted cultural roles. For these and other reasons, changes in schooling worldwide tend to be gradual and incremental.*

(DoE 1998:13)

Bringing about change in these institutions means bringing about change in the **people** that staff them.

However, many educators are ill-equipped for such change: many are still, after all this time, formally un(der)qualified and many more are formally qualified but practically, and motivationally, under-prepared for the enormity of the task with which they are entrusted. The National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) seeks to address the former need but also offers useful lessons for addressing the latter.

4.7.3   Towards communities of learning and practice

It has been noted previously that the NPDE is a new qualification. It is a qualification that seeks to use good distance education practice to meet the needs of a new kind of society within an international context which Barnett (1999/2002) characterises as one of "supercomplexity":

> *That is to say we live in an age in which our very frameworks for comprehending the world, for acting in it and for relating to each other are entirely problematic. We live in a world characterised by contestability, challengeability, uncertainty and unpredictability [and under such conditions] work has to become learning and learning has to become work.* (2002:7)

It therefore seems entirely appropriate to seek to address the professional development of educators in and through the workplace using distance education methods. In line with the blurring of boundaries between work and learning about work, there is also a blurring of boundaries between distance and more traditional contact-based education and within the ways in which learning is increasingly organised, as noted by Marsick and Watkins (1999/2002):

> *Much of our work has highlighted the shift away from a compartmentalised, almost assembly-line, approach to learning towards a holistic, integrated vision of a learning organisation (2002:34) [and] It can be argued that all organisations learn, or they would not survive, but learning organisations demand proactive interventions to generate, capture, store, share and use learning at the systems level in order to create innovative products and services.* (2002:41)

In response to the challenges outlined above, the discourse in education has increasingly oriented itself towards notions of lifelong learning in learning societies.

This discourse needs to take cognisance of influences at the macro, political level; the implications of moving towards a "learner-controlled" and away from a "systems-controlled" approach and the need to create appropriate learning environments. The discussion will be particularly pertinent at the meso-level of institutions, with regard to the ways in which they are organised and the kinds of programmes that they offer (Alheit, 1999/2002). Schuller and Field (1998/2002) argue that in reinventing institutions and programmes it will be necessary to strike the right balance between the development of human capital (foregrounding individual needs) and the development of social capital (foregrounding collective needs) and perhaps to be a little wary of what terminology like this implies about the underpinning philosophy. Keep and Rainbird (1999/2002 - building on the work of Marquardt and Reynolds 1994) suggest that institutions responding to the challenges will increasingly demonstrate the characteristics of learning organisations, a term borrowed from the business world.

One of the things that is interesting about the characteristics of learning organisations suggested by Keep and Rainbird (ibid) is the emphasis placed on flexibility around systems and structures and the particularly high emphasis placed on interaction (with customers, with peers, within and between teams) in a search for common ground, indeed, Keep and Rainbird (ibid) go on to observe (2002:84):

> *Perhaps the LO [Learning Organization] literature's greatest contribution to debates about learning skills and knowledge is its implicit message that current obsessions with the individualization of learning are misplaced and that the social and systemic dimensions of learning are the key determinants of how an organization successfully acquires, productively deploys, and develops its stock of skills.*

The increasing interest in both the education and business development spheres in the social nature of learning, forces enquiry into the extent to which the programmes offered and the ways in which they are managed are part of and contribute to the development of **communities** of learning and practice.

Wenger (2000/2002:163-4) identifies three characteristics of a community of practice:

> *First, members are bound together by their collectively developed understanding of what their community is about and they hold each other accountable to this sense of joint enterprise. To be competent is to understand the enterprise well enough to be able to contribute to it. Second, members build their community through mutual engagement. They interact with one another, establishing norms and relationships of mutuality that reflect these interactions. To be competent is to be able to engage with the community and be trusted as a partner in these interactions. Third, communities of practice have produced a shared repertoire of communal resources – language, routines, sensibilities, artefacts, tools, stories, styles, etc. To be competent is to have access to this repertoire and be able to use it appropriately.* (2002:163-4)

Moll (2003:17) agrees that facilitating learning necessarily involves making provision for the individual to engage with the ideas and experiences of others:

> *Learning is about the ways networks or webs of knowledge are established, built up and ultimately become the newly acquired understandings of an individual … This building of the networks of knowledge has both a crucial individual dimension and a necessary location in patterns of interaction between people involved in solving problems and carrying out practical tasks.*

Moll subsequently goes on to outline the central challenge that must be addressed in offering a distance course within which there are obvious limitations on the degree and nature of inter-personal interaction within the learning community:

> *In distance education, the central problems becomes one of how best to create a situation in which learners are able to engage in and be supported in a particular, unfamiliar activity – a knowledge practice – without having to be in the constant presence of practitioners of that activity.* (2003:21)

As a national programme subject to regular national meetings for reporting and discussion, a common curriculum framework, a commitment on the part of all providers to developing classroom competence and to providing an element of face-to-face contact support, the NPDE, and the approximately 11000 teacher-learners engaged upon it, should be able to make a

significant contribution towards building a community of learning and practice among South African educators.

4.7.4 Lessons of experience from the macro level

Nominally, the NPDE is a national programme following a national curriculum.

Theoretically, therefore, with such common ground to build on collaboration and shared understandings and practice should be easily possible in at least the following five key areas of operation (there may well be others):

- Management and development of support and reporting systems
- Marketing and advocacy
- Curriculum design and materials development
- Learner support
- Assessment and evaluation.

It is the Unisa NPDE experience, as reported at the 2003 Nadeosa conference (Mays 2003) that this is much easier said than done! Collaboration involves individuals and/or institutions working co-operatively together to achieve common goals, or separate goals that are complementary in one respect or another. Fundamental to the success of a collaborative endeavour is that all parties must benefit in some way from working together. With respect to the NPDE, this has not always been possible to achieve.

In general, it has to be conceded that the introduction of the NPDE has had limited impact to date on developing a community of learning and practice at the macro level. There have been too many different agendas and interest groups involved to meet the kind of requirements outlined by Wenger earlier. However, there has been some progress in this regard with Unisa now involved with the Department of Education at national and provincial level and collaborating with other providers in Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and the North West in mutual quality assurance and the sharing of materials. Such arrangements are only possible where there are shared values and

understandings and opportunities for meaningful engagement.

4.7.5   Lessons of experience at the meso level

At the meso level, the focus is on the programme's engagement within the institution and with other programmes within the institution. In this area the introduction of the NPDE has had a more profound impact. The RPL process adopted for the NPDE has, for example, been the subject of interest by a number of other academics responsible for other programmes and the NPDE is now represented on the institution's general reference group for RPL purposes. The process has also been adapted for the RPL of students outside of the NPDE who have fallen between two systems with the incorporation of their colleges into Unisa and the promulgation of a new qualifications framework for educators from 2003. In addition, both the RPL and integrated assessment portfolio processes within the NPDE are being dovetailed with the Professional Portfolio Development process being advocated by the South African Council of Educators (SACE).

Apart from growing synergy at the meso-level with the NPDE portfolio processes, ongoing discussions with the Departments of Registrations, Examinations, Assignments and Computer Services have resulted in innovations in all of these areas and an ongoing discussion about ways in which systems developed for large numbers of individuals studying primarily using a correspondence model can be adapted to suit the growing number of programmes offering contact-supported studies to groups of sponsored learners as well as the reality of unemployed students who have effectively opted for Unisa as their full-time university of choice.

These discussions have resulted in increasing agreement regarding the value of decentralised support and assessment, and the systems needed to manage these processes; the importance of tracking and monitoring student performance and cohort analyses thereof (as opposed to relying entirely on the motivation of the learner to meet assignment deadlines and prepare for examinations etc.) and innovations (for Unisa) such as year marks that count towards summative assessment and open-book examinations geared towards assessing applied competence rather than memorisation of content.

4.7.6   Lessons of experience at the micro level

Not surprisingly it is at the micro level of the Unisa NPDE programme team and its students where the greatest impact can be seen. At the end of the 2003 year, teacher-learners on the Unisa NPDE programme were invited to submit an anonymous evaluation of the programme. The results of this survey are summarised below. (See Appendix A for the survey instrument and Appendix B for the consolidated findings.)

Student evaluation

There were 2318 students on the NPDE programme in 2003. 707 (30,5%) submitted an evaluation form at the end of the programme. The following information is based on feedback from these 707 students of whom: 22 were first years; 277 were second year Foundation Phase; 116 were second year Intermediate Phase; 63 were second year Senior Phase, 216 were second year students who did not specify their specialisation and 13 did not specify in which year of the programme they were.

In response to the request to rate the extent to which the NPDE programme had helped them to improve their teaching, the weighted average of 678 respondents was 4,85 out of 5 where 5 = I have learned and changed a lot and 1 = I have learned and changed very little. In a similar question on the impact of the programme on their assessment practice in particular, the weighted average was 4,77 among 654 respondents.

When asked to name the module they found **MOST and LEAST** helpful in helping them to improve their practice, 15,8% (112/707) of respondents said that no one module stood out but that ALL of the modules were equally helpful. In response to the request to identify the LEAST useful module, 42,4% (300/707) said that none of their modules was "least useful".

The following interesting quotations from students indicate that they have begun to engage with some of the core issues on the programme:

"I can say I have accepted the change and have learned a lot in the NPDE programme, more especially I have gained a lot as far as aims, outcomes and assessments in lesson plans."

"I have learned and changed a lot. I know how to assess learners in different methods."

"All the modules have the same theem [sic] of how to teach your learners, how to arrange your learners and how to assess your learners."

"Because of these modules, I am able to do the correct planning lesson and recording."

"Reception year taught me to be more observant when teaching the young ones."

" ... and not to label ..."

" ... and now help other teachers ..."

"What I learned is correlated with what I am teaching. I've changed totally and I feel great."

One of the key ways in which the NPDE programme differs from most Unisa mainstream offerings is the fact that 10% of notional learning time is spent in direct face-to-face contact with tutors representing and trained by the institution. These tutors were supposed to play a motivating and facilitating role rather than to lecture content. When asked to rate contact sessions on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the best), the weighted average was 4,84 among 663 respondents.

The following quotations from students reflect the importance placed on the face-to-face contact

sessions and the possibilities these presented for social learning. It was interesting to note the high emphasis placed on the interpersonal as opposed to the academic skills of the tutor:

"Most of us wouldn't have made it without the guidance of tutors."

"Yes the contact sessions made me because that no man is an island. I needed to interact with my colleagues."

[The tutor was] "like a mother full of love and patience" [to us] "old bags"!

"Contact sessions have helped me to share ideas, gain confidence and I have improved a lot in doing my work."

"I have gained a lot in these contact sessions and I would continue with my studies if only my tutor will continue with me."

"Our tutors were very special to us. They are committed to their work. I also love them for their punctuality and dedication."

Towards the end of the evaluation form, teacher-learners were asked to outline their future plans:

- 59% (13/22) (100% of those who responded) of first years indicated their intention to move into the second year
- 81% (546/672) intended to register for a higher qualification
- 7,3% (52/707) indicated they had or would apply for a promotion post.

Given that the NPDE was targeted at a group of teacher-learners particularly disempowered by previous policies and noted for having self-esteem and related problems, and that one of the stated national goals was to provide an alternative pathway to higher study, the above results are little short of astounding.

The Unisa NPDE appears to have been singularly successful in encouraging a return to formal learning among its particular target group.

The final section of the evaluation form offered teacher-learners the chance to comment on any aspect of the programme that they found particularly interesting or useful or particularly annoying or unuseful.

The following selected quotations indicate once again the central role that interpersonal communication played in this social learning programme and the fact that some teacher-learners have been sufficiently empowered actually to offer constructive criticism of the programme and to have an influence within their wider community of practice:

> "It is a lifelong programme which I will keep on referring to. My knowledge has expanded a lot. I help my colleague a lot with the information I get from these books."

> "There should be more contact sessions, it was helpful. Students get to know each other and share their knowledge and give support to each other."

> "I enjoyed being grouped with other educators. We discussed about the modules and helped each other fairly."

> "I even helped my colleagues."

> "I would like to suggest that Understanding OBE and Continuous Assessment should be one because they are nearly the same."

> "The terminology in the module The Teacher in the Classroom should be changed."

> "Apart from the structure of Assignments which were so challenging and interesting, compiling the intergrated [sic] 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."

With some exceptions, the feedback from teacher-learners' evaluation of the programme is overwhelmingly positive. There is a sense from these student responses that over two years of part-time study, the NPDE programme has encouraged learners to engage with their own experience and that of their peers in a developing community of learning. However, are the teacher-learners' impressions borne out in practice?

Assessment

Teacher-learners may well assert that they have been empowered by the programme and feel better able to engage reflexively and supportively with their own practice and that of their peers, but are these assertions substantiated by the work that they actually produce? As noted by Mothata, Van Niekerk and Mays (2003) and discussed in Section 3.3, the focus of the NPDE has been to develop professional, classroom practice and for teacher-learners to demonstrate **applied competence** – which is a combination of three forms of competence (DoE 2000:10):

- **Practical competence** is the demonstrated ability, in an authentic (realistic) context to consider a range of possibilities for action, make considered decisions about which possibility to follow, and to perform the chosen action. It is grounded in foundational competence.
- For **foundational competence** the learner must demonstrate an understanding of the knowledge and thinking which underpins the action taken, and is integrated through reflexive competence.

- For **reflexive competence** the learner must demonstrate an ability to integrate or connect performances and decision-making with understanding and an ability to change

the unforeseen circumstances and to explain the reasons behind these adaptations.

Both assignments (two per module counting for 50% of the final module mark) and examinations (one per module counting for 50% of the final module mark) have been designed with these considerations in mind. As noted earlier of 2252 teacher-learners on the programme in 2002, 67% met the assessment requirements and qualified to enter the second year of the programme. Whilst the final results for the second, specialist year are not yet complete due to recent supplementary examinations, the preliminary results suggest a throughput in the second year of approximately 75% and a throughput overall minimum time of 50%.

In addition to the assignments and examinations, all teacher-learners were required to compile and present for self-, peer- and tutor assessment an integrated assessment portfolio built around lessons taught, planned and reflected upon and some teacher-learners who entered the programme with fewer academic or professional qualifications were also required to compile and present a second portfolio for RPL purposes. Teacher-learners' comments on their own experiences in these portfolios is particularly illuminating.

Generally, students appeared to be competent practitioners, although they generally badly needed the theoretical and content updates provided by the NPDE programme, but found it difficult to reflect on their work in a substantive way. Most reflective comments were superficial and not rooted in the underpinning theories of the course. It will be necessary to provide more explicit guidance in this area in future.

Cumulative examples of student comments:

A.   Range from the basic:

For many teacher-learners reflecting on their own practice and that of their peers was a new experience. As a result their comments were often superficial and general, as in the examples below.

> "Very good lesson. All the groups enjoyed lesson and activities."

> "Learners enjoyed using paper money. They knew how to calculate change. They used the paper money to play shop."

> "I found the NPDE course very interesting and helpful. I have learned a lot from all the modules. The most interesting was Language and learning. I liked the Language as I have learned a lot in this module. I am really going to implement what I have learned the past two years in my classroom. During the contact sessions I met and made new friends. The tutor: I have great respect for her as a person and a tutor."

> "The desks in my room I usually clustered so children could collaborate more easily with a partner or in small groups. All learner we ager [sic] to know what happening [sic] and they participate very we [sic]."

> "Outcomes not achieved because a lot of the learners in that group could not do the activity. If I do the lesson over I'll have to teach them the symbols and letters."

B.   To the more reflective, but not often making reference to the theory:

Some teacher-learners, however, clearly learned something from the process of self- and peer-assessment and reflection. Their comments indicate more focussed insights into the nature of the learning experience and their classroom practice.

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"I was so happy in getting this chance of assessing myself and my peer, and it is my first time. I've never thought of it."

"In the discussions afterwards learners felt that it was more difficult to write the directions then [sic] to give it orally, so I have to plan more lessons where learners need to give written directions."

"This lesson [linked to RPL module FP Life Skills 2: NPD010-5] was very interesting. I was not aware that learners at such a tender age knew about their rights and though they shied away from the responsibilities, they ended up acknowledging them. They wanted to know why they were not involved in their input on children's rights because they made their own classroom rules. I had to explain that some committees were responsible for the approval of their Rights because it was nationwide. They listened with interest as I told them about the events of June 16, 1976. They were able to relate the fact that they were fortunate to have parents and guardians who were responsible enough to provide them with proper housing and so on. They appreciated that though they were considered themselves to be poor at least they were better off than children who in the streets. The lesson was an eye opener for me and the learners as well."

C.   *To those beginning to try to show a link between theory and practice:*

A few students were able to offer quite insightful reflective comments on their own work and that of their peers and to link these insights to the material they had studied.

[Extracted from a lesson planned in response to the purpose of the RPL module NPD044-G Teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase]
"- We then sang a song 'Ke ele, e dutse thabeng'. Thereafter the learners were able to talk about their feeling.
- I told them we were going to learn.
- According to Richard, Binker and Weil (1990:7) in the module: Reception

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Year - they say learning is the art of taking charge of your own mind.

- I told them that we should learn about the epidemic and the drugs used [the lesson focussed on a magazine article on the AIDS activist Zackie Achmat]. We should not take stories from people who only talk what they think."

And an example of learner's work [Grade 3] related to the above lesson in which they were asked to write a letter to the government on the issue:

1.   Please take care of other people.

2.   And want people that can be nuses [sic] and doctor [sic].

3.   Because there is nobody help them and nobody give them medicines.

4.   But help them very hard.

5.   Because and them they want energe [sic] and to be healthy.

6.   And money to buy the pills and medicines.

Reflection on an intermediate phase lesson:

"According to OBE, all learners should succeed, which implies that it is learner-paced. I took in consideration that learners is not yet familiar with research work, so I supplied them with books, notes and information pamphlets, to get the necessary information needed for their task. They worked in groups, which can be successful because was done carefully, when I also took learners developmental age into account. Pupils can also benefit a great deal from groupwork and they learn informally from their peers when they discuss the task given to them.

In OBE the teacher acts as a learning mediator and facilitator. To do this I moved from group to group while they did the research to give advise and where necessary to assist them. All the learners in the group should have a task to perform, that is why I gave them the group-activity sheet and each learners role must be stated. I also made sure that during the reflection, I ask some individual learners in each group, how they felt having that role given to them,

and what they have learnt from being in that role. The important issue here is that they must realise that, that role is not theirs permanently, but will change everytime.

If you give learners a responsibility they learn to be responsible citizens. They learn to respect others and their views. They learn how to work in a group and to be co-operative. It also help their sociolistic skills to develop. Groupwork helps a great deal with discipline, if you plan your activity well and you can easily observe all the learners and be quick to notice disruptive behaviour.

Learners were also developed intellectually by learning about other cultural groups in history. They learned to respect others and learn what is of value and importance to others. They learn through doing and that is when they acted out the groups of people they represented. Their communication skills were developed when they communicated with their peers and when they reported back to the class. They learned what is worthwhile to them, when they did research on the different groups and discovered that not everybody is the same."

Direct observations of practice

Of course, teacher-learners' own assessment of their practice and tutors and lecturers' assessment of teacher-learners' work for assessment do not, taken alone, provide sufficient evidence of the impact that the programme may or may not have had on their practice. For this reason a limited number of observations were also conducted of teacher-learners interacting with one another and their peers during contact sessions (10) and of teacher-learners in action in their classrooms (22) (See Appendices C and D for the observation instrument and a sample observation report.) These admittedly limited observations, on the whole, served to reinforce the message conveyed by the student evaluation and the work submitted for assessment. Teacher-learners engaged on the Unisa NPDE programme are being forced to re-evaluate their practice and, in particular to re-appraise their attitude towards OBE and Curriculum 2005/RNCS.

They are beginning to use the new language of their profession both in their own private lesson planning as well as in engaging with their peers. However, they still find it very difficult to reflect in depth on their practice and are naturally diffident about appraising their peers.

4.7.7   Concluding remarks and observations

If countries like South Africa are to achieve the kind of goals that are set in meetings like the World Education Forum in Dakar, in April 2000, and in policy discussions around NEPAD and other initiatives, then there is need for ongoing and concerted effort in the professional development of the educators who have first line responsibility for nurturing the achievement of the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes in school learners.

Meeting the challenge requires development, innovation and research at all three levels of engagement, the macro-, the meso- and the micro- but particular attention needs to be paid to the meso-level and the ways in which institutions design their programmes, deliver those programmes and the ways in which they engage with their learners and the wider community they serve.

Increasingly, institutions will be expected to display the characteristics of learning organisations and to build internally a community of learning and practice that reflects the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that the institution seeks to encourage among its learners.

The scale of the challenges facing South and Southern Africa is such that collaboration is likely to become an increasingly important issue in seeking to meet increasing demands from already limited and strained resources. But this will not be easy if institutions who would like to collaborate do not share a common vision, ethos and values.

It will not be possible to make the kinds of strides that are needed unless teacher development programmes can build the kind of community of learning and practice that appears to be beginning to emerge within the Unisa NPDE at the meso-level partially and at the micro-level in

particular. As Wenger has noted (ibid.), building a community of learning and practice requires:

- Collectively developed understandings
- Mutual engagement; and
- A shared repertoire of resources

and this needs to happen at the macro-, meso- and micro levels.