RE-IMAGINING THE TAPESTRY OF TEACHING: AN INVESTIGATION INTO STUDENT TEACHERS' OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION (OBE) INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES.

by

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DECLARATION

Student number 3195-600-8

I declare that RE-IMAGINING THE TAPESTRY OF TEACHING: AN INVESTIGATION INTO STUDENT TEACHERS' OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION (OBE) INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged my means of complete references.

Signed: Date:

BLANDINA MAKINA

ABSTRACT

This study focussed on teacher training in the context of distance education. It investigated the impact on practice of an English methodology course offered by Unisa's Department of English Studies at certificate level. The unit of analysis was a group of eight student teachers registered for the module ACEEN26 *Teaching English: General Principles* offered by Unisa's Department of English Studies. This module aims to help students to understand the approaches that underpin Outcomes-based Education (OBE) and how these translate into practice in the English First Additional Language (FAL) classrooms.

To investigate the participants' classroom practices, the study adopted an open and inductive approach aimed at gauging their thinking with regard to teaching, learning, assessment and how these understandings reflected OBE practices. The aim was to determine how the eight students made sense of this phenomenon given their own epistemologies within the unique contexts in which they worked.

Data collection consisted of a mix of lesson observations, in-depth audio-taped interviews and analysis of documents. The interview was the main data-gathering technique. All these instruments were supplemented by field notes based on informal observations which were entered in a reflective journal.

The picture that emerged was of teachers who worked under demanding conditions as they tried to implement complex and sometimes contradictory policies and were constantly under the pressure of policy demands. Their practices were, to a large extent, inconsistent with the OBE approach to teaching and learning. Although they gained some

theoretical surface knowledge from the course, the students' practice remained traditional because of two main reasons emanating from the findings: their inability to internalise the theory to make it an integral part of their mental repertoire and the negative impact of disabling contextual factors.

The study constituted an evaluation of the course and therefore fed directly into the whole concept of dialogue and student support which are necessary prerequisites for success in distance education. As a teacher educator, this research was also a way of illuminating my teaching practices through practical research that simultaneously informs the field of teacher education.

Based on the training needs identified, a re-contextualised curriculum for the ACE English programme was proposed. This proposed new programme reflects my stance that instead of continuing to focus on pouring resources into dysfunctional schools, we should concentrate on the lowest denominator in the system — the teacher.

Key words: *outcomes-based education, continuing professional development, English First Additional Language, programme development, mediating learning.*

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated with love to the memory of my parents

Joseph Jambu Ngondo

and

Prisca Dambudzo Ngondo

Ndinomutendayi

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. PREAMBLE

This thesis researches the impact of an English methodology course on a group of students studying by distance. It probes the practices of these students in an open and inductive way in order to determine their understanding and application of the OBE approach to language teaching. Ultimately, the results will lead to decision-making directed at improving an entire training programme. The unit of analysis is a group of student teachers registered for the module *Teaching English: General Principles* offered by Unisa's Department of English Studies.

This chapter is in three sections. The first provides the context of the research. This is followed by a section on the theory that grounds the study. Finally, the qualitative processes followed in gathering and analysing the data are briefly described.

2. LEGITIMISING THE "I"

Although research is meant to be an entirely objective activity, it is also a product of the researcher and the context in which it is constituted. This study is a personal quest to interrogate my own professional practice and improve on it. It is, in a way, *my* narrative, where I engage in introspection by analysing my current practices as a teacher educator, identifying the tensions and contradictions that exist, and attempting to reconcile them to my work. In this thesis I therefore legitimise the living "I" (Mc Niff, 2008), because my active participation in the study makes the "I" a symbol of my subjective personal knowledge in this educational discourse. It emanates from my belief, which is also shared by Mc Niff (2008: 357), that educational research is "a living generative transformational process". This is because the study focuses on real people in real circumstances and constitutes narrative accounts of these people with whom I closely interacted in order to generate living theories. Using the personal pronoun "I", as opposed to the distant third-person "the researcher", is an acknowledgement of this proximity.

3. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In this section, I contextualise the study by providing synopses of the different areas that give meaning to the topic, beginning with my reason for embarking on this research journey.

Until recently (2010) the prevailing educational discourse has been outcomes-based education. Accordingly, course materials that this study focuses on are aligned to this approach to help students implement it in their teaching. The research participants were students who were engaged in continuing professional development in a distance education context and the study itself is a way of evaluating the impact of their course materials. All these facets form part of the background to the study which follows.

3.1. THE SPARK THAT IGNITED THE FLAME

In 2006, I was tasked with visiting schools to observe student teachers registered for the subject didactics English module SDENG3-J. I observed one lesson per student, followed by a fifteen-minute discussion. During these sessions, it struck me that my revisions of study material were based on the deficit approach, that is, on my assumptions of what students needed to learn. The reality that confronted me was a series of revelations that were characterised by diverse and challenging teaching contexts which impacted on the students' practice. Because of time and financial constraints, I could not at the time delve into issues that plagued my mind. However, the experience kindled a desire to find out whether my work had any effect on these students' classroom practice and then factor the findings into courseware design so as to improve the quality of professional development for these practising teachers. I was convinced that, as a teacher educator in a distance education context, I needed to improve on my unsatisfactory attempts at learner support, which are based on speculation, and be more realistic by taking cognisance of the actual experiences of our students in the field as a way of reducing the gap created by the distance mode of learning. Because I was already in the process of revising the module SDENG3-J, I decided to focus my study on a similar module but at the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) level.

3.2. OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION (OBE)

The transition to a post-apartheid democratic government in 1994 saw numerous changes, particularly in the educational field. These were meant to address the disparities of the apartheid system and help build a society defined by values of equality, increased participation, democracy, redress and equity (De Clercq, 1997; Christie, 1999) which had been denied by the apartheid government. Among the numerous initiatives to improve education was the introduction of a new approach to teaching and learning, Outcomes-

Based Education (henceforth referred to as OBE).[1] The origins of OBE in different forms can be traced to countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada (Cross et al., 2002: 176), to name just a few. South Africa adopted Spady's (1994) transformational OBE, whose attraction was its underpinning philosophy of "success for all" (Spady and Marshall, 1991: 67). This approach was meant to operationalise the then newly introduced Curriculum 2005 which, after two revisions, is now the current National Curriculum Statement (NCS). In this regard, OBE was used as a transformational tool in a new and democratic South Africa and aimed at equipping learners with the necessary skills, values and attitudes to take their rightful places in a democratic society. In Chisholm's words (2005: 86), OBE was seen as the "pedagogical route out of apartheid education". Because it was an educational innovation, it impacted on both the nature of knowledge and the essence of teaching.

Shortly after its introduction, critics (Kallaway et al., 1997; Jansen 1999; Mahomed, 1999; Rasool, 1999) warned that educational borrowing without solid understanding of how ideas, concepts and educational innovations are adapted and implemented locally would impact negatively on implementation of the educational reform. While the controversy led to some tweaking of the curriculum, the approach that drove it remained unchanged.

The OBE approach, undergirded by the notion of learner-centredness, introduced a relatively new way of looking at teaching and learning.[2] Policy (Department of Education, hereafter DoE, 1997: 30) unpacks this notion by stating that learners should not be treated "as empty vessels that have to be filled with knowledge", but that they should be active participants in the learning process, while teachers become facilitators. To this end, and in response to the requirement that education should equip learners to think critically, teachers are expected to design problem-solving activities that stimulate their learners to think and question ideas and take charge of their learning. This is in contrast to the dominant teacher-centred approach at the time that placed learners in a passive role as

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[1] The term outcomes-based education and its acronym OBE are used in this thesis to refer to the teaching approach that drives the National Curriculum Statement (NCS).

[2] Although it was deemed new, OBE shares many of its principles with the Communicative Approach which has been in existence for decades.

receivers of information imparted by the teacher. This change in focus from teaching to learning (Barr and Tag, 1995) requires teachers to look at planning, teaching and assessment from a different perspective to the one they were initially trained to adopt. In this new role, teachers are expected to centre their teaching on identified outcomes, adjust learning material to suit the learners' needs, make use of relevant and effective teaching strategies that enable learners to achieve the intended outcomes, employ a variety of assessment practices to test the achievement of the stated outcome(s), and give meaningful feedback that enhances teaching.

Underlying all these expectations is the pivotal role of language, because proficiency in language is fundamental in accomplishing classroom tasks. Being able to use a language effectively enables both the teacher and learners "to think and acquire knowledge, express their identity, feelings and ideas, interact with others and manage their world" (DoE, 2003: 9). In the context of this study, both teachers and learners need to be proficient in English; not only is it a language of instruction, it is also the subject of study. In the contexts in which this study took place, English is a second or even third language, but learners study it as a First Additional Language (FAL).

In brief, outcomes-based education is characterised by the following focal points:

- Focusing learning on achievement of explicitly stated outcomes;
- Emphasis on the active role of the learner while the teacher's role becomes that of mediator of learning;
- Emphasis on learning experiences that reflect real-life situations;
- Emphasis on the development of critical thinking skills to counter the apartheid curriculum that emphasised compliance;
- Use of assessment practices that reflect the continuous nature of the learning.

From the preceding discussion it is evident that effective implementation of OBE requires a major shift in the mindset of both teachers and learners, hence the need for in-service training for this group of teachers.

3.3. CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)

Transformation of the education system cannot take place without reforms in teacher education because the success of the process hinges on teacher capability. At the time

when OBE was introduced, there were serious concerns about the quality of teacher training. For instance, the National Teacher Education Audit (Hofmeyer and Hall, 1996), which investigated the status of teacher education governance, curricula and institutional conditions, revealed that teacher preparation was inefficient and dismal, with the exception of a few pockets of excellence. This finding was supported by various academics (Potenza and Monyokolo, 1999; Jansen, 1998; Christie, 1999) who pointed out that the reforms were being introduced hastily without adequate preparation of teachers. Among the problems they identified were the lack of alignment between curriculum development and teacher development and the incidence of ad hoc workshops in place of teacher training. In addition, Cross et al. (2002: 182) observe that the role of teachers in the curriculum reform became marginal because their participation in its conceptualisation and design was limited. They also mention that in the initial stages of implementation, it was reported that "the majority of teachers tended to act as mere technicians without the necessary conceptual and content tools". These problems seem to underline the need for continuing professional development or in-service training of teachers.

Elmore and Burney (1999) emphasise that teacher professional development should be at the centre of educational reform and instructional improvement. This is in line with the critical role of teacher education in "repairing, redressing, professionalizing and changing current educational practices" (Adler, 2002: 2). Consequently, practising teachers need to be retrained to equip them with knowledge and skills to cope with the changing educational landscape. Most importantly, they need to understand the new curriculum demands and be able to teach in the new approach. Until recently, this meant educating teachers to enable them to teach successfully within the OBE paradigm. In line with these trends, training institutions had to align their teacher training programmes to the new approach. Unisa was no exception.

In this study, the teachers who are upgrading their skills are registered for the Advanced Certificate in Education English programme, a qualification registered with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The group comprises students registered for the module ACEEN2-6, Module 2 on *Teaching English: General Principles*. This module helps students understand the approaches that underpin OBE and how these translate into practice in the English First Additional Language (FAL) classroom. This thesis is therefore situated in the

context of continual educational reform that acknowledges the central role that teachers play in improving learning and teaching in schools. It seeks to determine the extent and nature of OBE implementation by this specific group of practising teachers ten years after this approach was first introduced.

3.4. DISTANCE EDUCATION (DE)

The importance of distance education (DE) worldwide as a route towards open learning is well documented. This mode of learning has the advantage of enabling people who, because of numerous reasons such as age, distance from institutions of learning and family commitments, would not be able to access conventional education facilities (Jegede et al., 1998). With regard to teacher training, distance education has the advantage of updating teachers' skills while they remain on the job.

The advent of democracy and subsequent introduction of educational reforms meant that Unisa, like other distance education institutions in South Africa, had to respond to the need for upgrading and retraining teachers to equip them with skills to implement the proposed reforms. However, ensuring that trainees understand the reforms and actually change their instructional behaviour to reflect this understanding remains a challenge. In the DE mode of learning, one of the main obstacles to success is the transactional gap between lecturer and student which negatively impacts on learning by limiting the flow of ideas between the two. This study aims at narrowing this gap by listening to the students' voices. As consumers of the curriculum that is meant to change the way they teach, their input is vital in determining whether the training course has any impact on practice. Thus, the study feeds directly into the whole concept of dialogue and student support and is an evaluation of the effectiveness of the course.

3.5. PROGRAMME EVALUATION

The on-going changes in the educational arena call for continuous programme and course evaluation to ensure relevant teacher training that enables teachers to function optimally in the continually changing school contexts. This view is shared by Lockee et al. (2002), who assert that only by evaluating the effectiveness of DE programmes can one justify their use and continue to develop their quality.

Evaluation can be summative, when a final decision is intended, or formative, for improvement of an entity. Its major function is to serve as a lens through which people can

see what is happening, thereby enabling judgements to be made regarding what a programme is achieving or not achieving and why. For this reason, evaluation should be based on research.

Kirkpatrick's (1996) conceptualisation of the evaluation process was used in this study. He considers evaluation to be made up of four levels, the first two of which are most applicable to this research, namely:

- Reaction evaluation; that is, collecting information about what people like most, as well as what positive and negative feelings they have. It involves getting data about how the participants are responding to a programme or course *as it takes place*;
- Learning evaluation, which involves getting data about principles, facts and techniques acquired by participants.

This study involves both these forms of evaluation: information regarding students' understanding and attitudes about OBE as well as implementation practices is gathered during the year they are registered for the course. Because this is continuing professional development, the impact of a course can be judged in progress because the teachers are already practising; they can immediately try ideas they read and learn about, particularly in this case where the module focuses on the educational reforms that teachers are supposed to implement.

At Unisa, lecturers are expected to revise their modules after every three years. The assumption is that the revision is guided by the results of course evaluation in order to give it direction. Thus, evaluation is assumed to be an on-going process. Process evaluation is guided by the following questions which the study addresses:

- What is the course intended to achieve?
- Is the course meeting its goals? What is happening? What do students say?
- What are the gaps?

In this regard, the study is improvement driven and forward looking because the findings are used as a basis for improving the entire ACE English programme.

3.6.   JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Although the demand for continuing professional development of teachers has grown over the years, research evidence that documents the effectiveness of distance teacher

education programmes is thin (Faby et al., 2007). Most of the work done focuses on aspects of the mode of delivery, in particular the use and impact of new technologies on students (Keegan, 2008). Very few studies focus on the impact of programmes and particularly the extent to which already practising teachers who are upgrading through the distance mode negotiate and mediate change. This view is confirmed by Aluko (2009: 17), whose literature search "revealed a paucity of research on the impact of distance education programmes". The resultant void has led to little understanding of where teachers are in adjusting to new practices. Because of the dearth of studies of in-depth programme evaluation, reports of poor performance of teachers and their inability to adjust to the new approaches to teaching are often based on anecdotal as opposed to sound evidence. This is confirmed by Waghid's assertion (2009: 1126) that there is evidence of the "inattentiveness of research to teaching and learning", a situation that compromises programme or course improvement.

Due to the nature of distance education, course developers are removed from the press of school and classroom life and might prescribe ideas that are not practical and may be based on mere assumptions. This view is shared by Elmore and Burney (1999: 48), who contend that while a great deal is known about the characteristics of professional development, less is known about how to organise it successfully so that it influences practice. Substantive evidence of this gap is reported by Mays (2004: 2) on a national teacher audit that was conducted by the South African Institute for Distance Education (henceforth SAIDE) in 1995. His report found that "thousands of educators were involved in numerous training programmes but these programmes were often of quite questionable quality and seemed to have very little impact on the quality of classroom practice". This lack of impact is what struck me during my school visits. There is therefore a need for evidence based on locally generated research findings to guide teacher educators in designing more efficient and effective programmes or to assess which teacher training strategies are working and which ones are not.

Nearer home, the SAIDE report (2006) on the state of teacher training programmes offered by Unisa paints a dull picture that is characterised by alienation and disempowerment of both the lecturer and the students. Among the problems identified, two are relevant to this study: the theoretical nature of courses offered and, in cases where there is a teaching practice component, Unisa's reliance on headmasters of schools to manage student

supervision. This leaves the "individual lecturer investment in teaching, learning and assessment unsupported — a lone battle" (21). The isolation affects the quality of courses offered which do not speak to the students' needs. The authors recommend the creation of dialogue among all parties concerned as this would enable efforts by academics to have the desired impact.

The change to an outcomes-based approach to teaching and learning dictated a review of Unisa's English didactics modules to align them to competences as reflected in the Norms and Standards (DoE 2000) policy document and to prepare teachers to implement the new approach. Accordingly, in 2005, the module ACEEN2-6 was restructured in content to reflect current expectations. The revision was ad hoc and solely intended to comply with policy imperatives and financial constraints. The school visits sensitised me to the need to base revisions on research evidence, which is what this study seeks to achieve.

Put succinctly, the problem statement is as follows: The module revisions of the entire ACE English programme are based on the deficit approach, that is, on mere assumptions about the impact and relevance of the materials as opposed to research-based evidence.

This murky process gives rise to numerous questions that the study seeks to answer, particularly so because, while the research participants are products of the apartheid system of education and training, they are expected to deliver the ideologies and visions of the current government's policies.

3.7.   DELIMITING THE STUDY

Because of the complex nature of education, teacher training and educational reform affect and are affected by different stakeholders, from government to civil society and service providers such as Unisa. It is not within the scope of this study to delve into the dense terrain involving matters of participation by the different parties or the policy documents that were created to address curriculum issues and issues relating to teacher training. This study is not a description of the policy developments in South African education; neither is it a critique of OBE nor of the National Curriculum Statement. Rather, it interrogates my attempt as a teacher educator in a distance education institution to equip practising teachers with skills to implement educational reform.

The target group comprises eight teachers registered for the Subject Didactics course which forms part of the Advanced Certificate in Education: English (ACE) programme. This module is on English didactics. It does not deal with other languages or learning areas. The study specifically seeks to determine the implementation of the OBE approach and is limited to only those students who were registered for the module in a particular year (2007).

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this second section of the chapter, I begin by describing the meta-theoretical assumptions that ground this study. It is important to articulate this because my beliefs affect not only the ontological stance I take in this study but the epistemological view as well.

4.1. ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

I believe knowledge is a product of meaning-making between and among participants. Based on their mental frame of reference, people interpret events and assign meaning to them. In this regard, knowledge generation becomes a social construction which is context-bound. It is a product of co-creation of meaning among the participants involved, as opposed to its being a separate entity that exists out there waiting to be discovered. From an ontological view then, reality is relative and there are no absolutes because context plays a major role in how events are perceived. In other words, reality consists of multiple strands of knowledge emanating from various interpretations. Ideas are therefore fluid and subject to continuous revisions as reflective of changing contexts. This stance is particularly relevant to this study because the eight participants represent eight different case studies. Each constructs his/her reality based on the prevailing circumstances. This is why I went out into the field to find out information to answer the research questions, as opposed to making prior presumptions in the form of a hypothesis. I did not go out to prove any assumption and had no predetermined answers, but entered the field with an open mind, observing and interacting with the participants to obtain as full a picture as possible about each student's lived reality in that particular teaching context.

Because the contexts differ, so do the realities; therefore, from the epistemological perspective, I have to acknowledge the subjective and value-laden nature of the data that was gathered. I have to accept that the same phenomenon can be viewed from different perspectives and therefore the nature of data would remain open, because I am interested in the participants' multiple social realities. Consequently, I cannot generalise the findings

beyond the English ACE programme because these were created as I interacted with these particular participants. The importance of interaction in this study determined my choice of paradigm.

4.2.   THE SOCIO-CONSTRUCTIVIST PARADIGM

Having read about the different paradigms, for instance positivism, post-positivism and critical theory, I chose to ground this study in the socio-constructivist paradigm, which posits that knowledge is in a real sense made and remade by participation in learning. Ideas are personally and socially constructed through the continuous and interactive nature of experience. This is in contrast with paradigms such as positivism that view reality as objective, resting on order and waiting to be discovered mainly by scientific means. Socio-constructivism highlights the acquisition of knowledge through interaction with the environment. Knowledge is gained through social constructions such as language, shared meanings, documents and other artefacts. The emphasis is on dialogue or collaboration with others, leading to a shared understanding. It is also on active learning involving the "construction of cognitive structures" (Kivinen and Ristela, 2003: 365). While active learning warrants critical engagement with the source of knowledge and self-reflection on the process of knowledge acquisition, shared understanding emanates from collaboration in the construction of meaning, in this instance between student and lecturer. A socio-constructivist approach to education, therefore, views learning as "actively creating, interpreting and interrogating knowledge with peers and the teacher" (Gordon, 2008: 324).

Two main ideas pertaining to pedagogy can be drawn from the above discussion:

- that during the learning process, learners are active in constructing their own knowledge; and
- that social interactions are important to knowledge construction.

According to Fraser and Lombard (2002: 98), "the socio-constructivist approach is relevant to the South African context because it emphasises the need for dialogue". This is particularly so in the DE context of this study. On one level, each student teacher is expected to engage in a dialogic process with the study material, construct knowledge about OBE in his or her mind and translate it into classroom practice. On another level, I, the lecturer and researcher, enter into a didactic dialogue with the students who are the participants. Through dialogue, students are encouraged to "share their stories" (Hesse-

Biber and Leavy, 2006: 48) and make sense of themselves and their world. As they compare new knowledge with the old (experiences), they arrive at new understandings which in the case of this study might lead to a change of practice. It is these social constructions that generated the data to answer the research question.

What emerges from this brief review of literature on the socio-constructive paradigm is a clear alignment with the OBE approach to learning and teaching: both are based on principles of knowledge construction, knowledge application to real life situations, and active learning as opposed to recall and passive absorption of ideas. In the case of the students, this involves their being able to continuously interrogate the way they teach, asking themselves why they do things in that particular way, as well as the relationship between their practice and the vision embedded in the OBE approach.

The figure below, adapted from Schulze (2003: 7), demonstrates this alignment.

Socio-constructivism	OBE
The learner rather than the teacher is central to the learning process.	The teacher as facilitator helps learners to understand information and personalise knowledge.
Emphasis on relevance of information to context.	Emphasis on relating learning to authentic situations.
Knowledge is socially constructed and built on what participants contribute and construct together.	Emphasis on collaborative activities.
Learners are active participants in the process of learning.	Emphasis on learner-centred activities.

FIGURE 1: THE CLEAR ALIGNMENT OF THE SOCIO-CONSTRUCTIVIST PARADIGM WITH OBE

5. THE RESEARCH PLAN

This section focuses on the qualitative processes that I followed in conducting the study, the details of which will constitute the methodology chapter of the thesis.

5.1. METHODOLOGY

In line with the socio-constructivist framework, a qualitative design that was exploratory, descriptive and contextual in nature was deemed relevant for this study. The design was

- *exploratory* in that it used informants and involved in-depth qualitative interviews;

- *descriptive* in that it attempted to describe the teachers' practice in depth, utilising different tools;

- *contextual* because teaching, like all human activities, takes place in a given social context.

The aim was to generate themes that described the participants' practice and their perspective of OBE, as reflected in their constructions or 'multivoices' (Lincoln and Guba, 1995: 115).

5.2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Because of its qualitative nature, three sets of literature surveys were deemed appropriate for this study. The first was on continuing professional development, which was meant to contextualise the research. The second, on outcomes-based education, was aimed at generating the theoretical framework for analysing the data. Lastly, the literature review on programme design provided the theoretical grounding for the reconceptualised programme.

The reviews covered the following broad areas:

- Historical overview of in-service training of teachers in South Africa and the description of the ACE English programme;

- OBE and language teaching;

- Programme design, design models, design principles.

5.3.   RESEARCH AIMS

The purpose of the study was to:

- determine the extent to which a group of student teachers were implementing the OBE approach in their teaching and the effectiveness of the materials designed for the course;

- identify factors, if any, that impeded the implementation of OBE;

- proffer possible suggestions for improvement by reconceptualising a training programme.

5.4.   POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Since this was a reflective research project, I focused on eight students to enable me to explore the phenomenon in depth within the available time. All the participants were initially trained during the apartheid era and therefore had to adjust to the outcomes-based approach to teaching.

Purposive sampling was used for this study. This means the choice of participants was solely based on the researcher (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). The most determining factor was distance, in that participants had to be in a school that was easily accessible for prolonged and continuous engagement with me within the set time and financial limits.

5.5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was informed by the following overarching research questions:

> *What is the impact of the ACEEN2-6 module on the professional practice of student teachers? What aspects need to be improved?*

These questions were deconstructed into the following four subsidiary questions which guided the data collecting process:

- *What is the students' theoretical understanding of the OBE phenomenon?*
- *To what extent are the students implementing OBE in their classroom practice?*
- *What effect do the course materials have on the students' practice?*
- *How can the materials be improved?*

5.6. DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

The research tools comprised a mix of in-depth interviews, lesson observations, and analysis of key documents. Journal entries pervaded all three procedures. These instruments were deemed adequate for data collection in this design because they allowed a deep understanding of the teachers' classroom practices through insider perspectives. The details are as follows:

Interviews. This was the main data collection instrument. It consisted of a detailed schedule of in-depth open-ended questions on the OBE approach and teaching practices. The tool was designed to probe the students' understanding and assist them to reflect on their classroom practice.

Lesson observation. I analysed five lessons by each student. Performance was judged through the use of a lesson observation protocol on OBE principles and practices. The focus

was on the main characteristics of OBE in terms of tangible and observable indicators in the classroom.

Records and documents*.* Samples of lesson plans and marking as well as textbooks were collected and examined for alignment with OBE principles.

This triangulation was meant to ensure that the phenomenon was investigated by means of different sources of information in order to enrich the data.

Personal Journal. In addition to the above, I kept a journal in which I recorded my thoughts, frustrations, successes and personal reactions to events throughout the field work.

The interrelatedness of the four data collection tools can be represented as follows:

FIGURE 2: THE INTERRELATEDNESS OF THE FOUR DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

The summary of findings was presented by using the Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome (SOLO) taxonomy (Killen and Hattingh, 2004).

5.7. DATA ANALYSIS

Interview data was transcribed and coded with the help of external experts. The emerging categories and themes formed the framework within which the findings were presented.

Data from the **lesson observation** was analysed by identifying the prevalence of explicit and recognisable activities associated with OBE implementation. These were set against specified descriptors in the observation protocol.

The **documents** were subjected to global analysis. This procedure entailed reading the documents and making notes. Thereafter, the data was divided into segments based on the broad themes that had been identified.

5.8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Qualitative research is a process that involves prolonged interaction for meaning-making between the researcher and participants. Accordingly, there is a need to adhere to an ethical code of conduct. In this study, permission was sought to visit each school (Appendix A). Informed consent was also obtained from the eight participants who were informed of their right to withdraw from participating in the study without prejudice.

6. CHAPTER OUTLINES

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

- Paints the overall picture of the entire study. Gives synopses of the background, grounding theories and the research plan.

Chapter 2

TEACHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: a historical overview

- Contextualises the ACE English programme.

Chapter 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Presents a review of literature in the domain of the OBE approach to teaching and learning in the context of English FAL.

Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY

- Describes the research design as well as the processes and techniques employed in data collection and analysis.

Chapter 5

DATA PRESENTATION

- Presents the data gathered from the three instruments.

Chapter 6

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

- The findings presented in the previous chapter are analysed with a view of answering the research question.

Chapter 7

PRESENTATION OF THE RECONCEPTUALISED PROGRAMME

- Draws together the conclusions of the preceding chapter and derives from them suggestions for improving classroom practice. This is done in the form of a reconceptualised training programme that Unisa could implement.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

- This final chapter comprises my reflection on the entire thesis and related issues.

FIGURE 3: AN OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS COMPRISING THIS THESIS

CHAPTER 2: CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives the background to the study. It begins with a survey of continuing teacher professional development (CPD), also referred to as in-service teacher training (INSET).[3] This is followed by a narrative of the current trends in the teacher education field in South Africa with regard to policy and curriculum interventions. The chapter ends with a description of the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE): English programme and in particular the ACEEN2-6 module on which this study is based. The purpose of this orientation is to put the study into perspective and provide the background to the research questions. Contextualisation of the study is necessary because educational research is a wide and highly contested area, a fact that necessitates a careful delimitation of a study of this nature.

2. BACKGROUND TO CPD/INSET

The need for continuing education for teachers has been acknowledged world-wide. Governments take special interest in the quality of teacher training and development to ensure that the education system is capable of meeting the needs of the nation. Teachers are an important educational resource — the front soldiers in the implementation of a nation's curriculum. In turn, a nation's curriculum is built on policies that reflect its belief systems regarding the future of its people.

According to Darling-Hammond (2006: 300), there is growing evidence to show that among all educational resources "teachers' abilities are especially crucial contributors to students' learning". Results of the World Bank Study on Secondary Education in Africa (World Bank, 2005) show that the most important preconditions for effective teaching are competent and knowledgeable teachers, effective curriculum and resources, and the way in which teachers use these in the learning environment. An alignment of these factors results in teaching quality, with a cascading effect on the quality of learning. Scholars, among them Hopkins et

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[3] While specialists in the field of teacher training make a subtle distinction between CPD and INSET, the two terms are used interchangeably for the purposes of this thesis.

al. (1994) and Rice (2010), confirm that teaching quality is one of the most important variables which influence learner achievement. This is because quality teaching and learning lie at the heart of schooling. For these reasons, governments' interest is not confined to the initial teacher training; it is also in continuing teacher professional development. An investigation into teachers' practices is therefore important because it unearths the classroom dynamics that positively or negatively affect learning.

2.1. DEFINING THE CONCEPT: WHAT IS CPD?

According to Day (1999: 4), it is

> the process by which, alone or with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their teaching.

Orlich (1989: 1) defines the construct as

> a basic and necessary component of the continuing preparation of teachers, administrators and other staff as they extend their professional and technical knowledge.

From these two definitions four critical elements regarding CPD can be identified. First: teachers are change agents. By implication, training should assist teachers to negotiate and adapt to change. Second: the development of criticality, an important skill that enables a teacher to question ideas and select the most appropriate teaching strategies to achieve the intended outcome. Third: the importance of collaboration as the teacher interacts with colleagues to brainstorm and share ideas aimed at improving teaching practices. Finally, CPD is regarded as life-long learning throughout the teacher's working life. The underlying motif in the definitions is that of growth. After the initial training, teachers are, more often than not, required or they decide to upgrade their qualifications or acquire new skills, hence the need for continuing teacher professional development programmes. The initial training is not the end but a preparation for growth in the profession through in-service training.

2.2. CPD AS GROWTH

Bagwandeen and Louw (1993: 10) identify three phases in teacher training, namely the pre-service and education period, the induction period, and lastly the in-service education and training of the practising teacher. These stages, generally referred to as the triple-I-continuum (initial training, induction and in-service training), are regarded as important mechanisms for the improvement of education. Each stage caters for different teacher

needs, but they all complement one another. The initial training (PRE-SET) caters for the areas of knowledge particular to the target educational phase of learners, for instance the foundation phase in primary school, and provides very limited opportunities for teaching practice. The first real experience of a teacher's work comes during the induction stage when the novice teacher goes through some form of internship by participating in all the work that is expected of a teacher, usually under the watchful eye of a mentor. The third part of the triple-I-continuum, namely CPD/INSET, supports the need for continuous upgrading of teacher skills. As Bagwandeen and Louw (1993: 13) put it, "INSET … has to do with aiding people to grow, learn, improve, enjoy, think and do, but with an emphasis on improving performance". The focus here is on performance, implying practical implimentation. Whether it is a refresher course that introduces teachers to new curricula and skills, or an upgrading of academic or professional qualifications programme, the emphasis is on the practical aspect of teaching. In reality, the three stages are separate activities, but the word continuum suggests that they form one whole since each part feeds into the others. From this perspective, PRESET becomes just the beginning of a long journey of refining and updating specialised knowledge and professional skills which would otherwise become obsolete in the face of the rapidly changing demands of the 21st century.

It is clear that teaching involves continuous learning throughout the whole of a teacher's working life. The ultimate aim is "to empower teachers to be autonomous, flexible, creative and responsible agents of change in response to the challenges of the day and in relation to the espoused aims of education" (Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, 1996: 13). In the case of teacher education in South Africa, these changes are introduced through new policies and innovations. When this happens, the teacher needs to be oriented into the new ways of understanding and practising. Thus, professional development should assist teachers to teach with understanding, enable them to apply their knowledge to new situations and solve unfamiliar problems.

Greenland (as cited in Somers and Sikorova, 2002: 96), identifies four kinds of INSET, namely

- INSET for unqualified teachers;
- INSET to prepare for new education/management roles;
- INSET to upgrade teachers;

- Curriculum-related INSET which is mainly courses related to planned curriculum change.

In the context of this study, INSET is designed to assist teachers to cope with curriculum change and, according to Bagwandeen and Louw (1993: 20), to

> help teachers improve the quality of education in their schools; enable teachers to be more effective in their posts and enjoy job-satisfaction; prepare teachers for promotion and provide teachers with higher qualifications.

From this succinct identification of roles, it is evident that the concept INSET/CPD embraces all the experiences a teacher may undergo during the course of his/her working life, with the aim of improving academic and professional education. It represents lifelong education both for self-renewal and improved school performance, hence the description of CPD as growth. This is because challenges brought about by the complex and ever-changing nature of today's world call for teachers to constantly interrogate these roles. By implication, teacher education programmes should be continually reviewed to ensure that they remain effective in preparing teachers to function optimally in dynamic and complex teaching environments. In this study, the ACE English programme is intended to help teachers improve their skills and qualifications by orienting them to new theories and approaches to teaching language. The ACEEN2-6 module on which the study is based is especially designed to improve the teachers' classroom performance. The ultimate aim is to improve the quality of education in schools by keeping the teachers abreast of the recent advances in knowledge and pedagogical theory and practice. In this respect, it is linked to Somers and Sikorova's (2002: 96) roles indicated in bullets 3 and 4 above.

2.3. TEACHER TRAINING IN APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

The history of teacher education in South Africa in the 20th century is closely intertwined with apartheid. Under apartheid, the education system was largely determined and fragmented by the politics of the ruling party. The need to maintain this separatist policy determined the decisions made regarding the organisation and provision of education at all levels country-wide. South Africa had 19 different education departments separated according to race, geography and ideology (Gouws and Dicker, 2007: 241) because, according to the National Policy for General Education Affairs (Act 76 of 1984), teacher education was defined as an "own affair". According to Jaff et al. (1996), the same year (1984) saw the establishment of a Ministry of National Education, but it did not tamper with

regional control over teacher development and different regions continued to decide on matters pertaining to education with little or no interference from the national government. The authors also report that before the current changes, there were 104 state colleges of education, 93 of which were involved in pre-service teacher training (PRESET) through a contact mode. Of these, 14 offered in-service teacher training (INSET) programmes as well. The remaining 11 colleges were involved only in INSET. These colleges were dispersed throughout South Africa in the form of different providers such as universities, technikons and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The presence of INSET institutions during apartheid shows that even at that time, South Africa was not immune to the call for increased instructional quality and educational excellence that was sweeping across the world. For instance, the De Lange Committee Report in 1981 and the Government White paper in 1983 centred on determining ways of improving classroom performance long before the current reform initiatives that were put into place by the Department of National Education in 1990 (Bagwandeen and Louw, 1993: 58). However, state policies at that time promoted racial prejudice, a situation that resulted in unequal access to educational opportunities in relation to allocation of funding, access to learning resources and opportunities, and the quality of teachers (Department of Education, 2001a: 3). For instance, Keevy (2006: 2) observes that "while most white teachers received pre- and in-service training at well-resourced urban universities, most black teachers started teaching without even completing their own secondary schooling, much less the tertiary education that they needed". Welch (2002: 19) concurs:

> …there were racially divided streams of teacher training of black teachers and white teachers at very different educational levels, with only white teacher education conceived as professional practice. Even the period of study was different with three then four year qualifications for white teachers and two and three year qualifications for black.

The result was a negative cascading effect on the quality of black teachers, the quality of teaching and the quality of learners who themselves became teachers. It was a vicious circle, the effects of which are still felt today in the form of poorly trained teachers who teach poorly.

Welch (2002: 22) paints a gloomy scenario of the state of education at the end of apartheid: when the ANC government came into power, "it was faced with the task of dealing with a segregated, fragmented, authoritarian and dangerously unequal and inefficient education

system". She echoes the sentiments of Taylor and Vinjevold (1999: 131), whose research findings show that "teaching and learning in the majority of South African schools leave a lot to be desired".

Among other things, Taylor and Vinjevold (1999) report that:

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

While the first shortcoming may be a result of a poverty-induced shortage of resources, the last two weaknesses stemmed from a system of education which suppressed critical engagement with ideas and instead fostered the kind of education that emphasised compliance, conformity and passive absorption of information. Welch (2002: 20) posits that apartheid was also characterised by the control of curriculum, the dominant philosophy of which was fundamental pedagogics.[4] This philosophy promoted uncritical acceptance of educational content and therefore "placed the learner and teacher as passive subjects in the educational context". In fundamental pedagogics, authoritarian principles were translated into classroom practices as methods that were devoid of analysis or critique. The after-effects of this system are evident today in the form of teachers who lack initiative and cannot engage critically with knowledge, hence the need to retrain and upgrade them. Given this background, it is not surprising that most current South African in-service training programmes for educators have a common objective — to equip unqualified or under-qualified teachers to teach their subjects well.

The majority of teachers who enrol for the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) programme had their initial training during apartheid, hence the need to determine whether they have changed their practice to align it with the subsequent trends in the education system of the new South Africa.

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[4] The philosophy of fundamental pedagogics claims the existence of established truths about education. It promotes unquestioning acceptance as opposed to critical analysis of facts and in this way breeds subservience.

3. REFORM INITIATIVES IN TEACHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Although discussions regarding transformation in education started in the early 1990s (Keevy, 2006), the wheels of change were set in motion when the new government came into power in 1994. The whole process began with the White Paper on Education and Training (DoE, 1995), which spelt out the need for a complete overhaul of the educational system in the country. One of the numerous challenges facing the Department of Education was how to support and develop teachers so that they would be able to participate effectively in educational reform in general and in the implementation of the new approach, OBE, in particular.

The new educational era set high expectations for teachers. These are succinctly summed up by Adler et al. (2002: 150):

> Teachers are expected to teach new knowledge in new ways, and so engage in ongoing learning in relation to their professional expertise. They are expected to produce learners with high level skills and integrated and flexible knowledge so that they may take their rightful place as informed and active citizens in their new knowledge societies. Teachers are also expected to play a significant role in eradicating the social ills and inequalities that their learners bring to their classrooms.

This quote reveals the extremely sophisticated demands that were placed on teachers to realise the goal of curriculum reform. The transformation redefined the teaching profession: teachers were expected to shift to democratic classroom practices. These are noble ideals but they depend on sound infrastructure and capable manpower to make them a reality. It is not enough to conceptualise the process. Much depends on how it will be implemented and managed. In this regard, teacher education needs to equip teachers with adequate skills to effectively perform these roles because the reforms have resulted in a change in the notion of the essence of teaching. Thus the importance of continuing teacher education in contemporary society cannot be underestimated.

In the current educational climate that is typified by educational reform, INSET/CPD has become the main channel through which practising teachers are equipped to successfully deal with the fundamental changes taking place in all aspects of the education arena. This study seeks to determine the current state of student teachers' practice in relation to the new trends as well as determine the impact of the INSET/CPD intervention (module ACEEN2-6). The next section gives some insight into these new trends.

To redress the aforementioned inequalities stemming from apartheid, a plethora of policies and interventions were put in place to transform the education system. It is beyond the scope of this study to delve into all these reforms; the focus will therefore be on only those that impact heavily on current teacher education and practice.

Among the numerous interventions, the following five had a direct impact on teacher education:

- the establishment of a single ministry of education;
- the development and establishment of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF);
- merging of education and training institutions;
- interventions to accelerate access of un- and under-qualified teachers to further and higher education;
- introduction of a new schooling curriculum.

What follows is a brief discussion of these interventions with emphasis on the last three, since they are directly relevant to this study.

3.1. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SINGLE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The pre-democracy racially-based education departments were replaced by a national system of education that was provincially based. Its mandate was to control and co-ordinate all education-related activities. In turn, this new department of education set about establishing a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to manage the transformation of the education system.

3.2. THE DEVELOPMENT AND ESTABLISHMENT OF AN NQF

The NQF was implemented in 1998 as an intervention to regulate the whole education system. Its purpose was mainly transformative: it created an integrated framework within which all qualifications were registered and quality monitored by assigning relevant credits. Below is a brief description of its structure to locate the position of teacher education and notably the ACE programme in the overall design.

Qualification Bands

The NQF focuses on skills or competences in order to integrate education and training. It recognises three broad qualification bands namely:

- General Education and Training (GET)

- Further Education and Training (FET)

- Higher Education and Training (HET)

The GET band is placed at level 1 of the NQF and is an exit point at Grade 9 of the schooling system. It comprises three levels of learning: the Foundation Phase which runs from Grade 0 to Grade 3, the Intermediate Phase which includes Grades 4, 5 and 6, the Senior phase which runs from Grade 7 to Grade 9. Adult Basic education and Training also leads to level 1. The FET band covers levels 2 to 4, ending with the matriculation certificate, the exit point of which is at Grade 12 of the schooling system. All higher education qualifications including teacher education programmes are located at levels 5 to 8 of the NQF. The following diagram illustrates the structure of the NQF at that level.

**Table 1: The current structure of the HEQF reflecting
proposed teacher qualifications per NQF level (DoE, 2005)**

NQF level	Qualification Types	Proposed teacher qualifications
10	Doctorates	DEd, PhD
9	Masters degrees	MEd
8	BEd degrees; advanced diplomas	BEd Hons, Postgraduate Diploma in Education
7	Honours degrees	BEd, Advanced Diploma in Education
6	Diplomas and Certificates	NPDE (National Professional Diploma in Education); **ACE (Advanced Certificate in Education)**
5	Higher Certificates	Higher Certificate in Education

With regard to teacher training and teacher qualifications, the vehicle for change has been the Norms and Standards for Educators Policy document (1996; 2000).[5] It recommends the phasing out of the old teacher education certificates, diplomas, higher diplomas and further diplomas and the introduction of new ones (Ngidi, 2005: 34). The new qualifications include the National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE), which caters for under-qualified educators who want to upgrade themselves, Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE), a specialist professional qualification for fully qualified teachers, and the Post-Graduate

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[5] These together with the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) are dealt with in the next section.

Certificate in Education (PGCE), for people with academic qualifications who want to obtain a professional teaching qualification. The table illustrates how these and other programmes are structured in the NQF. The ACE is pitched at level 6 on the scale, just below the graduate band. It therefore is a pathway to graduate studies for these teachers. The structure is very fluid and current literature indicates pending changes.

3.3. MERGERS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

The new government also had to deal with the numerous education and training institutions all over the country. The National Teacher Education Audit (1995), which resulted from a situational analysis of all teacher education institutions in South Africa by the Committee on Teacher Education Policy (COTEP), enumerated 281 institutions (Djangmah, 2003) offering a full spectrum of pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes. It found, among other things, that "the teacher education field was large, fragmented and increasingly diverse; that the quality of teacher education was generally poor despite the pockets of excellence" (Djangmah, 2003: 8).

It is no surprise then that the first step towards the restructuring of education was the reduction of teacher training institutions. In the first two years after 1994, 18 racially-divided departments were restructured into one national and nine provincial departments and the National Education Policy Act (1996) was introduced. It established the foundations for an integrated system of education based on an outcomes-based rather than the former Christian National Education philosophy.

As part of the transformation of both education and the higher education sector, there was a shift from teacher education colleges as the dominant providers of teacher training to university faculties. Through the process of dissolutions, amalgamations and rationalisations, the number of colleges was reduced to 25 by 2001. Welch (2002: 25) notes that although the incorporation of teacher education into higher education was agreed upon in 1994, it was the Higher Education Act of 1997 that formally made all teacher education part of the higher education system. Subsequently, a number of universities were merged and teacher training colleges were incorporated into universities and universities of technology. In 2000, teacher education became the responsibility of universities as colleges were disbanded. Short learning programmes remained the responsibility of provinces.

3.4. INTERVENTIONS TO ACCELERATE ACCESS OF UN- AND UNDER-QUALIFIED TEACHERS TO FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The need for this intervention was two-pronged. Firstly, according to the National Teacher Education Audit commissioned by the Ministry of Education in 1995, there were high numbers of unqualified and under-qualified teachers, meaning that the majority of teachers were not skilled sufficiently to meet the education needs and challenges of South Africa in the 21st-century global environment. Details of the existing weaknesses were later to emerge in the findings of the President's Education Initiative Research Project (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999). Secondly, in an attempt to redress the legacy of apartheid education, the new government introduced a new curriculum which required teachers to adopt new approaches to planning, teaching and assessment. Practising teachers who were accustomed to different teaching approaches were overwhelmed by this new approach. According to Samuel (1998: 579), "teacher education under apartheid education did not equip the teaching force with alternative conceptions of language teaching and learning and many teachers within the existing school system feel inadequate to promote a more communicative and sociolinguistic analysis of language teaching and learning". Most of those enrolled for the ACE programme fall in this category. Success of the reforms therefore rests on massive reskilling of the existing teaching staff. Proper training is crucial to "achieve a community of competent teachers who are dedicated to providing education of high quality, with high levels of performance" (DoE, 2006: 5).

The presence of unqualified and under-qualified teachers particularly in black schools was the norm rather than the exception. For instance, in their 1995 report Hofmeyer and Hall mention that 60% of black teachers in primary schools and 22% of black secondary-school teachers were un/under qualified. Nine years later, Mays (2004: 4) gives the following figures from the March 2001 edition of Edusource Data News publication:

> The total number of teachers employed by the DoE countrywide at the end of February 2000 was 347,982. Almost 24% of teachers (85,501) are under- or un-qualified, and 80% of these are teachers in rural primary schools.

This situation justifies intensive INSET/CPD to improve the quality of teaching. For these programmes to fully meet the teachers' needs, they have to be multifocal, a fact that is emphasised in the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (2006):

> Both conceptual and content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge are necessary for effective teaching, together with the teacher's willingness and ability to reflect on practice and learn from the learners' own experience of being taught. These attributes need to be integrated, so that teachers can confidently apply conceptual knowledge-in-practice. (DoE, 2006: 16).

The above statements underlie the need for CPD/INSET to be based on a holistic view of teacher development. This includes helping teachers to improve on their classroom skills, strengthen their subject knowledge base, and upgrade their qualifications. The focus is on the knowledge, skills and attitudes expected of a teacher but these are integrated in performance and cannot be compartmentalised.

3.5. INTRODUCTION OF A NEW SCHOOLING CURRICULUM: CURRICULUM 2005, THE REVISED NATIONAL CURRICULUM STATEMENT (RNCS) AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM STATEMENT (NCS AND OBE).

The discrepancies that existed in the education system have been pointed out in the preceding sections. It was the need to redress these imbalances that resulted in the overhaul of the education system. According to Djangmah (2003: appendix 2), "the whole process of educational transformation was guided by the fundamental principles of equity and redress, democratisation, development, quality, effectiveness and efficiency and academic freedom". Encapsulated in this statement is the need to introduce measures that promote democracy and quality education and improve the quality of teaching. As Adler (2002: 6) puts it, curriculum reform "means developing new approaches to knowledge, learning and teaching, and constructing new kinds of classroom practices". The ultimate aim is to transform society through education.

Proposals for the transformation of education and training in South Africa first emerged during discussions on civil society policies before South Africa's democratic elections in 1994. These led to the establishment of the National Curriculum Framework, a product of recommendations proposed in the White Paper on Education and Training (1995), the South African Qualifications Act (1995) and the National Education Policy Act (1996). The outcome was the introduction of numerous curriculum reforms in schools to replace the apartheid system of education with a democratic one that supports enlightened approaches to learning and teaching. The most significant one was the launch of Curriculum 2005 (C2005) by the then Minister of Education, Sibusiso Bengu, in 1997.

Unveiling this curriculum, Minister Bengu announced that "the outcomes-based curriculum aims at equipping all learners with the knowledge, competences and orientations needed for success after they leave school or have completed their training. Its guiding vision is that of a thinking competent future citizen" (DoE, 1997: 1). These two features, namely that the outcomes-based approach and the development of critical thinking skills, are characteristic of the South African curriculum even today. In addition, the curriculum is competency-based: what matters most in a learning situation is the acquisition of competences that can be transferred to other life situations.

It was soon clear that teachers were struggling with the demands of the new curriculum. Firstly, they found the terminology too dense. Jansen (1999: 9) states that "more than 100 words were introduced into the curriculum landscape", making the curriculum jargon-ridden and conceptually inaccessible. Many teachers struggled to assimilate the curriculum terminology because its discourse was completely foreign to their understanding and practices. Secondly, the new curriculum used a complicated matrix of range statements, assessment criteria and performance indicators that made assessment difficult for teachers to understand. Lastly, new demands were made of teachers who were now expected to construct learning programmes and prepare lessons based on outcomes. In terms of pedagogy, the reforms proved challenging for teachers who were used to different ways of doing things. Most of them struggled to accept the change in their roles and cope with the new demands in their field. It was evident that the vision behind the reforms assumed teachers who were competent enough to promote the ambitious agendas of the new education system; the reality, however, was very different. Teachers had had minimum formal preparation and training (Jansen, 1999; Rasool, 1999; Todd and Manson, 2005) and were unable to cope.

There were mixed reactions to the new curriculum. While some scholars hailed it as a promising educational reform (Rasool, 1999), others (Jansen, 1999) attacked it as a political gimmick which has very little to do with what goes on in the classroom.

In an attempt to clarify the problem, the government commissioned a Ministerial Review Committee led by Professor Linda Chisholm to evaluate the effectiveness of C2005. While commending the outcomes-based approach of the new curriculum, the committee recommended numerous refinements, particularly by way of removing the jargon,

streamlining the design features, clarifying and specifying some core features.[6] Accordingly, C2005 was revised to make it more user-friendly, resulting in the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) for General Education and Training (GET) — Grades 0 to 9 — and the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) for Further Education and Training (FET) — Grades 10 to 12. The NCS was phased in gradually, and the last phase, Grade 12, was introduced in 2008. The NCS is therefore not a new curriculum but a revised version of C2005. It is a product of a Ministerial Committee review that was implemented in 2000 in the light of criticisms from the consumers of the curriculum. Apart from making the language more accessible to teachers, the process of streamlining C2005 reduced the design features from the original eight to three, namely Critical and Developmental Outcomes, Learning Outcomes, and Assessment Standards (DoE, 2000: 4). These changes did not affect the fundamental principles that govern teaching and learning. Accordingly, the NCS "keeps intact the principles, purposes and thrust of Curriculum 2005 and affirms the commitment to outcomes-based education" (Vandeyar and Killen, 2003: 130). The focus is on the achievement of outcomes as opposed to content, on learner-centred as opposed to teacher-centred learning and criterion- as opposed to norm-referenced assessment.

In Morrow's (2007) view, the NCS as a curriculum outlines in broad terms the aims and essence of an educational approach while OBE is the vehicle that delivers the methodology for achieving the stated or intended aims. In other words, the NCS finds expression in the OBE methodology. The two constructs cannot therefore be used interchangeably because they complement each other.

In terms of teacher education, the "NCS sets up expectations of teachers and educators that require a new and prolonged emphasis on education and training at all levels for all educators" (DoE, 2001a: 78). This statement stresses the need for both short term and long term teacher development and support, a fact which implies the need for continual professional development programmes such as the ACE.

Is in-service professional development fulfilling its promise of educational improvement and change in SA? Improvement, in the context of this study, implies being able to implement

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[6] Details are spelt out in several government documents on the Revised National Curriculum Statement.

the NCS through the use of the OBE approach to language teaching and learning.[7] This study seeks to answer this question by interrogating the effect of one module offered in the ACE English programme.

4. POLICIES IMPACTING ON TEACHER EDUCATION

The new curriculum set high expectations for the teachers whose skills are crucial to its success. Realising the un-preparedness of practising teachers to implement reforms due to a lack of knowledge and skills, the government took steps to ensure that teachers are well-equipped, the first of which was to draw up numerous policies that spelt out the vision for the future of education in the country.

The policies were a response to these concerns and especially targeted at empowering teachers by equipping them with knowledge and skills to implement the new curriculum effectively. They provide guidelines for the transformation of teacher education, thereby expressing the government's vision since the White Paper on Education and Training (1995) was formulated. This policy articulated the need for good quality education and training, acknowledging that in many schools and colleges serving the majority of the population there was a steep decline in the quality of educational performance. This trend had to be reversed, because quality was required across the board. Teacher training was especially targeted because it is arguably the most vital strategy for education reconstruction. According to Deacon and Parker (1999: 73), "if the ambitious path to the future that has been laid out in the policy is to be achieved, there has to be massive and radical re-education of hundreds and thousands of educators through whose identities, competencies, values and practices change will be mediated". Governments can put policies in place but the implementation takes place in particular educational contexts and mainly depends on the cooperation of teachers. Competent teachers are thus the key to quality education because the strength of an education system largely depends on the quality of its teachers. Unless teachers support change, most efforts at reconstruction will be ineffective.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to detail all policies, but two merit discussion because of their impact on teacher education. These are the Norms and Standards for Educators (1996;

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[7] In this thesis, OBE is understood as a pedagogy that drives the NCS curriculum.

2000) and the National Policy for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (DoE, 2006).

These two policies, although adopted at different times, complement each other. The National Policy for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa focuses mainly on the structures of teacher training, whereas the Norms and Standards for Educators policy provides details of teacher training expectations and outcomes. The two policies speak to the needs of the South African education system; they are aimed at achieving a community of competent teachers who are intent on providing high quality education and maintaining high standards of practice in the classroom. Because this study centres on practice that demonstrates the expected pedagogical knowledge, the following section gives a synopsis of requirements for teachers according to each of the two policies.

4.1. THE NATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHER EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA (2006)

The National Policy Framework constitutes an overarching policy framework which charts a long-term vision of a coordinated and coherent system of initial and continuing professional education of teachers. It focuses on the systemic role of teacher education in the overall transformation of the education field.

This policy operates mainly at a macro-level of teacher development. It seeks to "provide an overall strategy for the successful recruitment, retention and professional development of teachers to meet the social and economic needs of the country" (DoE, 2006: 5). The main aim is to align and standardise teacher qualification routes in line with the requirements of the NQF. Guided by the belief that teachers are the essential drivers of good quality education, the policy lays out regulations based on and in response to the recommendations of the Ministerial Committee on Teacher Education, which had worked closely with the South African Council for Educators. It operates on the premise that change is best effected when teachers themselves are informed and involved.

According to this policy, INSET/CPD for educators is two-pronged. On one node, it caters for an educator's intellectual growth, which in turn should result in better understanding of the education process as well as a deeper insight into the theories that govern the conduct of teaching. On the other node, in-service training strengthens the educator's effectiveness as a classroom practitioner by improving his/her teaching skills. An ideal INSET/CPD

programme should therefore maintain this balance of a teacher as both an academic and a practitioner:

> …all teachers need to enhance their skills, not necessarily qualifications, for the delivery of the new curriculum. A large majority need to strengthen their subject knowledge base, pedagogical content knowledge and teaching skills. (DoE, 2006a: 17)

The emphasis is clearly on the integration of subject, pedagogic and contextual knowledge (conceptual knowledge-in-practice) as a necessary prerequisite for teaching effectiveness. The ACE programme is moulded on these essential pillars.

4.2. THE NORMS AND STANDARDS FOR EDUCATORS

Of all the teacher education policies that have been formulated so far, the Norms and Standards for Educators document (1996, 2000) is the most comprehensive. Unlike the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (2006), this policy explicitly spells out the expectations of teacher training programmes, emphasising particularly the competences to be developed. It gives guidelines for teacher educators in designing programmes that would actualise its vision of producing highly skilled teachers able to provide high quality education. Accordingly, training programmes such as the ACE should be grounded in this policy.

The Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) document requires that teacher education programmes emphasise competences required in the workplace. More importantly, it stipulates that teaching practice "should be regarded as a mode of delivery through which all different roles of educators should be assessed" (Norms and Standards for Educators Policy, 2000:12). The emphasis is on applied integrated competence. The same researchers contend that if the concept of competence is to guide the development and implementation of training programmes, then those competences should be explicitly stated: "Descriptions of competences should be easy to understand, straightforward and flexible, permit direct observation, and be expressed as outcomes" (248). Accordingly, teaching practice is one of the avenues available to teacher educators to assess the level of competence of students.

The policy spells out the aim of INSET/CPD: to "properly equip teachers to undertake their essential and demanding tasks, to enable them to continually enhance their professional competence and performance" (DoE, 2006: 4). Embedded in this description are the notions of skills development and continuity, which are fundamental to professional growth. This

study is grounded within these expectations because continuity of professional development hinges on constant reflection on practices that is aimed at the improvement of training programmes. This in turn feeds into continued professional development. The study therefore contributes towards meeting the overall aim of the policy, which is to "achieve a community of competent teachers who are dedicated to providing education of high quality, with high levels of performance" (DoE, 2006: 5). In acknowledgement of the pivotal role of the teacher in this new educational dispensation, the Norms and Standards document provides a coherent picture of the seven educator daily roles. The assumption is that a teacher who can fulfil these roles is a competent practitioner who can transform education. The ideal competent teacher is described as one who is

- a specialist in a particular learning area or phase;
- a specialist in teaching and learning;
- a specialist in assessment;
- a curriculum developer;
- a leader, administrator and manager;
- a scholar and life-long learner; and
- a professional who plays a community, citizenship and pastoral role.[8]

These teacher roles "provide an explicit direction for the design and delivery of teacher education programmes and embody the knowledge, skills and abilities that an individual demonstrates under occupational situations" (Fraser, 1995: 7). The emphasis is on practical application of these three attributes. The roles are also an indication of what the national department expects from teachers regarding curriculum functions. This way, the policy feeds into the NCS, which emphasises the integration of knowledge and skills in a learning situation. The teachers' role is encapsulated in the holistic aim of teacher education as spelt out in the COTEP Norms and Standards for Teacher Education (1996: 13), which have a slightly different wording from those of 2000:

> Teachers must be empowered to become autonomous, flexible, creative and responsible agents of change in response to the educational challenges of the day and in relation to the espoused aims of education in South Africa.

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[8] The question of how teacher training programmes can help teachers to acquire the knowledge, understanding, skills, abilities and values to fulfil each of these educator roles has been explored in detail (Fraser et al., 2005).

Of the seven roles, the three that focus on identities related to classroom responsibilities, namely mediator of learning, designer of learning programmes and assessor, are particularly relevant to this research. They feed directly into the teachers' daily roles, which are to design (select and generate) learning resources to support a range of contextualised teaching purposes, mediate learning and use appropriate assessment strategies. In order to meet these expectations, both conceptual and content knowledge as well as pedagogical knowledge are necessary. They need to be integrated so that teachers can apply conceptual knowledge-in-practice.

As interconnected and interrelated strands, the teacher roles reflect a teacher who is able to work creatively and critically, adapt to change and accommodate diversity, which is a feature of today's classrooms. This corresponds to the postmodern pedagogy which envisages a 'classroom without walls' where the curriculum is problem-based and knowledge is regarded as a dynamic and fluid as opposed to a fixed entity. The underlying belief guiding this policy is that teachers are essential drivers of change in the form of provision of a good quality education.

The Norms and Standards policy therefore provides a generic picture of a teacher as well as the required competences and guidelines for the development of learning programmes aligned with the NQF. The competences and roles expected of teachers it spells out reflect a competence-based approach for teacher education programmes.

The ACE English programme responds to this requirement by emphasising both the acquisition of content and pedagogy. It adopts a holistic approach regarding the teachers' acquisition of competences in these roles: four modules deal with different aspects of content that is needed to teach English, while the ACEEN2-6 module specifically targets methodology. This places the module ACEEN2-6 at the centre of the entire programme because students need to demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter presented in the other modules when they discuss matters of practice. The competence expected at the end of the qualification is classroom practice that is aligned to the current expectations of teacher educators.

4.2.1 A competence-based approach to teacher training

Since the success of educational reforms rests on the teacher, the core issues of competence in performance leading to the provision of high quality education are the essence of teacher education in South Africa today. The notion of competence as a motif runs through all that is required of teachers because it is an essential prerequisite to sound classroom practice and must be demonstrated in real situations, which is the focus of this study.

Gonczi (1994: 28) identifies three conceptions of the construct competence. First there is the behaviourist view where competence is associated with the display and completion of automised tasks usually manifested through the use of checklists. Then there is the generic approach to competence which concentrates on the underlying attributes, such as knowledge or critical thinking capacity, which provide the basis for transfer of more specific attributes. This approach is abstract as it ignores the context in which these competences might be used. The notion of competence that this study adopts and which is consonant with the Norms and Standards for Educators policy is a combination of the two, which Gonczi (1994) terms the integrated or holistic conception of competence. It is a relational approach which links an individual's knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to the demands of the tasks or activities. In this sense, competence is seen as the ability that encompasses the entire range of demands that make up a complicated enterprise such as teaching.

An integrated notion of competence relates knowledge, skills and attitudes to the actions which can be brought together and displayed in the performance of certain tasks, taking the context (in this case the classroom), into account. It is a powerful device for improving content, delivery and assessment of current curriculum. While the seven roles are viewed as an integrated whole, this study specifically targets competence in two distinct areas — learning and teaching, and assessment. As the researcher, I intended to observe the educator performance in the classroom and make inferences about the quality of teaching and learning and the educator's competence.

What then is a competent teacher? Once new policies are in place, it is the teachers' role to implement them and this depends on the preparedness of these classroom practitioners which, in turn, depends on their competence. Spady (1994) contends that competence must be demonstrated in real, complex situations. In this study the teacher is required to demonstrate his/her understanding of OBE through classroom practice. The emphasis is on

the teacher's applied competence, which is made up of practical, foundational and reflexive competences. The contention is that adequate training that provides a proper conceptual base of these competences is a necessary prerequisite for successful implementation of the curriculum at classroom level. What is of most concern in this study, however, is applied competence as demonstrated in classroom practice, because the module that these students are registered for focuses on the practice of teaching.

The Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) document states that teacher training programmes are required to develop the teachers' applied competence, which is the ability to put into practice the theory learnt. Development of applied competence is the cornerstone of teacher training (DoE, 1996: 10). It consists of three interconnected competences:

- Foundational competence, which is an understanding of the knowledge and thinking that underpins the action taken (Fraser, 2007: 2). The competence is demonstrated in the teacher's ability to understand such aspects as learning styles, barriers to learning, and theories of learning and teaching. It is usually assessed through written assignments and examinations. The competence is particularly important "in teacher education in South Africa where research has shown that a major weakness of South African teachers is their subject knowledge" (Fraser et al., 2005: 235).

- Practical competence, which is the demonstrated ability in an authentic context to perform a chosen action after making considered decisions (Fraser, 2007: 2). It refers to a teacher's ability to make informed choices when confronted with a range of options. Such decisions should be based on theory. The emphasis is on the student teacher's ability to put into practice in authentic situations what has been learnt.

- Reflexive competence is the ability to integrate performance and decision-making with understanding (Fraser, 2007: 2), and to adapt to change and unforeseen circumstances. It indicates the teacher's ability to think retrospectively, decide on whether a strategy works or not, and emerge with solutions that govern future actions.

According to Fraser et al. (2005), the practice of teaching should incorporate all the competences and their assessment should take place in authentic contexts. Without knowledge of the subject matter (foundational competence), the performance will be poor.

Similarly, practical competence is vital because it involves the actual practice of teaching. Finally, reflexive competence is crucial because, in order to grow, a teacher needs to reflect and learn from experiences and mistakes in order to improve practice and knowledge. This requirement is in line with the aim of this study. While the ACE programme as a whole is designed to prepare a teacher for most of these roles, of concern in this study are the skills and abilities that a teacher demonstrates in the classroom, because these should reflect educational reform.

Gonczi (1994) posits that competence is a construct that is not directly observable but can be inferred from successful performance. It is underpinned by a combination of attributes such as knowledge, skills, dispositions, attitudes, values and ethics. Thus, while performance of skills and tasks can be observed, the attributes that underlie the performance are necessarily inferred. A holistic approach to competence therefore considers the context in which the professional works and allows for the incorporation of values, ethics and the need for reflective practice. This orientation has relevance to this study since evaluation of the impact of this module involves classroom observation of educators' performance, taking into account their varied teaching contexts. The intention is to draw inferences of the educators' competence regarding the quality of teaching and learning taking place.

Not everyone agrees with foregrounding competences in educational practice. Even the competence-based model itself has been criticised for its assumption that all knowledge and understanding can be assessed through direct observation (Whitty and Willmott, 1991). The two latter scholars are among those who contend that, although focusing on demonstrable competences is an effective way to assess practice, it runs the danger of engaging a mechanical approach that is uniform and devoid of creativity. Competence therefore should be more than just specifying the actions needed to achieve the outcome; it should be more about the process involved. What should be assessed "is not only the ability to perform the role but the competence, that is, how well the role is performed" (DoE, 2000: 10). This is because outcomes that have been met are the final products but competences are the abilities to perform the identified functions in line with expected standards . For instance, a well designed lesson plan is an outcome, but the designing of a lesson plan is a competence to be achieved. By implication, the teacher should be interested in how learners have arrived at the outcome they have achieved and, if they have not, how much they have

learnt. Norris (1991: 331) concurs and adds that competences should be transferable from setting to setting and meet national as opposed to local standards. This idea is congruent with the NCS tenet of learners being required to apply ideas learnt to new situations. It also underlies the concepts of integration and relating each lesson and specific outcomes to the Critical Outcomes. By assessing the impact of a methodology course, this study seeks to determine the student teachers' competence with regard to expected classroom practices.

While the educator's performance is crucial to the assessment of competence, it may be strengthened by other kinds of evidence. In this study, this is done through a range of performance activities that are assessed in order to make a reliable and safe inference. Whitty and Willmott (1991) recommend selecting a mix of methods that are most direct and relevant to the performance. This research project uses documents and interviews to augment lesson observation as a performance being assessed to infer competence.

Competence-based teacher education emphasises performance in authentic settings. In this domain, a relevant and effective training programme is one that enables teachers to demonstrate competence in the desired roles rather than master course material. In the next section, I describe a training course that is meant to arm students with the expected competences necessary to effect educational reform.

5. BACKGROUND OF THE ACE QUALIFICATION

Programmes of initial teacher education and continuing professional development are always in the process of development and adaptation aimed at ensuring that they respond to the expectations of a variety of stakeholders within the process of change. It is within this multifaceted background that teacher educators seek to construct practices that simultaneously seek to meet the teachers' pedagogical and professional needs as well as the demands of the various stakeholders. The intention is to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills that are relevant to the changing educational context of this century.

5.1. RATIONALE BEHIND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NEW QUALIFICATION

When the African National Congress (ANC) government came into power in 1994, it ushered in numerous reforms in many spheres of the South African society. The sector that probably experienced the greatest upheaval was the whole spectrum of the education field, ranging from pre-primary, primary, secondary, through high school to tertiary levels. Although these

reform initiatives were targeted at the learners, by implication teacher education had to be transformed to accommodate the new trends. Under the apartheid policy of separate development, "it was possible for educators teaching in black schools to have no professional qualification at all or a mere two years of professional development" (Mays, 2004: 1-2). Attempts to redress imbalances brought about by such discriminatory policies created the need for in-service teacher training. One of the decisions was to introduce new training programmes to meet the needs of the nation. The purpose was three-pronged: to facilitate the training of unqualified teachers, to provide pathways for trained teachers to improve on their qualifications and to help teachers understand and adjust to the newly-introduced approach to teaching in order to overcome implementation barriers. The belief was and still is that quality learning experience starts with curriculum development and design.

One of the programmes started by Unisa in 1996 was the Further Diploma in Education (FDE) programme.[9]

5.2. THE FDE ENGLISH PROGRAMME

The FDE was a two year in-service diploma for those teachers who already had three years' professional training and wished to improve their skills but were not interested in doing a full post-graduate diploma or degree. It had numerous areas of specialisation, one of which was English, taught by the Department of English. The diploma enabled students to improve their competence in English by enhancing their knowledge of the subject, refining their teaching skills and helping them to become aware of new trends, approaches and areas of debate in language teaching. In addition, it helped them to cope more confidently in a changing educational environment characterised by multilingual and multicultural classrooms and large classes.

The aims of the diploma were to:

- cultivate in students an enjoyment of English language and literature;

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[9] This programme was started before the introduction of Curriculum 2005 which introduced the term outcomes.

- provide student teachers with reading and writing skills necessary for success in the study of English;

- develop an understanding of the structures and functions of the English language;

- equip teachers with the necessary subject knowledge to enable them to teach English second language;

- enable teachers to teach English competently, confidently and with an awareness of the needs of learners in a multilingual and multicultural classroom.

Some of the areas of specialisation Unisa offered had only five modules, but the FDE English opted for six: FDEEN1-C and FDEEN4-F (devoted to Language Studies); FDEEN2-D (based on General Principles of Teaching English); FDEEN3-E (focused on the teaching of Fiction); FDEEN5-G (Poetry); and FDEEN6-H (Drama). The qualification adopted a holistic approach by integrating theoretical topics, content and methodology.

The FDE was extensively revised in 1998 to bring it up to date with the changes in policy introduced by the new education dispensation. In 2004, when it came under the SAQA umbrella, the qualification changed its name from the Further Diploma in Education (FDE) to the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE).

5.3. THE UNISA ACE PROGRAMME

The current ACE English programme is part of a cohort of programmes offered by the Unisa's Department of Further Teacher Education. According to the institution's Calendar, Part 5, the Advanced Certificate in Education comprises a range of learning area specialisations: Accounting Education, Environmental Education, English Education, Life-orientation, Mathematics Education, Educational Leadership, Special Needs Education, Travel and Tourism Education.

The primary purpose of this qualification is to provide South African school teachers with further knowledge and skills to enable them to better understand and address particular educational needs in the country. Each of the offerings is therefore designed for further specialisation for already qualified teachers and operates independently. This fragmentation was criticised in the audit on Unisa's teacher training programmes by the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) in 2006.

5.4. THE ADVANCED CERTIFICATE IN EDUCATION (ACE): ENGLISH

The importance of English as a school subject and a medium of learning and teaching cannot be underestimated. Because it is the medium of wider communication, poor language skills impact negatively on the transfer and assimilation of information. For this reason, it is imperative that learners acquire the communicative competence needed to operate effectively in today's world. Within most second and third language contexts in South Africa, the only place of contact with English for most learners is the classroom, hence the need for good language teachers.

Unlike all the other qualifications located in the Department of Education (Unisa), ACE English or English Education was located in the Department of English.[10] The qualification is for teachers who already have a school-leaving certificate with English as a subject and an approved three-year professional teaching qualification. The certificate focuses on one subject (English) and aims to meet the needs of teachers who teach the subject at the Senior Phase. It is directed at classroom practitioners who are at the forefront of implementing the educational reforms. By involving students in intensive study of both content and methodology, the programme aims to make them more proficient, knowledgeable and effective teachers of English than before. Originally it comprised six modules, but when the name changed to ACE English, modules 5 and 6 were collapsed into one (mainly for financial reasons), reducing the number of modules from 6 to 5. Most students take the first two modules in their first year, and the last three in their second.

The qualification is registered at level 6 of the NQF and is still organised around the commonly-used distinction between 'language' and 'literature'. At present, two modules, ACEEN1-5 and ACEEN4-9, are devoted to English Language Studies; one, ACEEN2-6, to Methodology; and the other two, ACEEN3-8 and ACEEN5-A, to Literature Studies. Although each module is complete in itself, students are encouraged to view the ACE English programme in an integrated way. The modules are interlinked and should be seen as connected aspects of the same general outcome: the development of competent English teachers.

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[10] Recently the programme was moved to the Department of Further Teacher Education but there have been no changes. The outcomes and course material have remained the same.

Common to all 5 modules is the prescribed dictionary, the *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English*. In addition, some modules have other texts prescribed.

5.5.   2005 REVISIONS

Until the modules were revised in 2005 (for 2006), the two language studies modules covered various theoretical topics that were integrated with methodological principles. During the process of planning for the revisions, students' performance over the past four years in these two modules (and in the programme as a whole) was analysed, and it was found that basic proficiency in English was generally of a low standard and needed to be explicitly addressed. This was partly due to the influx of students who had come through the NPDE and were weaker than students who had previously enrolled for the FDE. Accordingly, some material was reshuffled around the different modules, some discarded, and some new parts introduced. The following decisions were made that directly affected the structure and content of the language modules:

- The content of the first Language Studies module, ACEEN1-5, was replaced by a Proficiency module (bearing the same code) that would aim at enhancing students' reading and writing abilities. An existing proficiency module for education students would be used for this purpose.
- The suitability of the theoretical topics that had originally been included in ACEEN1-5 was assessed and those that were retained were incorporated into the second English Language Studies module, ACEEN4-9.
- Much of the content dealing with methodology from the original ACEEN4-9 was incorporated into a new, dedicated Methodology module, ACEEN2-6, which is the focus of this study.

The table below gives a summary of the five modules that make up the current ACE English programme.

Table 2: The ACE programme

Module	Description	Aims
ACEEN1-5	A proficiency module focusing on writing and reading comprehension.	To help improve the language competence or knowledge base of the students.

ACEEN2-6	Subject didactics module focusing on the teaching of English in second and third language contexts.	To equip students with skills to facilitate the implementation of the NCS in English First Additional Language classrooms.
ACEEN3-8	Literature module	To develop in students an appreciation for and enjoyment of literature, especially prose fiction.
ACEEN4-9	English Language Studies	To develop the students' ability to use English confidently by developing their own subject knowledge and language skills
ACEEN5-A	Poetry and Drama experience	To equip students with skills to teach poetry and drama in English.

As required of all teacher training programmes, the five modules that make up the ACE programme are aligned to OBE and the NCS: each module provides the outcomes that should be achieved and in some instances contains self-evaluation exercises to give learners the much-needed practice. Formative assessment is in the form of assignments. The modules are also consonant with the exit level outcomes and selected aspects of the roles specified in the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) and the National Framework for Teacher Education (2006). Given that all of them are theory-based, the emphasis is on foundational competence. Reflexive competence is developed through problem-based assignments that require students to account for their classroom practices. However, the absence of a practical component in this qualification militates against the acquisition of practical competence. Although the students are practising teachers, they need to be mentored in their experimentation with new ideas in actual classroom practice.

The ACE English programme also meets the standards set by UNESCO which spell out four core elements of teacher education:

- Improving the general educational background of trainee teachers (ACEEN1-5);
- Increasing their knowledge and understanding of the subjects they are to teach (ACEEN3-8, ACEEN4-9, ACEEN5-A);
- Improving pedagogy and understanding of children and learning (ACEEN2-6);

- The development of practical skills and competence (ACEEN2-6).

<div align="right">(Adapted from Perraton et al., 2002: 8)</div>

From the above, it is evident that the programme firmly rests on the essential three types of knowledge required of any teacher training programme, namely knowledge for practice (content), knowledge in practice (methodology), and knowledge of practice (awarenss of theories and reflective practice). In other words, the programme is designed to increase the teachers' conceptual knowledge-in-practice by developing their subject knowledge, enhancing their understanding of the new orientations to knowledge as well as improving on their skills. In contrast to other learning areas where subject content is offered separately, English Education designs and delivers both content and method. The philosophy that underpins the programme is eclectic. It views knowledge as a process which is open-ended and tentative: students are challenged to question assumptions and develop critical consciousness.

Programmes that are developed in terms of SAQA qualifications are organised into core, elective and fundamental components. In the case of this programme, four modules are in the core learning component and one, Language Proficiency, is in the fundamental learning category. There are no electives. The aim is to help teachers acquire competence in their own knowledge and didactic practice in an integrated manner.

5.6. STUDENT SUPPORT SYSTEM

As a distance education institution, Unisa exploits the potential to use a range of sites for programme delivery such as the web, CDs, satellite broadcasting and various tutor-staffed centres country-wide. With this group of students however, the provision is predominantly institution-focused; students correspond with the university individually. It is all independent learning and students are welcome to ask for support from lecturers.

The demographic profile of enrolled students reveals that the majority are geographically dispersed in rural areas of SA. Very few have access to internet and e-mail but almost all have access to mobile technology which the university utilises in the form of SMS text messaging for both administrative and academic purposes. There are no face-to-face contact or tutorial sessions. To meet the needs of this student population, paper-based distance learning materials are made available in the form of study guides, tutorial letters and information booklets. The print-based modules typically consist of

- one study guide;

- a series of tutorial letters, the most important one being Tutorial Letter 101, which gives details of study materials, assessment, assignments and due dates as well as examination dates.

5.7. ASSESSMENT

The modules are text driven with fixed content. There are three assignments for each module, the first of which is compulsory for subsidy purposes. Assignments serve a dual purpose, namely that of admission to the examination and formative assessment. In the latter case, 20% of the highest assignment mark counts towards the final mark. For a student to obtain examination admission, s/he has to have attained a minimum of 40% as the year mark. The examination is a three-hour paper written between October and November and a supplementary one in February.

To pass the course, a student must have a minimum score of 50%.

All modules are pitched at level 6 of the NQF and the entry qualification is a teaching Diploma.

5.8. ACEEN2-6 IN CONTEXT

This English Didactics module is the focus of the present study. It is a practice-based, one-year, part-time course designed to help students understand the approaches that underpin OBE and how these translate into practical implementation at classroom level. The intention is two-fold: to provide students with a good grounding in the principles and practice of language teaching and assessment in order to equip them with skills to help their learners reach their full potential; and to enable students to cope with practical problems in the field, in particular those relating to teaching large classes. The design is aligned to the NCS languages Learning Area Outcomes in that it focuses on the teaching of the four language skills. To meet the requirements of teacher training programmes outlined in the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) policy, each unit deliberately focuses on the three groups of general competences: knowledge, skills, values and attitudes; to determine what learners have achieved after a learning experience. Assignments are designed to assist students to reflect on their practice by emphasising the integration of knowledge and skills as well as theory and practice, with the aim of improving classroom performance and professional

growth. The theory underlying the course is the need for performance-based teacher education.

The module rests on three pillars of teacher knowledge identified by Darling-Hammond, (2006: 305):

- knowledge of learners and how they learn and develop language (Units 1 and 2);
- understanding of the curriculum content and goals (Units 1 and 7);
- understanding of pedagogy, including knowledge of how to facilitate learning to diverse learners, managing large classes, effectively assessing learning, and designing lessons and activities (Units 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8).

This last pillar is crucial because it enables teachers to continually address the problems of practice they encounter and meet the unpredictable learning needs of their learners. The continued engagement with teaching, reflecting and seeking answers to difficult questions enables teachers to learn from practice as well as for practice.

5.9. MODULE OUTCOMES

In terms of content knowledge, students are expected to demonstrate understanding of:

- the main tenets of OBE and how to apply them in the classroom;
- principles of language teaching in a multilingual context;
- elements of a good lesson design;
- assessment practices that are in line with OBE.

In their assignments, students are expected to demonstrate the following practical skills:

- design sound lesson plans;
- design interesting and creative lesson activities;
- demonstrate integration of the four skills in planning and teaching;
- write a detailed and logical lesson account;
- show ability to put into practice the principles of OBE;
- show ability to use different assessment practices.

With regard to values and attitudes, students are expected to:

- show a positive attitude towards the different languages, accents and cultural behaviour that are found in multicultural classrooms;

- adopt a supportive attitude to learners who are not proficient in English.

From these outcomes it is clear that the focus of the module is on practical competence of a different kind from that required of initial teacher training. This is because the students enrolled for this module are trained and practising teachers who wish to re-skill or upgrade their qualification. INSET/CTPD programmes such as the ACE cater for this need by allowing teachers to continually improve on their practice in line with new trends while they remain in the field. This stems from the belief that teaching is an art that needs constant refinement and adjustment.

5.10. STUDENT PROFILE FROM 2006 TO 2010 (APPENDIX C)

5.10.1. Age categories

Available statistics indicate that the majority of the students who register for this course are between 31 and 50 years old, which means that many of them were trained in the pre-OBE era. The enrolment has increased gradually over the years from 91 students in 2006 to 387 in 2010. This indicates a rising demand for this course, a fact that justifies a study of this nature which assesses the course impact with a view to improving the quality of training.

5.10.2. Geographic location

Students are geographically scattered across South Africa. The highest concentration is in Giyani (26 students in 2010) followed by Polokwane with 15 students and Johannesburg with 13 in the same year. The thin spread reflected in all the other years and across provinces has implications for provision of learner support. It is costly both in terms of time and money to conduct school visits and for the same students to meet for discussion classes. In addition, because most of the students teach in rural areas, access to information could be limited by the unavailability of internet facilities. This situation can compromise the quality of training and teaching.

5.10.3. Pass rate

Statistical analysis of examination results in the past five years shows a gradual increase (64.29% in 2006 and 73.76% in 2009). This could indicate a need to re-examine both the course content, examination and learner support mechanisms on offer with the intention of improving the throughput rate.

5.11. JUSTIFICATION OF CHOICE OF MODULE

The ACEEN2-6 module is designed with a focus on pedagogy as its core area of expertise; it is therefore appropriate that the study to determine evidence of the required shift in the classroom practice of teachers in this programme be couched in this module. Whether and to what extent the teachers are applying the theory in their classroom practice is the focus of this study. The aim is to establish whether there is any integration of knowledge and skills as reflected in the students' performance.

6. CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a comprehensive grounding to the study. It began by giving a detailed account of the scope and purpose of INSET/CPD worldwide and in South Africa. This was followed by a description of the four most relevant interventions that were put into place to redress past imbalances. The interrelatedness among these initiatives was emphasised throughout by indicating the similarity in guiding principles. The chapter then proceeded to describe the ACE programme and ended with a presentation of the ACEEN2-6 module, which is the subject of this study.

The aim was two-fold. Firstly, it was necessary to give the historical background that justifies the interventions leading to the establishment of new programmes such as the ACE. Secondly, through a detailed description of the ACE English programme, the chapter provided a necessary grounding to the research questions.

Teaching is not ahistorical. As this chapter has shown, "new forms of teaching evolve all the time, new stories of teaching are told and new metaphors used to express different purposes and values for the teacher" (McEwan, 1995: 174). While no programme can prepare teachers for all the complexities they are likely to face in the classroom, INSET/CPD programmes such as the ACE: English play a crucial role in facilitating adaptation to change, preparing teachers for challenges and providing the context within which these new stories can be told. This is the essence of curriculum reform.

In the context of this study, effective implementation of the NCS curriculum rests on the student teacher's understanding of OBE, because it is the engine that drives the new curriculum. Therefore, in order to determine the effect of the course on students' practice, it is necessary to determine their understanding of this teaching approach. The next chapter

reviews the relevant literature with the aim of generating a theoretical framework that will be used to analyse the data.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to build a conceptual framework for understanding the teachers' practice within the OBE paradigm, this chapter reviews literature relevant to the key constructs pertaining to the study: Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), teacher identity, the role of language in the context of OBE and finally, mediating learning.

The chapter is divided into two parts. Part One focuses on the OBE construct. It begins with a brief overview of educational transformation in South Africa. This is intended to contextualise the OBE approach. An in-depth discussion of literature on the different facets of transformational OBE as spelt out in Spady's vision and the controversy surrounding this methodology follows. The section ends with a reflective literature review on the dichotomy between policy and practice and how this impacts on teacher identity. Part Two delves into pedagogical issues associated with OBE theory and practice. It explores literature on the concepts that underpin classroom practice in the context of this approach in English FAL classrooms and ends with a brief consideration of a notion that undergirds teacher practice, namely reflection. The ultimate goal is to generate a theoretical framework for analysing the data. In structure therefore, this chapter encompasses the two strands that comprise this research, namely how teachers implement the OBE *theory* in their classroom *practice*.

2. PART ONE: CONCEPTUALISING THE OUTCOMES-BASED APPROACH

With the birth of the new South Africa came numerous changes meant to usher in a new democratic society to replace the one that was dominated by apartheid. One of the most significant changes took place in the education arena. Previously, the education system had been governed by the philosophy of fundamental pedagogics, characterised by a discourse of compliance and a pedagogy dominated by rote learning, with emphasis on the mastery of content. As a way of redressing the situation, a new curriculum — Curriculum 2005 (C2005) — and new approach to teaching — OBE — were introduced in 1997. It is beyond the scope of this study to delve into the procedures that were developed to facilitate the entire process of educational change. Suffice it to say they were tied to the political, social and economic developments at the time. The previous chapter outlined in broad terms the processes that ultimately gave birth to the current curriculum, the NCS. Any discussion of

educational reform is incomplete however, without a description of the outcomes-based approach, because it is the vehicle that delivers the methodology for achieving the intended goals. Educational reform rests on effective implementation of OBE, and this is what the teachers in this study were expected to do.

2.1. FRAMING THE CONSTRUCT: WHAT IN ESSENCE IS OBE?

The OBE paradigm which was introduced by the South African Government of National Unity in 1997 is central to this thesis because the study is about how students understood, experienced and interpreted this phenomenon. The purpose was to determine OBE implementation by a specific group of teachers. Accordingly, a detailed description of this approach to teaching is necessary in order to establish a common understanding. Vandeyar and Killen (2003: 111) define implementation as "an active process during which individuals interpret, reinterpret, reform and reconstruct policy ideas when actively putting them into practice". In the context of this study, teachers were expected to implement educational reform in response to policy requirements.

Among several forms of OBE the South African one is heavily influenced by the ideas of the American educationist William Spady, in particular his version of transformational OBE,[11] because it is what the South African educational authorities claim to have adopted, although Spady (2008) has refuted these claims.

Succinctly put, "an outcomes-based educational model involves a paradigm shift from the content-based system to one that is outcomes-based. The latter hinges on a clear articulation of outcomes on which the curriculum, learning facilitation and assessment are focused" (Spady, 1994: 9). These elements determine the programme of learning, the learning activities designed, and the assessment practices implemented. Spady et al. (1994: 29) describe outcomes as "clear observable demonstrations of student learning which is in the form of knowledge, skills and values and/or attitudes that an individual is expected to demonstrate at the end of each learning experience". These attributes jointly underlie the notion of competence. However, during the learning process the focus is not only on achieving the outcomes at the end of the lesson but also on the processes necessary for

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[11] According to Spady (2008: 4) and Waghid (2001: 127), OBE comes in three versions, namely the traditional, the transitional and the transformational. The first version is content-specific, the second integrated, and the third, which SA adopted, is future-focused.

learners to achieve this goal, hence the descriptive term "transformational". The emphasis is on life-long learning in accordance with the main aim of education, which is to equip learners with competences for use after they leave school (Spady, 1994; Waghid, 2001). In the South African version, these competences are spelt out in the twelve critical outcomes that were developed for all education and training. They include being able to think and solve problems, to collect, organise and analyse information, to work in a group and independently, to communicate effectively and to make responsible decisions. School is therefore supposed to groom learners to be self-directed and analytical, with an ability to solve problems (Spady, 1994; DoE, 1996), an expectation that has significant implications for classroom practitioners and the way they are trained. In a nutshell, the guiding vision of transformational OBE is that of an empowered learner whose critical thinking skills are well developed to enable him/her to cope with the demands of life and who continues to learn after leaving school.

In Spady's (1994) view, classroom learning and teaching should mirror learning and teaching in the outside world. He argues for a return to the past: that the processes of learning and assessment and even the credentialing should reflect traditional non-school-based education, firstly by their emphasis on outcomes or performance criteria. The outcome itself is predetermined, clearly articulated and known to the participants. Secondly, outcomes should be used to shape the instructional strategies as well as assessment practices. Finally, because success occurs when and wherever a learner demonstrates all of the defining performance criteria in authentic situations, time is flexible and adaptable. By implication, learners are given "multiple opportunities to demonstrate their highest level of performance and proceed at a pace that suits their particular rate of learning" (Spady, 2008: 1).

Emanating from the above are what Spady (3) terms Four 'Power' Principles of OBE. These are the defining elements which guided policy-makers' process of reforming the education system of South Africa. They are also the guideposts for shaping outcomes-based practice in schools. Below, they are deconstructed and interpreted specifically for the English language classroom.

Clarity of focus: learning should focus clearly and consistently on identified outcomes or outcomes of significance. In a language classroom, the emphasis should be not on content

but on the knowledge, skills and values that a learner is expected to gain. These should be articulated at the beginning of the lesson. The content is the vehicle through which these outcomes are achieved.

Designing back: there should be inter-relatedness among all components in the teaching, learning and assessment processes and these should be closely related to the intended outcomes that learners are to achieve. In terms of language teaching, there should be a clear alignment of outcomes with activities and assessment.

High expectations: teachers should work on the premise that all learners can learn. In practical terms, the teacher should reflect inclusivity by providing multiple teaching strategies and time frames to cater for individual differences.

Expanded learning opportunities: teachers should cater for individual differences regarding how learners learn. The implication for the language classroom lies in designing different activities to cater for the different learners' needs. This involves giving more challenging work to the gifted learners and reinforcement activities for the less gifted.

These key principles should be at the core of the teachers' understanding and application of this approach and this is what this study seeks to find out in the practice of the participants.

The basis of OBE practice is that assessment of the success of any teaching is in terms of its outcomes for learners; what ultimately matters most is what the learners learn. This requirement challenges teachers not to rely on the textbook: "Teachers themselves design learning programmes sensitive to their learners and responsive to their contexts, and develop appropriate resources and other learner support material in order to achieve the nationally mandated learning outcomes" (Morrow, 2007: 95). Since there should be different learning pathways to the same outcome, teachers need to map out suitable pathways for different learners. The learning process should lead to a successful end product. For teachers who were trained to follow policy directives and textbook instructions, this is a daunting challenge.

2.1.1. THE FOUR PRINCIPLES: WEAKNESSES AND CONTRADICTIONS

An in-depth analysis of the principles that underpin Spady's (1994) version of OBE reveals some weaknesses and contradictions. The first problematic area is the emphasis on identified outcomes and their assessment standards. They are the focal point in any learning and teaching context and are pre-determined and centrally defined. This gives the paradigm

an epistemological orientation that is instrumentalist because learners are expected to be consumers of predetermined outcomes while, paradoxically, teachers are vehicles for the delivery of the transformation agenda (Waghid, 2001). This not only thwarts innovation and creativity for both teachers and learners by limiting the learning experience to what policy has determined, but is a contradiction of the key tenets of OBE, which are holistic and advocate independence, autonomy, creativity and innovation. Working within a framework of identified outcomes predisposes the approach to manipulation and control. In addition, the key OBE principles of acquiring higher order thinking skills and problem-solving competences are not consonant with pre-specified outcomes; hence OBE is self-contradictory. Furthermore, defining outcomes is a negation of the dynamic nature of learning where the result can differ from individual to individual. It is this behaviourist slant of OBE that creates a paradox which contributes to the teachers' confusion at implementation level. For instance, with some language skills such as reading a piece of literature, it is difficult to predict outcomes because each learner experiences the text differently according to his/her frame of reference. In addition, it is impossible to demonstrate in some tangible form whether some outcomes, for example, changes in attitude or acquisition of values and appreciation of an aesthetic form, have been met. The same view is echoed by Deacon and Parker (1999), who warn against an educational system that relies on explicitly achieved outcomes because such an instrumentalist view of outcomes and assessment promotes an emphasis on the extrinsic value of knowledge at the expense of the intrinsic, for instance values and attitudes. They argue that unquantifiable and intangible items which are important in language teaching, such as reflection, sensitivity or awareness, are difficult to measure. Lastly, operationalising outcomes is of concern to educationists (Cochran-Smith, 2005) because these are formulated at the macro level and yet find practical expression at a micro level without prior meaningful engagement by the teacher. As a result, deconstruction of outcomes by individual teachers might differ, impacting on how and what learners learn as well as their level of achievement.

The paradox surrounding outcomes is even more evident in policy documents that expect teachers to create possibilities for "the use of judgements and insights based on particular contexts and diverse learner population" (DoE, 2003: 1). This implies that teachers should be creative and innovative in their practices instead of solely relying on the provided

documents; it is a negation of the rigidity created by the existence of predetermined goals. Unfortunately, because of their training, most teachers do not deviate from policy prescriptions but adhere to these demands to such an extent that innovation, autonomy and creativity are sacrificed.

The third problematic area is the assumption that all learners can learn and succeed. Implicit in this statement is the potential of this approach to meet the needs of all students regardless of potential, financial or socio-economic background or any other disabling condition. Its proponents argue that "it enables teachers and educationists to have a more explicit, unequivocal curricular focus and be able to develop better instructional procedures and access learners' achievement with exactitude, clarity and validity" (Baxen and Soudien, 1999: 133). Designing effective instructional procedures depends on teacher quality and cannot be taken for granted. In addition, the assumption that all learners are able to master the desired outcomes if educators provide the optimum conditions takes numerous other silent factors for granted. It assumes an ideal learning environment where the teacher is capable, the teacher-learner ratio small, the learners' language ability average and/or above average and learning resources plentiful. Unfortunately, most of the learning environments in South Africa do not meet these criteria.

The last idea in Spady's (1994) vision of OBE that calls for comment is that every learner must be accommodated and helped to succeed. This implies the design of multiple learning activities as well as the use of multiple teaching and assessment strategies to bring the best out of every learner. In theory therefore, all students can pass and it is the teacher's role to establish the conditions and opportunities that enable and encourage all students to achieve those essential outcomes. In reality, however, because of the disabling factors that exist in most schools, this is not feasible. Learners are not assessed when they are ready, but are subjected to the regime of predetermined once-off assessments at set times and are closely monitored by the education district officials. This contradicts the principle of expanded learning opportunities that presupposes individual attention and accommodation of each learner's needs to ensure that they give of their best and succeed. The predetermined testing episodes also negate the principle of flexible time frames that cater for individual differences regarding the pace of learning.

Spady (2008: 2) acknowledges that from the outset "there was obvious conflict between the paradigm of learning reflected in these features and modern-day conventional education". In conventional schooling, time is fixed and predetermined and there are fixed dates of instruction. The blocked-in time frames that characterise modern education militate against OBE implementation which thrives on flexibility. Spady observes that "this deeply entrenched practice makes it profoundly difficult for schools to use time and opportunity flexibly and to offer students legitimate expanded opportunities to improve and reach high performance levels after formal instructional time has ended" (10).

Spady (8) blames all these problems on the lack of capacity for a fundamental shift from conventional practice. He contends that successful implementation of OBE requires more than a mind-shift; it requires restructuring of the entire school system in terms of the following:

- **Paradigm thinking:** teachers and policy-makers should think in terms of an outcomes-based as opposed to a content-based approach to teaching and learning. This also entails a change in attitude.

- **Organisational and structural arrangements:** the resources and structural arrangements in schools, for instance the teacher-learner ratio and the school environment, should be amenable to OBE implementation. This points to the quality of the available infrastructure.

- **Teaching and curriculum:** classroom practice should reflect the teachers' shift in paradigm thinking (focusing on outcomes, learner-centredness, formative assessment and authenticity of materials).

- **Structuring and use of time:** time should be seen as a flexible resource and each learner should be able to work at his/her own pace.

- **Resource allocations:** schools should be well-resourced to enable teachers to access tools (books, video, library and computers) for scaffolding learning.

- **Professional training and support:** teacher training should equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to implement OBE. This entails assisting teachers to gain subject knowledge to enable them to teach with confidence as well as practical knowledge to enable them to improve on their practice. It points to teacher quality.

As the findings will show, these are challenges that exist in many South African schools and which educational authorities in South Africa are unlikely to overcome in a short space of time. As Jansen (1998) aptly observes, the curriculum was introduced without adequate preparation and training for teachers because there was a critical ideological need to break with the past system. Whether the reforms were actually effected at classroom level was less important than the symbolic significance of curriculum change after apartheid. Spady (2008) concedes that these changes depend on the political, cultural and economic situation in a country and might therefore not be entirely feasible. In the meantime, teachers have to cram their curricula into the fixed times. In addition, given the very structured nature of the school day and the large classes that teachers have to contend with, it is not possible to give learners multiple opportunities and allow each learner to proceed at his/her own pace. If time-based programmes cannot be outcomes-based, will this approach ever be feasible in South Africa? Spady hoped for an approximation to the ideal in South Africa. One of the subsidiary questions that this study seeks to answer is: *To what extent are the student teachers implementing OBE in their classroom practice?*

Mahomed (1999: 165) concedes that OBE implementation presents challenges from the point of view of scarce resources because it assumes "a highly technological context requiring hi-tech resources for the demands of modernity". He is however quick to point out that this is not mandatory. In his view, OBE is an advantage even to less resourced schools which are expected and encouraged "to use whatever is available or accessible in their environment, albeit rural, poor or less developed". While this expectation fosters creativity, it does little in the provision of equal chances for learners to succeed because those in privileged learning environments derive more benefits from the resources available while those in under-privileged schools remain disadvantaged due to a lack of adequate stimulation resulting from a lack of resources. In addition, globalisation has created the need to expose learners to diverse contexts that are reflective of the world they will live and work in. Narrow exposure to their environment alone deprives learners in disadvantaged communities of the opportunity to broaden their horizons and is a negation of the concept of equality which the new government aims to promote through education. Ultimately, teacher quality and the teaching and learning context determine whether each learner is successfully catered for.

The contradictions identified in the preceding discussion are the basis of the controversy and heated debate that characterises the implementation of OBE even today. The list of dissenting voices from different stakeholders is growing.

2.2. THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING OBE

Not long after its introduction, OBE became the subject of lively debate among various educationists. Some hailed it as a promising educational reform (Baron and Boschee, 1996: 1), but others (Jansen, 1999; Mahomed, 1999; Rasool, 1999) questioned its benefits and effectiveness. Jansen argued that its weaknesses were so glaring that it would definitely fail. Of the ten reasons he listed to back his claim, the most relevant ones to this thesis are firstly the "complex, confusing and sometimes contradictory language" (Jansen, 1999: 147). In trying to understand OBE, a teacher had to wade through a maze of jargon and definitions which could be intimidating and not practical enough to implement. The second problem was the conceptual leap in the roles of teacher and learner. Both teachers and learners were expected to make the conceptual mind-shift from a content-based approach to a learner-centred one where the teacher is a facilitator as opposed to a transmitter of knowledge. Learners who were used to being spoon-fed and teachers who were accustomed to imparting information struggled to make the transition.

To get to the root of the problem, a research project, the President's Education Initiative (PEI), was initiated (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999). It was the first broad-based intervention by the Department of Education into the fields of teacher development and instructional practices. Findings by the Review Committee are documented in a book titled *Getting learning right. Report on the President's Education Initiative Research Project,* which synthesised information from thirty-eight diverse research projects. They reveal a grim picture of the state of education in South African schools and, in particular, disadvantaged schools, which the researchers found were not coping with the new approach:

> There is a broad consensus that teaching and learning in the majority of South African schools leaves [sic] much to be desired. The problems are generally described in terms of teacher-centredness, pupil passivity, rote learning and the like. (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999: 131)

The findings were corroborated by Le Grange and Reddy (2000) and Chisholm (2000), who observed that teachers who were trained to conform to the doctrine of fundamental

pedagogics, which was dominant during apartheid, were responsible for the persistence of these practices. They were trained to work in authoritarian, teacher-centred classrooms and therefore had problems effecting changes that were at odds with their experiences of classroom practice. The de-emphasising of content did not make this transition easier. Ironically, Spady himself was aware of these problems: in his submission to the review committee on Curriculum 2005, he stressed that OBE in South Africa had taken on an "uneasy form" (Chisholm et al., 2000: 11).

Todd and Mason (2005: 222) warn against passive acceptance of OBE. They contend that, given the historical and situational constraints in South African schools, "the potential for successful implementation and enhancement of student learning is limited". Their objection emanates from sound observation. OBE is an ambitious initiative and there is a need to put it within reach of teachers and learners by focusing on those aspects that are feasible to implement. They explain that problems have arisen because OBE is an innovation that assumes certain basic structures such as functioning schools, adequate furniture, and qualified teachers, all of which are abundant in well-resourced schools but scarce in schools needing the educational reform. They caution policy-makers against enforcing the "one-size-fits-all" framework and instead advise them to consider the context within which the change will take place as well as the agents of implementation. Samuel (2008: 14) concurs. He deems "blind compliance" with OBE as de-professionalising. In his opinion, teachers should have room to exercise "situated interpretative judgements" as independent professionals; they should be allowed to explore alternative approaches to teaching and learning that are more suited to their particular learners and contexts.

Samuel's view is consonant with that of Le Grange (2007), who argues that OBE is not a monolithic construct that is impervious to penetration and change. He bases his contribution to this debate on the idea of the rhizome, which he borrows from Deleuze and Gauttari (1987). This construct represents chaotic networks that interconnect, as opposed to well-ordered systems. From a rhizomatic perspective, reality is dynamic, heterogeneous and non-dichotomous and there are no absolutes. Therefore, instead of opting for a linear understanding of policy development and teachers' interaction with it (Allais, 2007), we should adopt a "rhizo-textual" perspective (Le Grange, 2007: 84) which views teachers as engaging rhizomatically with policy texts, including those dealing with OBE practices. Some

teachers would adopt it, some reject it, while others would not understand it. There are no fixed boundaries; everything is context-dependent. From this perspective, outcomes should not be fixed but viewed as flexible entities that emerge during lessons and which teachers can see by observing learners' performance.

While this perspective has merit in its inclusiveness, the lack of structure in Le Grange's (2007) proposed framework is likely to militate against those teachers who are used to following instructions from above. Creating flexible boundaries that accommodate the different teachers' identities might create discomfort for those who lack the skills to deal with the uncertainty emanating from the existence of varied perceptions and interpretations of OBE. In addition, engaging rhizomatically with these texts might lead to different interpretations of OBE classroom practice. This, in turn, might upset the whole educational system by widening the theory/practice dichotomy. Policy is meant to create order and some form of uniformity is necessary for equity, which is what educational transformation is meant to achieve.

OBE continues to be the subject of fierce contestation and at times contradiction: in 2008, the ANC called for the complete overhaul of the education system and the demise of OBE (Serrao, 2008), which it blamed for the learners' lack of writing and numeracy skills. It did not see how OBE could help learners acquire and master the necessary skills needed for this millennium, such as cognition, experimentation and collaboration. However, the most scathing attack comes from Ramphele (2008: 7), who claims that OBE has "failed our nation. It has failed our children" by contributing to what she terms "the stunted mental growth" of learners. She accuses the government and education officials of giving the impression that OBE is working and identifies the quality of teachers as a major stumbling block to quality transformation: "At the heart of under-performance is the knowledge base of teachers in the majority of schools serving the bulk of poor pupils." So outraged at the perceived under-performance by teachers is she that she urges the government to take action and protect learners from "these dangerously under-prepared teachers … who continue to contribute to the downward spiral of the quality of our education" (Ramphele, 2009: 19). One of her recommendations is that the government should scale up in-service teacher training. This study makes a contribution in this regard through its engagement with the lived realities of

in-service teachers in their working contexts with the aim of improving the quality of teacher training.

The Ministry of Education, however, takes a different stance, contending that OBE is here to stay because "it was a necessary change for South Africa … it would be an absolute disaster to change it" (Gower, 2008: 6). Gower quotes the then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, who suggested that rather than start something new, we should look at improved implementation. Consonant with this vision the Ministry of Education would continue to refine OBE, especially in those areas where problems have been identified. In the minister's view, the two major problems, both of which are relevant to this study, are inadequately trained teachers who misread the curriculum and a lack of resources. Both are pivotal to the success of OBE because, unless teachers are adequately trained, its implementation will remain flawed. The debate rages on and there seems to be little consensus on this matter. Some quarters in government do not share Pandor's constructive criticism of the approach but agree with Ramphele, blaming OBE for all that has gone wrong in the educational system of the country since 1997.

The current Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angelina Matsie "Angie" Motshekga, does not share her predecessor's moderate stance on this educational reform. Addressing parliament, she declared: "So if anyone asks us if we are going to continue with OBE, we say that there is no longer OBE. We have completely done away with it."(Motshekga, 2009: 1) However, in 2010 the same minister announced a review that "is aimed at fixing major flaws in the Outcomes-Based Education system" (Lekota, 2010: 13) and a new curriculum called Schooling 2025, which would be based on the envisaged improvements. In July 2010 the same minister announced measures to lessen the administrative burdens on teachers, one of which was discontinuing portfolio files for learners (Ngobo, 2010: 2). Therefore, while the discourse points to scrapping this approach, what seems to be happening on the ground is making it more user-friendly.

Ultimately, the responsibility of rectifying the situation rests on the teacher. S/he plays a pivotal role in ensuring that policy directives are adhered to at grassroots level. This view is shared by Rice (2010: 8), who contends that the fault does not lie in OBE alone but with teacher quality: "without good teachers, the system will not work.... In any educational context, the most important variable is the teacher", he argues, adding that pouring money

into upgrading programmes, workshops and curriculum development is not going to help unless teachers are committed to the changes. In other words, engaging with policy directives at a theoretical level does not yield results. Rather, it is how the teacher translates the ideas into classroom practice that matters. Two of the subsidiary questions this study seeks to answer are: *How accurate are the teachers' mental constructions about OBE? How do these manifest themselves in the teachers' classroom practice?*

The next section looks at the policy/practice dichotomy and its impact on teacher identity.

2.3.   THE POLICY/PRACTICE DICHOTOMY AND TEACHER IDENTITY

The teacher is at the core of the debate about educational reform in SA. Policy-makers may formulate the best of policy initiatives and put them in place but without the co-operation and competence of the teachers whose duty it is to translate the reforms into practice, they will remain abstract concepts and the whole process of educational transformation will be doomed to failure. Potenza and Manyokolo (1999: 231) posit that "successful translation of a curriculum into practice rests on three pillars, namely curriculum development, teacher development and the development, selection and supply of learning materials". Their view is shared by Adler et al. (2002: 139), who aver that in order to teach well, teachers "need disciplinary knowledge-in-practice which is a co-ordination of content and pedagogical knowledge". In addition, they need knowledge of how to connect the new conceptual knowledge to their existing knowledge of the classroom situation. Whereas this study mainly focuses on teacher development, it also touches on the selection of learning materials because of the complex nature of teaching. The concept-practice relationship is what the study seeks to determine.

Practical application of theory is central to OBE because, in Spady's view, the envisioned outcome should be demonstrated in authentic situations. Demonstration implies action, performing a skill and showing practical competence, as opposed to accumulating knowledge and theoretical understanding. From a language teaching and learning point of view, the acquisition of language skills is the basis of language learning and content is seen as the context within which the skills are taught. The emphasis is on application of the acquired skills to authentic situations. This involves doing something tangible (writing a letter; designing a poster; using argumentative language). However, this is not always realisable when teaching language. As already stated, some aspects are difficult to

demonstrate at the end of a learning experience. In addition, it needs a competent teacher to observe and reflect on the learners' attitudes. Perhaps it is this lack of application that has created problems in the education system. Research findings (Elmore, 1999; Jansen, 1999; Fullan, 2001; Blignaut, 2007) show that failure to implement policy, which leads to a policy/practice dichotomy, is not unique to South Africa. These scholars contend that there are numerous examples of new policies on educational change worldwide but very few examples of success stories involving large numbers of teachers engaging in the new practices at classroom level.

In addition to the above are numerous distal factors. South African educational reform has to survive against the realities of environments that are not conducive to teaching and learning, such as a lack of resources, hunger and disease, which impact negatively on learning. The multicultural nature of the classroom as well as the teachers' existing beliefs about what to teach and how to do it also create a barrier against implementation of new ideas (Jansen, 2002). Then there is the important issue of the quality of support rendered to teachers once the innovation is under way. If this is minimal, teachers will retain their old practices in the face of policy initiatives. The reform efforts will flounder and the planned national goals will remain elusive. The teachers registered for the ACEEN2-6[12] module are used to a structured teaching environment where they exert their authority. An unstructured teaching and learning context becomes a challenge not only because of the large classes that make individual attention difficult; it also requires a confident and independent teacher who is comfortable with the intended reforms.

Blignaut (2007) attributes failure to implement policy to a myriad of factors that could derail any effort at change. Chief among these is the weakness of reform strategies that focus on structures and formal requirements and do not engage directly with existing cultures. Jansen (1999) shares similar sentiments. He attributes the problem to permutations emanating from the top-down strategy which impacts on teacher identity. He argues that teachers feel marginalised because the new approach and curriculum represent a major change in their work status, identity and demands. The top-down approach to solving problems exacerbates the situation because it excludes the teacher and, in particular, the

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[12] Chapter 2 gives details pertaining to this module and the entire ACE English programme.

teachers' understanding of their capacity to implement the proposed reforms. De Clercq (2008: 11) concurs and notes that lack of successful implementation results from "a top-down strategy of bureaucratic teacher accountability". The principle behind this strategy is the perception of teachers as workers who transmit a given curriculum and have to comply with procedures and regulations. As mere instruments for the implementation of policy their own opinions are not considered. Harley and Parker (1999: 191) refer to this strategy as "the vertical plane" where loyalties follow a hierarchical structure, with the teacher at the bottom of the pile. This strategy, contrary to the ethos of OBE, stifles creativity and innovation and also undermines constructive dialogue among teachers on ways of improving their teaching practices. In order to facilitate change, policy-makers need to adopt a bottom-up approach which recognises the teacher as an important role-player in the reform process.

On a different level, there is a dichotomy between the old and the new as reflected in the traditional and new approaches to teaching. Proponents of OBE present it as a solution to the bad practices associated with the old approach and this compromises teachers' identity: when a new approach sets out to discredit the teachers' schemata by implying that the way they have been teaching was wrong, it takes on a new emotional dimension. On the one hand, the teacher is expected to undergo a change of mindset and embrace the changes. On the other, s/he is insecure about the new roles that these reforms bring. This challenges the teachers' sense of being and their beliefs regarding teaching and learning. Jansen's (2002: 118) image of the "disappearing teacher" is instructive here because teachers feel threatened by the learner-centred classroom environment where the focus is on learners and learning as opposed to teachers and teaching. Accordingly, teachers such as the ones enrolled for the ACE programme who for years were used to transmitting a teacher-dominated curriculum struggle to negotiate the numerous challenges arising from the adoption of the new approach. They find themselves victims of expanding and sometimes conflicting roles that are being foisted on them from above. This places barriers to conceptual change. In this context, the root cause of resistance to new practices is not the complex nature of OBE but teacher identity.

In reality, many teachers find the changes disquieting, either because they are not convinced of the need to change (Samuel, 2008) or they are so set in their ways that they

are unable to transform in the way expected by the current educational bureaucracy. Fullan (2001) posits that meaning-making, that is, how the teachers actually experience change, as opposed to what the policy-makers would like to see, is crucial to the successful implementation of any reform. If teachers do not understand or believe in the proposed changes, they might just decide to pay lip service to the desired discourse while their classroom practice remains unchanged (Jansen, 2002; Mattson and Harley, 2002). Blignaut (2007: 51) argues that an absence of change in teachers' belief system is one of the reasons why "policies have historically struggled to penetrate classroom practices". He observes that unless teachers are convinced of the benefits of the reforms, they will sabotage them by resisting the change, making it difficult for the policy goals to be realised. This study seeks to find out the extent to which the educational reform and the accompanying policy initiatives are being realised in the teachers' practice.

In reality, teachers view themselves as victims of competing and multiple levels of forces that impact on the present school climate, resulting in the expanding of their roles and responsibilities.[13] There is on-going debate regarding these numerous roles, with some educationists (Morrow, 2007) arguing that they distract teachers from the main focus of the job, which is teaching, by placing too much emphasis on the material requirements as opposed to the actual teaching itself. Consequently, teachers are de-motivated and might even resist policy directives.

As a solution, De Clercq (2008: 11) urges policy-makers to make use of "professional accountability that acknowledges the teachers' voices". In this strategy, teachers are viewed as professionals who are encouraged to share ideas and reflect together on ways of improving practice; the focus shifts from compliance with bureaucratic demands by school or district to a more dynamic, context-specific process owned by teacher teams. This more flexible approach towards monitoring affords the teacher professional responsibility to improve practice. Harley and Parker (1999: 191) concur but use a different construct — "a horizontal plane" which perceives teachers as co-creators of the process of educational

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[13] The Norms and Standards for Educators (NSE) document uses an outcomes-based approach to teacher education and provides detailed descriptions of what a competent educator can demonstrate. The aim of the policy is to train educators who have the knowledge, skills and values necessary for implementing and improving the education system. Together, these roles are the embodiment of a competent teacher.

transformation. Both strategies are congruent with OBE; they create space for teachers' voices to be heard as they work together towards a common goal. Blignaut (2007: 49) suggests "re-culturing by helping teachers to acquire new values and practices". The place to begin is, as the present study does, by interacting with teachers in their work contexts because the autonomy of teachers in making sound judgements regarding quality education is a necessary prerequisite to successful implementation (Samuel, 2008).

Jansen (1999) and Morrow (2007) propose that the solution lies in acknowledging teachers as individuals and professionals who work in particular contexts and respond to social and political pressures. They emphasise the need to develop a deeper understanding of the personal identities of teachers as a way of finding practical solutions to the complex problems associated with teacher education reform. Jessop (1997: 242) strongly argues for teacher development rooted in and drawing on teachers' life histories "as one way of nurturing the seeds of reflection on practice" because, when it comes to implementation of new ideas, the past will always have a bearing on the present. Spillane et al. (2002) stress the importance of acknowledging teacher thinking as a solution to the identity crisis. They argue that the teachers' cognitive scripts, that is, their knowledge, beliefs and attitudes, as well as the context, influence how they understand policy. Effective change should entail a reorientation of these psychological scripts as a basis for the accommodation of different classroom practice. In other words, there is a need for policy that is rooted in the teachers' identities and not in conflict with them (Fullan, 2001; Jansen, 2003). If reform is to succeed, one has to acknowledge the teachers' epistemological beliefs and strategies and, as this study attempts to do, take account of the diverse contexts in which they work.

In spite of the general consensus regarding the importance of teacher identity, some scholars (Carrim, 2002) believe this should not be overemphasised. Research findings show that disadvantaged learning environments are characterised by poor quality teaching that emanates from poor quality of training. It would therefore be naïve to expect these teachers to know what is in their best interests and expect their voices to be more authentic versions of policy change which removes them from their comfort zones. In other words, the teachers alone cannot be plausible sounding boards for policy change; authorities need to exercise criticality regarding their inputs. As a starting-point, however, it is important to take cognisance of their voices by speaking *to* them, not *about* them, otherwise the reform will

lead into a cul-de-sac. By interviewing students about their classroom practice in the context of educational reform, this study seeks to do just that.

The problem of teacher identity is closely linked to training since adequate training brings about positive attitudes and perceptions when teachers understand why they have to behave differently. Accordingly, attention has also focused on "higher education institutions [that] are being chastised for their lack of relevant curricula which are seen as failing to adequately match the goals of the new educational policy contexts" (Samuel, 2008: 6). By seeking the opinion of teachers on the materials prescribed for the course, this study aims at making the curriculum relevant to both the teachers and the educational policies.

The preceding discussion foregrounds the complex dynamics relating to successful implementation of educational reform. It is evident that teachers' identity is a "kaleidoscope of many permutations" (Samuel 2008: 9), a result of the multifaceted nature of a profession which requires of them to construct practice from multiple influences impacting on their identity: internal and external, professional and personal, individual and social. So far, very little seems to have been done to change teachers' attitudes; rather, the focus has been on practice. Part Two examines in detail what is expected of the teacher as a classroom practitioner in the context of OBE because the study seeks to determine whether the research participants match up to these expectations.

3. PART TWO: THE PRACTICE OF TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN THE OBE CLASSROOM

The preceding discussion has detailed the different facets surrounding the OBE phenomenon, ending with how educational reform impacts on teacher identity. Part Two of the review provides a detailed discussion on pedagogy as a way of completing the triangle. This is because the teachers' understanding of OBE and the effect of the educational reform on teacher identity have a direct influence on classroom practice.

Currently, because of the decline in educational standards in the majority of South African schools, South African education authorities are being challenged as to how they view and think about teachers' work. Although the Norms and Standards for Educators (DoE, 2000) provide the theoretical roadmap, real transformation hinges on how those ideas are translated into practice. This study feeds into the much needed area of the teacher's role

because the focus is on the impact of teacher training on teacher practice. To begin with, a teacher operating successfully in the OBE paradigm has to have a sound understanding of the role of language because this determines how language should be taught.

3.1.   THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF OBE

Chapter 2 detailed the competences teachers need in order to be effective practitioners. From that discussion it is evident that the notion of competence permeates everything the teacher and learners do: teachers have to demonstrate their understanding of a teaching approach while learners have to demonstrate in practical terms their understanding of new knowledge that they gain through participation in the learning experience. This new knowledge is clearly articulated in the lesson outcome. Learning therefore is no longer only about accumulating knowledge; more importantly, it is also about gaining skills. In learning environments where teaching and instruction have been focused on acquisition and retention of content, this shift implies adopting new understandings regarding what it means to teach and to learn a language.

In the context of OBE, language learning is not an end in itself but a means to an end: it is a tool to empower users to engage meaningfully with the world around them. Learning is seen as a social construction and the thrust is clearly on the Communicative Approach, which emphasises creating opportunities for learners to engage in constructing meaning during interaction with other learners and the teacher. Language is used to share information, clarify and describe concepts, question and evaluate ideas, and then apply ideas to novel and authentic contexts. Language, then, is central to learning. Not only that, it is central to thinking. Thus the notion of critical thinking for meaningful communication underpins the vision of transformation in language teaching, as clearly articulated in policy documents:

> To this end, the curriculum, teaching methods and textbooks at all levels and in all programmes of education and training, should encourage independent and critical thought, the capacity to question, enquire, reason, weigh evidence and form judgements, achieve understanding, recognise the provisional and incomplete nature of most human knowledge, and communicate clearly. (DoE, 1995: 22)

From an OBE perspective therefore, language is viewed as a vehicle for critical thought and self-expression. By implication, the process of thinking which enables one to acquire, organise, reject or retain knowledge should be at the centre of language learning. The aim is

to equip learners with well-developed critical thinking skills because the demands of modern living make it imperative to empower learners to think for themselves as opposed to merely accepting knowledge. This is why the notion of language for cognition is key to any teaching and learning process.

In the classroom, critical thinking is often equated with critical engagement with a text (Northedge, 2003), but Brookfield (1997) contends that this should not necessarily be the case. He posits that critical thinking involves more: it requires a willingness to think and act differently as a result of this questioning. By adopting this critical perspective, the assumption is that individuals (including teachers) should challenge the status quo. In the language classroom, this involves empowering learners "to examine the accuracy and validity of assumptions and ask questions about the taken-for-granted 'common sense' ideas and not relinquish this responsibility to those who claim to know what is in their best interests" (Brookfield, 1997: 1375).

Across the curriculum, an Outcomes-Based Education therefore implies that:

- teachers make explicit the expectations they have of their learners in the classroom.
- the focus of any learning programme is on what learners should do and be able to do in terms of content (knowledge), practical skills and dispositions (attitudes, values and norms).
- each learner's unique needs are accommodated through multiple teaching/learning strategies and assessment in order to realise his/her potential.
- there is a shift of emphasis from teaching to learning.

To achieve each of these outcomes, one needs a reasonable command of communication (linguistic) and thinking (cognitive) skills. This is because the new curriculum is based on language and cognition.

As a designer of OBE materials, the teacher should emphasise activities that encourage learners to interrogate ideas and reach an independent decision. Halvorsen (2005: 1) suggests that in a language classroom, learners should be encouraged "to consider the issues they come across in their reading from different perspectives, to look at and challenge any possible assumptions that may underlie the issues under discussion and to explore possible alternatives". The ideal is to produce learners with well-developed critical

thinking skills who will be able to deal with the demands of the twenty-first century. This requirement places high expectations on the teacher who, in turn, should possess critical and creative thinking skills and problem-solving abilities and be able to facilitate the development of the same in the learners. The participants in this study were trained to comply with instead of question ideas and would therefore have to make a mind-shift in terms of this new role expected of them by policy. This study seeks to determine the extent to which they have effected this change.

Adams and Wallace-Adams (1990) share similar views regarding the basis of language teaching. It should be based on the following:

- the development of cognitive skills through purposeful use of language;

- viewing language learning as an active process;

- teaching language as a vehicle for self expression. The emphasis is on teaching for cognitive skills with a focus on both output and input.

- focus on applying learnt knowledge and skills to new situations.

The emphasis of the above is clearly on using language for meaningful communication in a learner-centred environment, which is one of the principles of OBE. Communication implies being able to use language in a variety of situations. Through a combination of thinking and communication, language learning becomes not only learn*er*-centred but learn*ing*-centred; language becomes a tool for problem-solving and meaningful communication, that is, it becomes a tool that learners use to think. Empowering learners to do so is the primary role of the teacher as mediator of learning. This role is described in detail in the next section, which begins with an explanation of the theory of mediation.

3.2. THE THEORY OF MEDIATING LEARNING IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: INPUT AND OUTPUT

With the introduction of the outcomes-based approach to teaching, the teacher assumed a new role — from transmitter of information to mediator of learning. The word mediation "is derived from the Greek *mesitēs,* which means to intervene between two parties" (Fraser, 2006: 5). The theory behind this construct is explained from various perspectives: the Vygotskian (1978), the Nyborgian (1993) and the Feuerstein (2001) perspectives, just to name a few. According to Miller (2003: 82) the various perspectives share common ground through their emphasis on:

- the importance of mediation in cognitive development;

- the role of task intrinsic motivation as crucial to the responsiveness of learners; and

- the importance of shared activity during learning.

Mediation thus represents a theoretical framework of interactions that can occur to facilitate cognitive and social learning. Because of the emphasis on shared meaning, the principles of mediation are embedded in the theory of constructivism that was described in Chapter 1.

Succinctly put, mediation refers to "a type of interaction between a learner and an instructor where the teacher assists, guides the learner to become confident, open-minded, inquiring, resourceful and task-committed" (Osman and Kirk, 2001: 176). The teacher provides support for the learners' cognitive development and helps them become autonomous. It is intentional intervention by the mediator to equip the learners with cognitive skills and provide an environment that is conducive for the learning to take place.

The role of the teacher as mediator of learning is explicitly spelt out in the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000:13):

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

Of the seven teacher roles listed in the Norms and Standards for Educators, mediating learning encompasses all the duties the teacher is expected to perform. In other words, this role encapsulates the essence of teaching. Unpacking it reveals a multiplicity of responsibilities. First, the teacher has to create an atmosphere that is conducive to learning, taking cognisance of learner diversity, which is the norm in the South African classroom. Creating an enabling learning environment involves much more than sensitivity to the **affective filter**;[14] the process also entails designing sound instructional strategies that are

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[14] This is a theoretical construct that attempts to explain the emotional variables associated with success or failure in acquiring a second language. High affective filter inhibits whereas low affective filter promotes learning.

relevant in terms of content, context, and interest. Second, the teacher should have sound knowledge of the subject matter as a prerequisite for deciding what knowledge, skills and values (SKVs) to communicate during lessons. The language that the teacher models becomes a crucial teaching tool underpinning the entire teaching and learning process. However, the essence of mediation is how the learners engage in the process of acquiring the new concepts. It is an iterative and multifaceted process that depends, among other things, on the teacher's skill to manipulate the contextual factors that affect learning. Taking cognisance of context is important because learning takes place in socio-cultural contexts that are diverse and need skill to manage.

The mediation perspective adopted in this thesis is that of Vygotsky (1978), particularly his notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which views learning as a process of negotiation among the participants in a social context. From this perspective, learning is a cumulative experience during which a learner is assisted (scaffolded) by more able peers and the teacher to bridge the gap between his/her current level of understanding and the next. The ZPD is the area of "intellectual functioning between the actual (current) developmental level (determined by independent problem-solving), and the level of potential development (determined through problem-solving with guidance from an adult, or in collaboration with more capable others" (86). This means that the ZDP characterises mental development that is possible. In classroom practice, the teacher should provide support for a learner to achieve beyond what s/he can possibly do on his or her own, that is, enabling learners to go through the zone of proximal development. This notion is consonant with Krashen's (1981) Comprehensible input and the Input plus 1 Hypothesis. In Krashen's construct the learning process begins at stage i. Through the teacher's comprehensible input (Vygotsky's scaffolding), learners move from the current level of competence to i + 1, which is a level of complexity of structures and concepts that the learner has not yet acquired. In other words, learners move from dependence to independence on a wide range of skills and problem-solving activities (Goldenberg, 1991). Both Vygotsky's ZPD and Krashen's i + 1 input hypothesis stress the importance of the teacher's mediation to provide the appropriate scaffolding around "the learners' current level of competence to assist them into the next stage, the zone of i + 1" (Krashen, 1981: 127). Meskill (2009: 52) concurs and uses yet another, similar explanation of what constitutes mediation. In his view, mediation

depends on "initiating and maintaining good instructional conversations". It is a complex process involving several kinds of understanding, namely understanding the purpose of the learning experience or conceptual destination, understanding the learner, understanding the factors that constrain the conversation and lastly, understanding and using the language that best brings out the desired effect. While each of the three scholars (Vygotsky, Krashen, Meskill) emphasises a slightly different aspect of mediation, they share a common understanding of it as being a deliberate, multifaceted and complex process which requires focus and depends on teacher expertise. In turn, expertise is born out of training, experience and reflection. It is within this context that the study seeks to determine the effect of training on the teacher's ability to mediate learning.

In an English FAL lesson, mediation can take various forms: modelling, manipulating learner feedback, direct instruction, skilful questioning and pacing of tasks. It is a complex process during which the teacher acts as an anchor of the learners' cognitive development. S/he creates the learning space by encouraging the expression of the learners' own ideas, responding positively by building upon information that learners provide and in the process guiding them to increasingly sophisticated levels of understanding (Goldenberg, 1991). When these strategies are used meaningfully during classroom interaction they lead to successful mediation, which is the essence of learning.

While it is the teacher's duty to provide input, learners are expected to demonstrate understanding of the new concept by producing output. Cummins (1991: 171) observes that in a given learning situation, "comprehensible input — the receptive aspects of interaction, as in reading and listening — and comprehensible output — the productive aspects of interaction, as in speaking and writing — are equally important". The teacher organises and defines the learning space and designs purposeful activities to stimulate thinking (input). As learners engage in the tasks, they give output which emanates from purposeful, deliberate and focused interaction with text. Accordingly, meaningful reading and comprehension of written texts and the production of written texts for real audiences are necessary for competent output. The key words, *meaningful* and *real audience*, imply relating learning to real-life situations and this is one of the pillars of OBE. In the classroom they find expression in the use of authentic texts and tasks and integration of language skills. A focus on meaning exposes learners to activities that enable them to manipulate language in a manner that

replicates real life. This in turn assumes teacher expertise to design the activities and learner ability and willingness to experiment with language. Given the training of the participants in this study and the environments in which they work, the two conditions remain elusive.

Omaggio (1986) uses a different construct to describe the production of output by the learner. In his "output hypothesis" (1986: 51), he contends that there should be an O + 1 zone (output plus 1) at each stage of the learner's language development. The teacher and more able peers have to provide support so that each learner can produce output beyond what s/he presently does on her or his own. Accordingly, the formal aspects of language (grammar and pronunciation) should not be the focus of language learning. Instead, self-expression and meaningful communication should be emphasised. Therefore a crucial aspect of mediation involves designing scaffolding activities that promote self-expression (the O + 1 zone), even if this is at sentence level. By implication, language learning should be centred on tasks such as discussions, debates and problem-solving, making the situations as authentic as possible. Such activities are consonant with the holistic nature of OBE.

To summarise: the core of mediation is the assistance of learners to move from their current level of understanding to the next level of development by focusing on both input and output (Krashen, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978; Omaggio, 1986; Cummins, 1991; Goldenberg, 1991; Meskill, 2009). The teacher's role, which is the focus of the next section, is to guide the process.

3.3.   MEDIATING LEARNING IN THE OBE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: THE TEACHER'S ROLE

In terms of models of education, South Africa has moved from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred one. The former is a banking view of learning in which the teacher's role is to "fill up" the learners' heads with knowledge as though they are empty bottles, while the latter views learning as a collaborative exercise between learner and teacher. Teachers are now expected to change their teaching method from transmission to facilitation.

The basis of mediation as a practice is the theory of Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) (Osman and Kirk, 2001: 176). This construct refers to "a type of interaction between a learner and an instructor where the teacher assists, guides the learner to become confident, open-minded, inquiring, resourceful and task-committed". As mediator, the teacher is responsible for what Bernstein (1996: 27) terms framing. This concept refers to how the teacher organises and regulates learning by exercising control over:

- selection of the communication;

- sequencing of tasks and concepts;

- its pacing, that is, the rate of expected acquisition;

- control over the social base which makes this transmission possible.

If framing is weak, there is less control by the teacher, thereby giving more responsibility to the learner. Within the OBE paradigm, framing is weak in all areas except the outcomes, which are predetermined at national department level. But during the learning experience, the teacher is expected to foster creative and critical thinking by encouraging the learners to take risks. In this way, the framing weakens because the learner becomes an active participant in the learning process as opposed to merely a passive recipient of information.

Spady's vision of transformational OBE (1994; 2008: 8) is loaded with high expectations of teachers:

> ...defining, designing, building, focussing and organising everything in an education system on the things of lasting significance that we ultimately want every learner to demonstrate successfully as a result of their learning experience.

This assumes an innovative and motivated teacher able to plan and mediate learning with the aim of producing a fully-rounded individual, a teacher who understands policy requirements and can effectively translate them into practice. The words "lasting significance" imply lifelong learning; the skills that learners acquire should equip them for the future. This is a necessary prerequisite in a world that is saturated with information. The new approach to education therefore expects practitioners to be autonomous professionals who assert the independence of their role regarding teaching and learning. This research seeks to determine the extent to which teachers meet these expectations.

Morrow (2007: 3) posits that the central role of the teacher is "to organise systemic learning", which involves intentionally and systematically setting up the space that promotes learning. In a language classroom, this entails the design of interactive activities such as group work and role play that enable learners to achieve the intended outcomes while the teacher facilitates the process. Organising systemic learning is a competence that is consonant with Bernstein's (1996) notion of framing because, as organiser, the teacher should consider what is suitable for the particular learners to learn and have the expertise to invent ways of enabling them to learn the relevant content effectively. S/he stimulates

and helps the learners interact with the learning materials so that each learner can learn by him- or herself, hence the need to design learner-centred activities that foster autonomy. The intention is to help learners take responsibility for their own learning and give them the opportunity to succeed. According to Fraser (2006), mediation enhances the teacher's sensitivity to learner diversity; hence the need to adapt teaching strategies accordingly and create conditions suitable for learning.

As mediator of learning, the teacher is expected to make key decisions regarding sequencing, grading and pacing of the curriculum. Research findings have indicated that most teachers lack this skill; consequently, they struggle to make this shift in terms of methodology (Taylor, 1999). Ehrman (1996: 55-57) posits that the teacher should be constantly aware of his/her role regarding pacing of the activities because language learners use various activities to navigate their way. To explain these, she presents the Learning Situation Taxonomy (Transportation Metaphor) in which she demonstrates the grading of activities based on the level of difficulty. The taxonomy consists of the following aspects:

- **Railroads:** beginner activities that involve maximum external control and structure, such as defined dialogues for memorisation, and mechanical and meaningful drilling. These activities are deemed necessary in learning contexts where English is not the mother tongue and the learners' exposure to the language is minimal. Learning therefore occurs at a surface level, involving comprehension of basic meaning. From an OBE perspective, learners should get minimal exposure to these very controlled activities.

- **Motor highway systems:** activities that involve a limited choice of options. In OBE they are recommended during the practice phase of a lesson. Examples are oral interaction closely linked to lesson outcome, controlled conversation and cloze exercises.

- **Trails:** activities involving very little external structure. They are recommended in OBE because they give learners control over their learning while the teacher facilitates. Examples are prepared but free conversation, as in role-play, and activities that show considerable learner initiative, as in simulations.

- **Open Country** activities involve maximum freedom and autonomy on the part of the learner and reflect deep learning. In this context, learning mirrors real life

experiences with characteristics such as unpredictability of language and tolerance of ambiguity. This is the deeper level of cognitive proficiency that involves analysis, synthesis and evaluation of ideas. The emphasis is on authenticity of learning material and activities to develop learner strategies for coping. This in turn ensures language learning success at higher levels of proficiency. It should be the ultimate aim of language teaching in the OBE approach.

The basic assumption in the above metaphor is that teaching and learning activities should be adapted to suit the needs of different learner abilities. A teacher's knowledge of his/her class would determine whether the activities to be designed are at a surface level (railroads), at an intermediate level (motor highway systems or trails), or at a deep level (open country). It is a gradual move from dependence to independence as reflected by tasks that progress from simple or guided activities to challenging ones that foster autonomy because they require spontaneous use of language. Ehrman advises the teacher to build in an increased array of options in tasks and assignments to reflect learner diversity. In addition, learners should be given guidance in structuring their own work along lines that begin in their comfort zones and gradually stretch them out of these zones in a process that involves a combination of situated and overt practice. Being able to deal with open country language expands the learners' repertoires and makes them more independent. However, the teacher needs to start from where the learners are, and then find ways of helping them to become autonomous. In other words, the taxonomy reflects a gradual move from shallow to deep learning. The emphasis is on helping learners to delve into their personal lives and understand how they act in, interact with and react to life in the real world while expanding the already existing functions of thinking and communication. This is the primary task of the teacher. The whole metaphor shares affinities with the OBE approach to mediation through its emphasis on giving individual attention, engaging learners in deep as opposed to surface learning and adapting learning to suit the learner's cognitive ability in order to enhance chances of success.

In brief, mediation of learning in the language classroom is a complex process that requires the teacher to:

- specify learning goals for students to enable them to focus on the task at hand.

- consciously orient lessons towards a cognitive problem-solving approach in which authentic issues are dealt with. Rote learning, memorisation and chanting of language drills should be minimised. By implication, deep as opposed to surface learning should be encouraged. The focus should be on authentic communication during which participants make their own choice in terms of what they say, and in terms of how they say it. One-word and yes/no questions are useful in assessing whether input has been comprehensible, but the same are not suitable as output. Rather, emphasis should be on problem-solving activities which are designed specifically to develop critical thinking skills such as asking questions, defining a problem, examining evidence, analysing assumptions and biases, reflecting on other interpretations and tolerating ambiguity. The underlying assumption is that language should be presented as an integrated whole.

- reconstruct material from texts so that it is presented at an i + 1 level. This means material should be as authentic as possible to enable learners to relate classroom experiences to real life situations. The ability to relate new information to one's own experiences of the world, to question reliability and usefulness of this new information and to communicate it to other people is an essential inherent skill necessary for effective functioning in the modern world (Liu and Littlewood, 1997: 382).

- encourage learners to express themselves at the O + 1 level. Language should be used to solve problems and express ideas, as opposed to repetition and imitation. The learners' responses should not be rigidly controlled by the textbook.

- relate content and concepts to learners' background knowledge and experience. The teacher should assist them to make this connection by choosing texts that are accessible and constantly assessing them (formative assessment) during the lesson to determine their level of understanding before proceeding to the level of potential development. Both teachers and learners should take accountability for the teaching and learning processes.

The above duties imply a change of the teacher's role from giver of information to facilitator of learning. They presuppose a change in attitude; a shift in perspective regarding what constitutes learning. In addition, the teacher should be proficient enough in English to

tolerate ambiguity in order to encourage learners to experiment with language for various purposes. Above all, s/he should know when to teach and when to stop teaching.

From the preceding discussion it is evident that in the new educational dispensation teachers are being called upon to re-think their roles and re-orient their classroom practices. Of note is the change of role from teaching to mediating learning. Outcomes are at the heart of this transformation and the teacher should be constantly cognisant of what language learning means. By implication, language learning is much more than gaining knowledge, it is also about the acquisition of life-skills, values and attitudes; hence the term transformational OBE. Given the problems that have been identified and the complexity of the teaching and learning situation, teachers struggle to meet these expectations.

The subsidiary question that this research seeks to answer is: *To what extent do the students' classroom practices mirror the mediation principles of the OBE approach?*

3.4. MEDIATING LEARNING: PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The preceding discussion has dealt with the theory of mediation, the role of language in the OBE paradigm and the role of the teacher. Emerging from it is the expectation that teachers should adopt new approaches to planning, teaching and assessment. This last section of the chapter focuses on this practical aspect of the teacher's role. It takes the reader through a step-by-step process of mediation in the language classroom. The procedure begins with the choice of learning support materials, followed by lesson planning, which involves the design of learner-centred activities, then finally, assessment. The aim is to develop a theoretical framework from which the criteria for data analysis will be generated.

3.4.1. Learning Support Materials (LSM)

Materials are an essential ingredient of any curriculum; they provide tangible examples of how teaching and learning should be carried out. Experienced teachers depend on materials for guidance in developing their own resources while inexperienced teachers depend on them for ideas on how to plan and implement their courses. In Nunan's (1989: 98) words, they "lubricate the wheels of learning".

Ideally, materials should be suggestive rather than definitive; they should act as models for teachers to develop their own variations, but this is not usually the case. Most materials are comprehensive and structured in nature because they have a strong methodological bias

and dictate what goes on in the classroom. In this way, they determine what learners learn, how they learn and how they are assessed. Because of this pivotal role, they influence the learning process. To avoid contradictions, they should therefore reflect the latest thinking in the education system; in the context of this study, the principles of OBE.

The paradigm shift from a content- to an outcomes-based system of education could be expected to have a direct impact on materials design. Materials consistent with OBE should reflect a "shift from focussing on teacher input to focussing on learner outcomes" (DoE, 1997a: 30). By implication, the learner should be an active participant in activities aimed at achieving the stated outcomes rather than a passive recipient of information. In addition, focus should be on application of knowledge to novel situations by emphasising problem-solving activities (open-country) that promote communication of meaningful ideas so that participants understand what they learn. Attention should be on the use of communicative tasks which focus on both form and meaning and engage learners in manipulating language for a variety of authentic purposes. This presupposes the integration of the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

In OBE, materials refer to a diverse range of texts: oral, written or multimedia. They include textbooks, books, television, everyday experiences, newspapers and even families. A resourceful teacher does not confine him/herself to the textbook but makes use of a variety of available texts. Learners vary; therefore teachers should use multidimensional inputs to cater for these differences.

- **The language textbook**

It is not possible in a thesis of this nature to do justice to the variety of materials that are currently available in schools. The textbook is an ideal choice due to its accessibility. Even in the most deprived learning contexts of the majority of learners in South Africa this resource continues to be the most cost-effective and accessible way of supporting the curriculum. A language textbook is a compilation of material to aid the teacher in her or his task. In a typical English textbook, each chapter focuses on a separate topic area or theme which allows for the acquisition of lexical as well as linguistic items. All four skills are covered. But a textbook is more than this. It is the embodiment of a set of language and learning theories. Examination of a textbook should therefore reveal the theories that underpin its approach and practices. In this case, these should be OBE-oriented.

In an attempt to foster creativity and resourcefulness, the NCS expects teachers to use resources from the environment, thereby playing down the role of textbooks. This has led to misunderstandings, so that some teachers believe textbooks are not necessary, a belief that has militated against OBE implementation. While resourcefulness is encouraged, the importance of the textbook is paramount, particularly in resource-deprived contexts where teachers and learners have less capacity or confidence to venture beyond the safe boundaries of the printed word.

The South African township, rural and informal settlement schools where this study was conducted have a limited budget and the majority cannot afford to provide more than one textbook per learner. It is therefore important to select the best textbook from the start. In privileged contexts, it has proved useful to have more than one set of course books so that learners can benefit from what is best from each. NCS-oriented textbooks are a particular advantage because they are crucial in modelling for teachers what the new system expects of them. Given the initial training of the research participants, the undesirable tendency is to slavishly follow the textbook. The experienced teacher should be able to manipulate the textbook material to suit the learners' needs. This can be achieved by modifying the material, making it more accessible to the learners' different abilities, or supplementing the textbook with other available resources in order to enhance learning (Kilfoil and Van der Walt, 1997). All this is consistent with Spady's principle of expanded opportunities that increase each learner's chances of success.

Carnwell (2000) explains that textbook materials can be classified as being either high or low in structure. Highly structured materials include specific guidance regarding the timing of reading and the use of prescribed activities and in-text exercises. All resources and readings are contained within the package. Materials that are low in structure adopt a more flexible approach with suggested readings which students are required to select. There is less reliance on timed activities. From the preceding discussion about the essence of OBE, it is obvious that an ideal textbook should contain materials that show a progression from low to high structure as reflected in Ehrman's (1996) taxonomy. They should reflect materials that are sequentially paced and build skills (and knowledge) logically. Materials should be graded to cater for learners of differing abilities. Where resources allow it, the teacher should

supplement the textbook, possibly with audiovisual material, games or any other resources available in the community.

Since the introduction of the new curriculum, there has been an influx of commercially prepared learning support materials. South African writers and publishers have produced publications that are especially designed for the local situation. Cultural background is often central to comprehension, so these local publications are very suitable for use, especially in English FAL contexts where learners need considerable cognitive support. However, a textbook that restricts itself solely to South African contexts would also be a drawback. An ideal textbook should provide exposure to both familiar and unfamiliar contexts. Many of these textbooks are supplemented by a teacher's manual that assists both the inexperienced teacher and the one faced with carrying out a new and unfamiliar approach such as OBE by describing how teachers can use the textbook material to greatest effect. Some series also provide supplementary material such as learners' workbooks, tables, charts, posters and sets of readers. In a recent development, textbooks also "pay attention to making the text user-friendly by including pictures, games, differing formats and typography, and so on" (Kilfoil and Van der Walt, 1997: 55). This provision lessens the teacher's burden and provides a solid base on which s/he can select resources for use.

Perhaps the most important point to make is that the textbook is a tool that the teacher can use flexibly. It does not replace the prescribed learning programme for the particular grade.

- **Text analysis**

Each year teachers are faced with the task of selecting texts for the different grades they teach. One of the avenues through which this study seeks to determine the students' understanding of OBE is by analysing their choice of textbooks. The following pointers describe the essential attributes of a language textbook.

The theories that underlie the desired teaching practices should be explicit. Outcomes should be clearly stated, activities learner-centred and assessment practices transparent and varied. Secondly, the content should be of interest to the learners both generally and in terms of English across the curriculum. Language from authentic texts should be used, not passages written exclusively for second or foreign language learners. In addition, the material and ideas in the textbook should be acceptable to the community in which it is

being used and there should be a deliberate attempt to promote societal values. Finally, assessment strategies should be aligned to the underlying approach and practices. In terms of OBE, assessment should be formative, valid and aimed at improving teaching and learning.

The expectations from policy-makers are high, judging from the descriptors of OBE as a collaborative, flexible, trans-disciplinary, empowerment-oriented approach. It therefore requires highly competent and qualified teachers to make sense of all the ramifications imposed by the teaching and learning context and choose a textbook that reflects this understanding. From the above discussion, criteria for analysing textbooks will be generated.

Once the suitable resources have been chosen, the next stage in mediation is planning for facilitation.

3.4.2. Lesson planning

One of the reforms that the introduction of OBE brought in teacher education pertains to lesson preparation. In the past, teachers used to plan their lessons around content, but this is no longer the case. The new approach requires them to base every lesson on helping the learners to acquire language skills and these should be explicitly stated in the lesson outcomes and assessment standards. More than ever before, teachers are expected to demonstrate skills of creative lesson planning. This involves the ability to select and prepare teaching materials from a variety of sources and design learner-centred activities cognisant of the multilingual and multicultural nature of today's classroom. In the OBE paradigm, the craft of planning is as important as the practice of teaching.

There are different models of planning (John, 2006: 186-188). The most dominant is the system model. As the name suggests, it involves a step-by step planning process unlike the other two — the interactional and naturalistic models — which are more iterative as they do not conform to a rigid structure. The need to begin with a statement of outcomes is characteristic of the system model, which requires teachers to base their planning on some fixed procedure and format. Its main advantage is that the teacher learns to plan in a rational way. It is ideal for the novice teacher but critics contend that, because of the nature of teaching, lesson planning should be flexible and interactive. The rigid format of the

system model, critics argue, is a form of control and is suitable for teachers who are being prepared to base their teaching on policy imperatives. In this study, teachers registered for the ACEEN2-6 module are being trained to align their teaching methodology to OBE, making the system model an appropriate choice.

Despite the need for structure, OBE does allow room for flexibility. It expects teachers to treat a lesson plan as a working document that, with reflection and experience, is framed and reframed to reflect the learning context (Christopher, 1992). It should be a reflective tool, a work in progress. In this regard, a lesson plan can be adjusted to meet the learners' immediate needs during a lesson. The teacher has to be skilful enough to deal with "the tension between an anticipated sequence embedded in the diachronic aspects of lesson planning and the immediacy of the synchronic 'here and now' of teaching" (John, 2006: 495). This implies that the decision to effect change during a lesson (in-flight thinking) should be a result of logical analysis of the learning processes that are taking place. The teacher has to be confident and skilled enough to depart from the plan and engage learners in activities that address their immediate needs as a way of motivating them. Acknowledging and motivating learners is an important aspect of mediating learning and should be infused in lesson design.

Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997: 63) emphasise the role of context in lesson plan design. They posit that a well thought-out lesson plan is a product of "the teacher's experience, knowledge of her or his subject, teaching techniques, the syllabus, the materials available in the school and community and the learners". Taking all these factors into consideration, a skilful and creative teacher makes informed decisions on how best to exploit the particular teaching and learning situation with the aim of helping learners achieve the intended outcome. The focus is not only on teacher knowledge but on how best the teacher can mediate learning, given all the various components of that particular situation.

Lesson planning should be a well-considered process that is responsive to OBE tenets. Although lesson plan templates differ in structure, they are all supposed to reflect the following key elements: formulation of outcomes, time set for the lesson, selection of appropriate resources and learner-centred activities that are aligned to the outcomes, and integrated assessment practices. These elements are discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

The first requirement is that the planned outcome must be spelt out; on it depend the lesson activities and assessment. While the NCS determines the learning area outcomes and assessment standards, it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure relevance and continuity by formulating a lesson outcome that reflects in exact terms what learners are expected to achieve in terms of knowledge, skills and values after the particular learning experience. Formulating the lesson (refined) outcome enables the teacher to reflect on the process of learning which in turn has an impact on the sequencing of tasks.

The second aspect is time. From an OBE perspective, time is flexible, giving each learner the opportunity to work at his/her own pace, thus increasing the chances of success in line with Spady's principle of expanded opportunities. In other words, time does not define learning but is viewed as a resource that the teacher should manipulate to suit each learner's need. However, the realities of big classes and the allocation of time for each subject do not allow this flexibility. Having each learner proceed at his/her own pace would militate against learning and result in chaos, particularly since teachers are not used to these practices. What should be emphasised at this stage of mediation is the creation of an enabling environment for learning by careful and realistic time allocation to pre-empt any distractions.

Next, the outcomes must be accomplished by means of interesting and relevant learning activities that actively involve the learners. Planning enables the teacher to anticipate and determine beforehand what methods would best facilitate the attainment of the desired outcomes, then prepare the strategies and materials needed for the lessons. For example, if the teacher decides to use role play, part of the planning should indicate how the learners will be organised, the instructions they will get, the time allowed for the activity, how they will be assessed and, most importantly, the teacher's role in facilitating the process. The ideal lesson plan has activities arranged logically, with whole class activities preceding individual or pair work so that the new knowledge can be introduced in the low-risk whole-class situation. Comprehension exercises should precede production exercises; the former are passive language skills and should go before those requiring active language use. Consonant with OBE tenets, the plan should reflect use of authentic texts.

Lastly, the teacher should consider opportunities to assess the learners' progress.[15] OBE emphasises formative assessment which is integrated in the learning activities. This means teachers need to continually assess the progress of learners during the lesson and also allow room for learners to assess themselves and each other. Assessment should be transparent; the use of assessment tools, for instance grids and checklists, should be encouraged. These should be designed or identified during the planning stage. Carefully planned summative assessment tasks should test the transfer of skills to new contexts. The cognitive processes described above are an essential ingredient for effective planning.

Overall, the teacher should ensure that a lesson plan focuses on enabling factors such as relevant and stimulating tasks and adequate scaffolding to create room for learners to experience success. Learners who feel successful are more likely to find the learning meaningful. This is important because of the OBE belief that all learners can succeed. Therefore the planning stage should focus on positive experiences for learners so that the outcomes are within reach and the intended new knowledge builds on what the learners already know.

In brief, lesson planning involves careful formulation of the lesson outcome, interpretation of knowledge and transforming it into logical chunks for meaningful manipulation by learners as well as continual monitoring of learners' progress. From this discussion, criteria for analysing lesson plans will be generated.

After planning, the teacher is ready to facilitate learning. This is the core of the whole process of mediation and, from an OBE perspective, revolves round the notion of learner-centredness.

3.4.3. Learner-Centred Teaching

OBE promotes an emancipatory agenda that considers all people as being able to take control of their learning. This is the basis of learner-centredness, the underlying principle governing activities in this approach. Learner-centredness is a move from a banking approach to education to a system where learners are active participants in the learning process; a shift from an authoritarian, top-down approach to a democratic one (DoE, 1997a)

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[15] The aspect of assessment is discussed in detail in the latter part of this section.

where both teacher and learner are co-creators of knowledge. The empty vessel metaphor which characterises the traditional view of learning is replaced by learning as collective dialogue. Learners assume new roles based on the conception of language as a vehicle for self-expression; for accessing skills and the required values and attitudes.

The concept of learner-centredness in educational discourse is not new. Similar ideas were expressed in the days of Dewey (1933) and Piaget (1977). Dewey argued that learners should learn and make sense of new knowledge together, while Piaget viewed learning as a process of continual construction and reorganisation of knowledge, with the learner taking responsibility for that process. South Africa has followed suit with an educational reform that places the learner at the centre of learning. Policy states that in "learner-centred pedagogy, the learner milieu and interests become the basis for 'negotiating' with the teacher, pacing and execution of learning" (DoE, 1996: 51). By implication, the teacher as mediator defines the learning space and allows learners to actively participate in the learning experience. The focus of all activities is the learner.

The following two quotes from official documents illustrate the learner-centred focus of the educational reform.

> The perception of teachers as dispenser of knowledge will also have to change to one where learners are valued as equal and active participants in learning and development processes. (DoE, 1996: 20)

> In OBE, teachers … are encouraged to find ways of providing conditions of success in the classroom. Teachers will become facilitators rather than transmitters of knowledge. (DoE, 1997a: 28)

These policy imperatives call on teachers to democratise learning by developing learning material and facilitating learning processes that foster a move away from the teacher as the fulcrum of activity in the classroom, and focus activities on the cognitive and linguistic needs of the learners.

Implementing a learner-centred pedagogy requires teachers to make links between the learners' current and new knowledge. Teachers are expected to use a variety of teaching and assessment strategies to cater for individual differences and assist learners to achieve the intended goal(s) (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The focus is on what the learner does and achieves and the nature of evidence to demonstrate that achievement (Olivier, 1998). As mediators of learning, teachers provide scaffolding to help learners negotiate the Zone of

Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) or move from the current level of competence to the expected level (Krashen, 1981; Omagio, 1986). The focus is on learner participation in meaningful exchanges or instructional conversations (Meskill, 2007). This perspective is a shift from learners as passive receivers of information to participants in a thoughtful, engaging, communicative interaction that is carefully mediated and directed towards reaching the conceptual destination. This is the hallmark of OBE. However, facilitating learning effectively is a challenge, because teachers tend to teach the way they were taught and trained. As the preceding discussion has shown, this paradigm shift entails a change in identity which most teachers are not prepared or unable to make (Jansen, 1999).

Ideally, in a learner-centred language classroom, the learner decides the pace at which s/he wants to study and actively engages with the learning material while the teacher supports the process by providing meaningful input and creating optimal conditions for learning. Learners move through the units and tests at their own speed and to assist them the teacher devises methods that work for individual students especially during the corrective loop. The assistance given to the learner (scaffolding) should be temporary, adjustable and removable once the learner does not need it. For this to happen, two conditions are necessary. First, the learner has to be at a stage to accept the new knowledge and second, s/he should actively engage with the new knowledge during the learning process. The teacher's role is to facilitate the process by "supporting and developing students' thinking abilities" (Mohammed, 2006: 375). In other words, the learner is involved at a deep cognitive level which fosters the development of critical thinking skills. But, as has already been stated in the previous section, research evidence points at poor quality teaching in the majority of schools. Getting learners to actively engage with the new knowledge is dependent on the teacher's sometimes inadequate subject knowledge and skills.

In brief, learner-centredness implies the centrality of the learner in the learning process while the teacher becomes a facilitator of learning. One of the strategies that foster learner-centredness is group work.

- **Group work**

Group work is a key strategy for effective learning in the OBE language classroom because it promotes meaningful communication of ideas — the chief aim of teaching language (Manges et al., 1996). Fraser (2006: 5) avers that working "co-operatively in groups is a very

important way of bringing learners to an understanding while a problem-centred approach where learners work with information to find a solution themselves forms an important component of outcomes-based teaching". His observation is instructive from three perspectives. Firstly, as mediator of learning the teacher designs activities and creates the space for learning. Secondly, group work, if properly structured, promotes learner-to-learner interaction for the purpose of sharing ideas. Lastly, during interaction learners practise questioning ideas, accepting constructive criticism and finding solutions to problems. Thus strategies such as group work increase chances of participation, improve communication skills and promote the development of higher order thinking skills by promoting analysis and reflection. Encouraging enquiring minds helps learners to develop their critical thinking skills, which is one of the aims of language teaching. These benefits are however not easy to reap in the inadequate cognitive and language learning environments in which participants in this study work. The reasons range from a lack of resources to the teachers' mindset that is geared to direct instruction. The result is learning opportunities that heavily lean towards teacher-controlled, low-level or surface learning.

The teacher's role in group work is crucial. If this strategy is to be effective, s/he should structure it in such a way that it promotes critical thinking by engaging students in productive social interaction involving co-operation and negotiation of meaning (Wilen, 1990). Since meaningful interaction is the essence of group work (Kilfoil and Van der Walt, 1997), group activities should be goal directed. When learners work together to solve problems as in, for instance, reading a map to get directions, the emphasis shifts from teaching to learning. While facilitating the activity, the teacher's role changes to that of a facilitator of learning who creates an enabling atmosphere for learners to achieve. This involves allowing learners to work in groups while s/he provides opportunities for enrichment and takes corrective action where needed. After work has been assessed, those students who need additional work form the group that takes the corrective pathway while the more capable ones follow the enrichment pathway, with appropriate activities for each group. This entails flexible group composition: as soon as one demonstrates the required outcomes, s/he moves on. By implication, a learner can be a member of different groups in one week as s/he progresses quickly in some units and more slowly in others. Such practice is consistent with the OBE principles of high expectations and expanded opportunities

because the multiple activities provide chances for success at various levels of learner ability. Thus the process of facilitating groups is complex, requiring expertise and confidence. In English FAL contexts, the process can become fuzzy because it depends on what the teacher views as his/her role. In addition, the classes are so big that the kind of individual attention described here is difficult to realise. Finally, not all teachers can draw the line between giving necessary input and spoon-feeding or, in more explicit terms, teaching and allowing learning to take place.

Brophy and Alleman (1991) caution against over-emphasis on interactive activities that could lead to a waste of time. They contend that there should be a balance between allowing learners to create their answers, and teacher input and direction to the required knowledge. Maintaining the balance depends on the teacher's mediation skill which in turn rests on the socio-cultural factors that learners bring to the classroom. In fact, the whole notion of learner-centredness has affected classroom interpersonal relationships and teachers sometimes struggle to negotiate the divide. In his notion of "the disappearing teacher", Jansen (2002) has alluded to the insecurity of the teacher at what is seen as the letting go of power in a learner-centred classroom. Having been used to a climate of strong authoritative control, teachers experience this new role of facilitator as negatively impacting on their identity and struggle to make this conceptual leap in classroom relationships. There is also the danger of implementing a form of discovery learning which is just a veneer where the teacher channels learners towards premeditated right answers, as opposed to allowing them to negotiate their own meaning. In spite of these weaknesses, teachers feel the need to employ this strategy because, from a policy point of view, the quality of learning required in the new curriculum is more effectively attained in classrooms typified by shared power relations as opposed to authoritarian classrooms. Consequently, it is expected that group work be a pervasive element in all planning and teaching.

Teaching in learner-centred ways involves more than just getting learners to do things. At a deeper level, it involves careful diagnosis of learners' needs, getting learners involved in problem-solving activities during which they generate meaning, providing input where necessary, pacing learning tasks, and providing intensive assessment to monitor progress. It is a process that comprises an amalgam of numerous techniques specifically fine-tuned for

the particular time and context. This study seeks to determine the extent to which the students' classroom practice is aligned to the OBE principle of learner-centredness.

The last crucial mediation aspect to consider is formative assessment. It is the essence of successful learner-centred facilitation because the results determine learner movement among groups.

3.4.4.   Assessment

Before OBE was introduced, assessment in the majority of SA schools was the sole responsibility of the teacher and entailed regurgitation of information that had been learned by rote with no practical application of the knowledge to real life situations. This emanated from the traditional view of learning which viewed learners as "empty vessels or tabula rasa to be filled with knowledge" (Goodwin, 1997: 38). The assessment criteria were rarely made explicit to the learners and emphasis was not on the process but the product (DoE, 1997b; Gipps, 1994). Assessment was largely summative, norm-referenced (emphasis was on testing and awarding of marks and achievement) and judgemental in nature (DoE, 1997a). It was separated from instruction and usually took the form of "assessing discrete, isolated or fragmented knowledge and skills" (Vandeyar and Killen, 2003: 122).

An outcomes-based approach is assessment-driven because all learning activities should focus on the achievement of the intended outcomes (Manges et al., 1996; Steyn and Wilkinson, 1997; DoE, 1997a; Waghid, 2001). The National Assessment Policy (DoE, 1998) states that assessment is a process of identifying, gathering and interpreting information about a learner's performance as measured against nationally agreed-upon outcomes for a learning phase. Implied in this definition is the planned and deliberate nature of the assessment process as indicated by the logical steps of identifying, collecting and making sense of evidence about learners' work. More importantly, the process is dialogical, involving both the teacher and learners, who make judgements on the quality of work produced by them and their peers. Thus, in the new paradigm, learners are not passive recipients of test scores determined by the teacher but "thinkers and constructors" of their own meaning (Goodwin, 1997: 38). They are active participants in the whole process and share responsibility with both the teacher and each other. In a language classroom, learners are given opportunities to assess their own and each other's work and improve their own performances in the light of this assessment (Airasian, 2001). This vision is therefore a move

from a culture of testing to a culture of learning (Gipps, 1994). It highlights the need for both the learner and teacher to understand and participate in the assessment and monitoring of learning progress because the assessment criteria are made transparent to assist learners to assess themselves and take responsibility for their own learning. It is a shift "from a content-defined curricula and norm-referenced assessment to competency-defined curricula and criterion referencing, from information (content) to a focus on skills and competencies" (DoE, 1996: 41).

The basis of OBE is sound assessment practices. Spady (1994) proposes that assessment rests on the following four pillars which are reflective of the four power principles that were stated and discussed in Part One (pages 72-79).

Firstly, lesson outcomes should be clearly stated. This corresponds to the principle of clarity of focus. Part of the teacher's role as facilitator of learning is to clearly state the outcomes to be achieved and explain the assessment process to the learners. This is the reason for criterion-referenced as opposed to norm-referenced assessment: criteria must be made explicit to the learners. Assessment should be linked to outcomes and the assessment standards that clarify what is expected in the demonstration of each outcome. In addition, assessment should be transparent, that is, the criteria should be shared with the learners. By defining precise and explicit learning goals for a lesson or activity, it is possible to investigate whether and how instruction facilitated or inhibited students' achievement of the goals. Specifying outcomes also enables the teacher to define what counts as evidence of students' learning and link it to specific instructional activities and assessment practices. This requires assessment tasks to be clearly and explicitly linked to well-defined outcomes. Learners should not be assessed on outcomes they have not been helped to achieve.

Secondly, there should be emphasis on integration because each component of learning should directly contribute to the learner's achievement of short-term outcomes which in turn contribute to the achievement of more complex outcomes. In this regard, teachers need to describe the purpose of each assessment task in terms of how it reflects the learners' understanding in the continuum of learning from the current level to the learner's readiness to proceed to more complex tasks. Assessment therefore becomes a tool for gauging how much learners have learnt. This is because the results of assessment allow "sound inferences to be made of what a learner knows, believes and can do in defined

contexts" (Worthen and Sanders, 1987: 92). Since the results can be used as a basis for making decisions about the direction of future learning, assessment is a mechanism for monitoring progress as opposed to accumulating marks.

In accordance with Spady's principle of high expectations, assessment tasks must be challenging so as to bring out the best of a learner's capabilities in applying knowledge. Learners must demonstrate deep levels of understanding: the emphasis should be on application of knowledge (higher order skills) as opposed to regurgitation of facts.

Finally, consonant with the principle of expanded opportunities, teachers should provide learners with multiple pathways to demonstrate their understanding and achievement in different ways by providing alternative methods of assessment. Learners do not all have to be assessed at the same time and in the same way (DoE, 2000: 95). Assessment should therefore be meaningful and authentic and accommodate individual differences. OBE allows room for all learners to succeed, given adequate opportunity and time.

- **Formative Assessment**

The OBE paradigm is characterised by the use of different forms of assessment with an emphasis on the formative type. A lesson begins with baseline assessment to establish what learners already know; responses during performance of tasks form the formative assessment as learners meet the smaller outcomes. Finally, follow-up tasks consolidate what has been learned. The whole process of guiding and encouraging the learner through constructive feedback is part of formative assessment, as are observations and insights and class work (Pahad, 1999). Examinations and tests form a small component of evidence-gathering mechanisms because of their focus on lower-order skills and information recall. OBE assessment emphasises those outcomes that require higher-order thinking skills such as problem-solving, analysing and synthesising information. Learners are tested for their ability to transfer knowledge and apply it to new situations (Gutling, 1997; Gronlund, 1998). The focus is more on the process (formative) than on the end product (summative). However, due to the large classes that typify most FAL teaching contexts, teachers tend to opt for tests at the expense of other forms of assessment.

Because of the formative role, assessment is integrated into teaching and learning. It is not an end in itself but rather a mechanism to help learners learn. Its importance lies in

supporting the growth and development of learners according to the principle of high expectations (Van der Horst and McDonald, 1996; Claassen, 1998). DoE (2000: 94) aptly sums up this function: "The purpose of assessing learners is to enhance individual growth and development, to monitor progress of learners and to facilitate learning." Although the emphasis is on formative assessment practices, summative assessment also has a place in the OBE paradigm because it is a tool for grading purposes and for validating learning that has taken place.

The following are different aspects of formative assessment that are at the disposal of the teacher. They include:

- *Baseline assessment*, which is used either with a new class or at the start of a learning cycle or lesson. The aim is to determine what learners already know and can do. The teacher uses the results to plan relevant activities or re-shape the direction of the lesson.

- *Diagnostic assessment*, which is a tool to identify barriers to learning. Once these are identified, the teacher decides on and designs intervention strategies usually in the form of remediation activities. In this regard, diagnostic assessment can impact on learning programme goals.

- *Self-assessment* supports the learning process and involves learners in evaluating their own or each other's work either orally or in writing. Through observation and monitoring of collaborative activities during the lesson, the teacher assesses learner output. This strategy is dependent on feedback from other learners and the teacher.

- *Portfolio assessment* is a form of continuous assessment (CASS). Learners' performance is monitored throughout the year through their engagement in different tasks such as tests, end-of-term examinations, oral presentations, essays and projects that are reflective of the different language skills. The scores contribute to the final year mark. I consider it a extremely valid type of assessment which, unfortunately, has been discontinued.

In addition to all the above-mentioned formative assessment practices is summative assessment which takes place at the end of a lesson, learning cycle or year. Learners' competence is usually demonstrated through written examinations.

As can be deduced from the array of assessment strategies listed above, summative assessment comprises a very small portion of the entire assessment process because even a project is a culmination of numerous individual and co-operative activities that are assessed to determine whether learners are following the right track. The above strategies represent the numerous avenues which teachers can utilise to continuously track the progress of their learners in order to provide them with feedback aimed at helping each learner to understand how to progress towards pre-specified learning outcomes. Therefore, for the teacher, mediation of assessment is a continuous process.

The table below illustrates the shift from old to new assessment practices.

Table 3: Old and current assessment practices

Content-based assessment	Outcome-based assessment
norm-referenced	criterion-referenced
no transparency regarding the purpose of assessment and standards used	outcomes and assessment standards made explicit
rigid	developmental
judgemental	linked to outcomes
regurgitation of information	emphasis on application and transfer of knowledge
summative	formative and summative
an end in itself	for developmental purposes

From an OBE perspective, assessment should be planned with the aim of finding out what students know and can do. The information should then be used to inform planning and subsequent teaching. It also enables the teacher to set relevant activities. Thus planning is influenced not only by the curriculum but also by assessment evidence. In other words, a teacher can give a task to assess learners summatively and then, after giving comprehensive, constructive feedback, provide opportunities for learning in areas where weaknesses have been identified. Pahad (1999: 261) concurs, but cautions that "teachers find it impossible to assess the specific outcomes in their preferred learning areas effectively because they do not have sufficient depth of the subject expertise. They have been poorly

taught themselves and struggle to explain and assess the knowledge, concepts and skills they are expected to teach".

This observation is instructive; it demonstrates that flawed assessment practices have a negative effect on OBE implementation. The challenge is for teachers who were trained the old way to change their mindset to accommodate the new trends, hence the need for continual professional development programmes such as the ACE, whose main role is to re-skill teachers.

A basic principle of assessment is that it should be attainable, observable and measurable. Based on this vision, Vandeyar and Killen (2003: 120-122) identify basic principles of sound OBE assessment practices as follows:

- **Reliability**. Reliable tasks are free of errors of measurement and produce consistent results regardless of changes in the assessment situation.
- **Fairness**. All learners should have had the opportunity to learn the concepts being tested. Testing should take place in favourable surroundings. A variety of assessment strategies must be designed to ensure opportunities for success by considering the different learning styles, culture, gender and age because, from an OBE perspective, all learners can succeed.
- **Validity**. Teachers should ensure that the test assesses the intended outcomes.
- **Meaningfulness and contribution to learning**. Meaningful assessment tasks should be contextualised, practical and relevant, with outcomes and assessment standards made explicit at the beginning of the learning experience. The focus is on meaning; memorisation is discouraged.

The above principles indicate that reliability is pivotal to any assessment process. To this end, the NCS documentation leans heavily on assessment guidelines for each phase and grade. However, these guidelines cannot be implemented effectively "unless teachers understand why they are assessing, what they are assessing and how to assess in a manner appropriate to the purpose of the assessment" (Vandeyar and Killen, 2003: 125). It is therefore imperative for teachers to be workshopped and guided on practical ways of meaningful and effective assessment practice. Furthermore, the teacher is required to use measuring devices such as rubrics, checklists and marking schemes with relevant

assessment criteria for grading purposes to ensure reliability of evidence. In a language classroom, evidence required might be of functional or practical origin requiring physical demonstration, for instance presenting a role play or mental representation of the competence by writing an essay.

In most FAL classrooms these assessment principles might be negatively affected by contextual factors over which the teacher has no control, such as hunger and overcrowding. In addition, the teacher's pre-conceived judgement about learners' capabilities or interruptions during assessment might affect reliability of assessment. Furthermore, given the nature of language, reliability can be somewhat slippery when dealing with fluid situations such as human interaction because of an element of subjectivity involved in, for instance, rating a learner's emotional response to a piece of writing. As Norris (1991: 336) posits, "there is a massive mismatch between the appealing language of precision that surrounds competency or performance-based programmes and the imprecise, approximate and often arbitrary character of testing when applied to human capabilities". All the above negative factors make assessment a challenge. Because of varied teaching and learning contexts, teachers struggle to demonstrate this competence with diverse learners and divergent social and cultural milieus. Although little can be done about distal factors (hunger, large classes), the teacher has control over the task itself. S/he should make it meaningful, relevant and appropriate to the learners' language proficiency and background.

From the preceding discussion, criteria for analysing the students' assessment practices will be generated.

3.5. IMPORTANCE OF FEEDBACK

The preceding discussion emphasised the importance of integrating teaching, learning and assessment into classroom practices so that assessment becomes part and parcel of the learning process. In other words, assessment should be "interwoven with learning and teaching" (Goldenberg, 1991: 8). This process involves four stages, namely generating and collecting evidence of achievement, evaluating the evidence against outcomes, recording the findings of the evaluation and using the information to assist the learner's development and improve the process of learning and teaching (DoE, 2000). The last point is the key to the whole assessment process: the feedback should be used as a diagnostic tool that

reflects strengths and weaknesses which should inform the design of future learning activities. This is in line with the designing back principle as described in Part One 2.1.

The key to mediating assessment is constructive feedback because assessment is developmental and not an end in itself. Effective feedback means providing information on how and why the learner understands or misunderstands a concept and what interventions must be put in place to remedy the situation. Consequently, depending on the results of assessment, the teacher should create different pathways for learners so that the next lesson will be relevant to the learners' level of understanding. Commenting on research by Hattie (1992), Todd and Mason (2005) explain that the single most powerful factor that enhances achievement is feedback on students' learning. This includes scaffolding techniques such as reinforcement, corrective feedback and remediation by the teacher and other learners. Learner involvement in this respect is empowering because, by engaging in dialogue to evaluate one another's work, they share responsibility with the teacher. When carried out effectively, the process of feedback challenges learners' ideas, introduces new information, provides alternatives and encourages self-reflection (Ramaprasad, 1983). Constructive feedback is therefore a vital component of formative assessment.

As mediator, the teacher defines how the learning goals are assessed, monitors the learners' progress and facilitates feedback. When learners face barriers, the teacher has to diagnose the problem and design appropriate remediation measures. To successfully perform this role, s/he needs, among other things, a sound grounding in OBE theory coupled with knowledge of the subject matter and a willingness to implement the required assessment practices. Once again, these are very ambitious expectations of teachers, particularly those who have been doing things differently for many years. This study seeks to determine how far the participants' assessment practices are compliant with the stated OBE principles.

During formative assessment, the teacher facilitates learning by weaving comments and different contributions into what s/he intends learners to achieve and then blends the learners' prior knowledge with new knowledge to broaden the learners' understanding. This role requires the utilisation of a complex repertoire of teaching practices girded by the ability to constantly reflect on the whole teaching and learning process. Given that reflection underlies practice, it is fitting that this chapter ends with a section on this notion.

4. REFLECTION

I end this section with a brief discussion of reflection because it grounds effective teacher practice. This notion can be traced to Dewey (1933), who made a distinction between routine action that is driven by tradition or directives from authority; and reflective action that emanates from self-appraisal. A number of researchers has since refined these ideas.[16] According to Westera (2001: 84), reflective behaviour is "more agentic, characterised by exercising free will". This is in contrast with reflexive behaviour that is characterised by ad hoc automated responses to invisible forces. Reflection involves engaging with ideas from within and is inevitable for anyone trying to render knowledge fit for purpose (Giddens, 1990). Therefore, the success of all the teacher's roles depends on the ability to reflect on the entire process (choosing texts, planning, presenting a learner-centred lesson and assessment).

As findings from recent research have shown, policy alone cannot change practice (Christie, 1999, Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999, Taylor, 1999; Jansen, 2003; Mattson and Harley, 2003; Parker, 2003). Real educational transformation comes from inside the classroom and emanates from the teacher's ability to reflect. From a practical point of view, the teacher should continually examine and question classroom practice and the values that s/he brings to the learning/teaching situation, and be sensitive to the learning /teaching context (Adler and Reed, 2002).

According to Schön (1987), a reflective practitioner is one who can think while acting and is therefore capable of responding to unexpected and unique situations and conflicts that may arise in the classroom. Farrell (1998) extends Schön's ideas by identifying three types of reflection that the teacher should engage in, namely reflection *in* action, reflection *on* action and reflection *for* action. The first type of reflection pertains to insights that a teacher gains while at work and the second type is the evaluation after the lesson. Lastly, the teacher uses ideas from reflection in and on action to plan for future action when s/he reflects for action.

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[16] See, for instance, Schön, 1983; Giddens, 1990; Zeichner and Liston, 1996; Farrell, 1998; Gimenez, 1999; Westera, 2001; Dinkelman, 2003; and Hiebert et al., 2007.

Zeichner and Liston (1996) explain that reflective skills are developed through practitioners thinking critically together about the contexts in which they work and the influence they as teachers have on their learners. Their concept of a reflective teacher is one who examines, frames, and attempts to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice; is aware of and questions the assumptions he or she brings to teaching; is attentive to the institutional and cultural contexts in which he or she teaches and takes responsibility for his or her own learning.

Reflection is crucial because it keeps the teacher focused on the intended outcome while at the same time structuring the learning situation in accordance with learners' immediate needs. Although this might seem a contradiction in terms (because outcomes are predetermined), it underlines the notions of flexibility and relevance. Constant reflection enables the teacher to gauge the suitability of the task to the learners' cognitive ability and gives room for adjustment if needed. Therefore, the common thread in the characteristics of a reflective teacher, cited above, is critical self-reflection with the intention of improving practice.

Hiebert et al. (2007: 49) stress the importance of reflective practice. They contend that "the core of teaching is not learned through automising routines or even through acquiring expert strategies during a teacher preparation programme. Rather, it is learned through continual and systematic analysis of teaching". The emphasis is not on the in-flight (real time) teaching performance in the classroom but on critical analysis of practice outside the classroom — that is when strategic plans to address learner weakness are made.

The authors argue that reflection should answer these questions:

- What did students learn?
- Why did instruction influence such learning?
- How could lessons based on this information be revised to be more effective when teaching them next time?

This mental process is a necessary prerequisite for meaningful and focused preparation and facilitation as required in this approach. A reflective teacher is one who is constantly aware and questions his/her actions and their effect on practice with the intention of improving or

solving problems. The aim of reflection is to do better with each teaching experience and seek alternative solutions to problems.

Teachers should be trained in reflective action: questioning their assumptions about the way they practise, critically examining the theories underlying their actions and investigating how these can be improved. This is crucial because it enables the teacher to direct learning towards achieving the intended outcomes. Through critical self-reflection, teachers are able to identify the weak pockets in their practice and seek ways to remedy the situation. Reflection therefore enables them to understand their practice "in such a way that they are in a better position to deliver lessons of sound intellectual quality to their learners" (Marneweck, 2004: 230). Put differently, reflection is a systematic way of examining one's own actions in the classroom and the effect of these actions on learning. It is therefore an essential analytical tool and a necessary ingredient of educational transformation. The research participants in this study were trained within a different educational paradigm to the one that is currently operational; critical self-reflection would entail challenging existing ideologies and creating space for accepting or adapting to current theories in order to change their practice.

Teacher education is in essence professional practice; it is constituted in terms of theoretical concepts. It is shaped and guided by the theory that informs it and by the concepts, beliefs and principles of those who participate in it. Through identification and discussion of the dominant concepts associated with educational reform (mediation, learner-centredness, critical thinking, reflection), and linking them to the different facets of competence discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter has identified the theoretical concepts on which this study rests. They are synthesised into a theoretical framework that is presented below.

5. SUMMARY OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In a nutshell, successful mediation in the language classroom is based on the following processes:
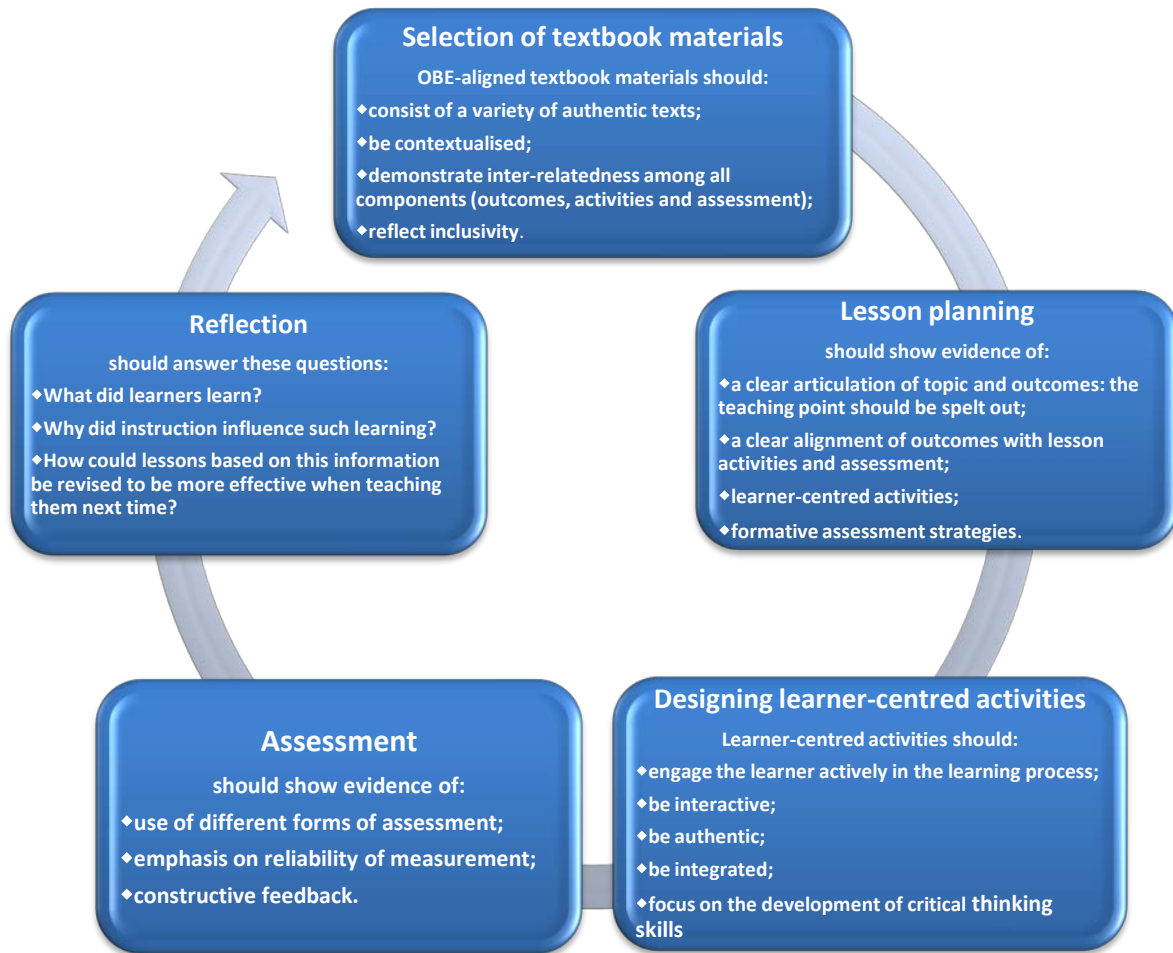
FIGURE 4: ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL MEDIATION IN THE CLASSROOM

Referring to results of several thousand studies by Fraser et al. (1987), Todd and Mason (2005:225) show that, with regard to quality and quantity of teaching, "learning achievement was strongly correlated with reinforcement and corrective feedback, tutoring and lessons based on and adapted to diagnosed individual needs, good planning and organisation, … good questioning technique, cooperative learning, homework, … and high teacher expectations". The conceptual framework that has been generated in this section reflects these attributes.

6. CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed literature pertaining to the key concepts of this study. These centre on Spady's (1994) framework of the four pillars of transformational OBE on which the whole chapter rests. The chapter is in two parts. The first gives a narrative on the background and essence of this approach and the controversy surrounding it, particularly

with regard to teacher identity. In the second part, pedagogical issues relating to teaching in FAL contexts are discussed in detail, with the focus on what is expected of the teacher in his/her role as mediator of learning. Because this study is about implementation, the last part of this section takes the reader through the stages involved in mediating learning in the language classroom, namely choosing texts, planning lessons, facilitating learner-centred lessons and assessment. The aim is to generate a framework for analysing data. In the next chapter, the methodology that was used to gather data is described.

CHAPTER 4:   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.   INTRODUCTION

This chapter documents the processes and methods used to collect, sort and analyse qualitative data. It begins by describing the population and justifying the sample. After a brief discussion of ethical considerations, it gives a detailed justification of the case study approach. This is followed by a presentation of the research design. The main thrust of the chapter is the thorough description of the research process, which includes presentation and justification of the research tools and an explanation of the data collecting and analysis mechanisms. The chapter ends by addressing issues of validity and reliability.

The description of methodology is set against the background of Chapters 2 and 3. The former provides the historical background of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and spells out the reasons behind the need to effectively upgrade the teaching skills of those teachers who are already in the field. It also provides a detailed description of the ACE English programme as a way of contextualising the research. Chapter 3 prepares the ground for the research process by delving into the new orientations to knowledge and pedagogy as reflected in educational reform policies in South Africa. In particular, it takes the reader through the different facets of expected teacher practice in the context of the newly introduced OBE approach, ending with the generation of a theoretical framework.

1.1   PREAMBLE

The search for answers to the research questions begins with the identification, detailed description and justification of the research design and tools. It is therefore appropriate to re-state the research questions at the outset, because they drive the entire research process.

The study was informed by the following overarching research questions: *What is the impact of the ACEEN2-6 module on the professional practice of student teachers? What aspects need to be improved?*

The question was deconstructed into the following four subsidiary questions which guided the data collecting process:

- *What is the students' theoretical understanding of the OBE phenomenon?*

- *To what extent are the students implementing OBE in their classroom practice?*

- *What effect do the course materials have on the students' practice? In other words, to what extent does the prescribed module help these teachers to change their classroom practice to reflect educational reform?*

- *How can the materials be improved?*

There were two dimensions to the practice base of this study. On the one hand, the study was couched in the theory and practices of the ACEEN2-6 module as a professional development course; on the other, the research was carried out in the classrooms with teachers (the students) who are expected to implement a new approach. The aim was to learn from the students[17] through their practice but with a focus on the effect of the course on their professional development. It is practice-based research aimed at understanding and theorising the student teachers' practices in local settings in all their complexity and diversity.

In order to answer the research questions, I operated within a broad scope which included what teaching practices were dominant and how knowledge was mediated; what resources were available; how they were used; what aspects of course materials were relevant; and how successfully students applied the theory into practice. This spread enabled me to capture some of the complexity of teaching and learning and understand the participants' reasoning behind their instructional practices.

1.2   POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Since this was a reflective research project, the study population initially comprised two different groups of students — those enrolled for the Subject Didactics module (SDENG3-J) and those enrolled for the Foundations for Teaching English (ACEEN2-6) module. Both modules are on English teaching methodology, the former at post-graduate and the latter at certificate level. However, my attempts at finding a convenient study population registered for the SDENG3-J module were fraught with problems. The main stumbling block was the requirement that participants had to be in a school that was easily accessible for prolonged and continuous engagement with me within the set time and financial limits. In a qualitative

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[17] In this study, the research participants are referred to as participants or respondents or students to separate them from teachers in general.

study, prolonged contact with participants is important as it enhances the trustworthiness of the research. Most of the students registered for the SDENG3-J module were not permanent teachers and the few who were, were uncooperative. They gave various excuses as to why they could not avail themselves for this research. Studying the two groups was important to me because I would have wanted to know whether the different educational levels would result in different findings. Because of the limitations already stated, I decided to reconfigure the study to focus solely on the students registered for the ACEEN2-6 module.

This being qualitative research, the sample was small — eight students. I decided to focus on a single module out of the five that comprise the ACE English programme, firstly to make the in-depth study of the phenomenon possible, and secondly because this is a key module in the programme as it draws on the knowledge and skills acquired in the other modules. The scope of the research was ambitious: it investigated practices that extended across diverse contexts and conditions in an attempt to make descriptions and comparisons across a range of students and classrooms in order to identify patterns.

Purposive sampling was used for this study. This means the choice of participants was solely based on the researcher (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). The main determining factor was distance. Because of financial constraints, I needed students who were easily accessible and this meant those who were in Gauteng. One feature of this type of selection was that the sample did not necessarily include those students who later turned out to be very capable or those who struggled with the course work. The selection was merely a matter of convenience. Each portrait was similarly structured so as to facilitate cross-case analysis.

The size of the sample was justified; it was not too big for an in-depth study, thereby making it manageable to collect and process the data within the set time frames. At the same time, it enabled me to retain a reasonable sample in case of possible drop-outs. In addition, since the research was conducted in two school terms and I spent five days with each student, eight students were the most I could accommodate in terms of time, budget constraints as well as the turbulent nature of the school environments. The sample size therefore set the delimitation posts clearly. The participants represent a theoretical population in that they are spokespersons of the topic of enquiry only. They are not representative of the entire

population and therefore findings from the report cannot be generalised but are transferable and may be extended to other similar contexts.

By 13 April 2007, I had successfully convinced eight students to participate in the study. Since all the students were registered for the module ACEEN2-6 that year, it was a cohesive sample. They represented the different teaching contexts of students who enrolled for this module — township schools, rural schools and schools in informal settlements — and the different school levels; primary schools, high schools and FET. One of the students also doubled as an adult educator. The study was therefore representative of reality. The aim was to examine human experiences of a small number of subjects in order to develop patterns and relationships of meaning and thus focus on discovery, insight and understanding from perspectives of those being investigated. Although my intention was to visit schools in the Gauteng Province only, the student teaching in the nearest rural school was in Kwamhlanga, so I had to include Mpumalanga Province as well.

1.3   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since qualitative research involves prolonged interaction between researcher and participants, there is a need to adhere to appropriate ethical conduct. As part of my preparation for the fieldwork, I sought permission from the Department of Education to visit each school (Appendix A). Informed consent was also obtained from the participants, who were made aware of their right to withdraw from participating in the study without prejudice. In addition, I made a preliminary visit to each school during which I informed students about the research, specifying its aims and benefit, duration, as well as what would be expected of them. This was a necessary step to establish rapport and trust, the cornerstones of a meaningful researcher-participant relationship. I gave an undertaking to treat the participants fairly and with respect, work with them within the stipulated time frames, and make the results of the study available to them should they desire it. In any reporting on the study, I have therefore avoided naming either the schools or the students to preserve their anonymity. Because the participants worked in different contexts, each had to be studied as a different case within the overarching study.

1.4   JUSTIFICATION FOR THE CASE STUDY APPROACH

According to Yin (2003: 23), "a case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context … and in which multiple sources of

evidence are used". These defining traits are consonant with those of this study. Not only was the OBE approach very current, but the research took place in its natural settings and three research tools were used to collect the data. Denscombe (1998) and Henning et al. (2004) concur with Yin (2003), but their emphasis is on the use of multiple instruments in a natural setting as the main characteristic of the case study approach. This too was a key feature of this research, which was a multi-descriptive case study: each participant was a separate entity, but together the participants were all part of the object of study, which is the ACEEN2-6 module. Cresswell (2003: 15) posits that "in a case study the researcher explores, in depth, a programme, an activity, a process or one or more individuals". In the context of this study, the cases were bounded[18] by the specific needs, circumstances as well as time during which the fieldwork was conducted. The investigation was in depth because of the prolonged time of engagement and the use of a variety of data collection procedures.

1.4.1 Advantages of a case study approach

There are numerous principal advantages of adopting a case study research method: it is strong in reality and therefore likely to appeal to practitioners; it can represent a multiplicity of viewpoints and can therefore offer support to alternative interpretations; the insights it yields can be put to immediate use for a variety of purposes, such as curriculum development, staff development and formative evaluation. Each of these attributes is discussed below.

- **Appeal to practitioners**

Case studies are aimed at addressing the "how" and "why" questions about "a contemporary set of events" (Yin, 2003: 9). In this regard, they provide the participants with space to think about, articulate and bring to the fore understandings of their actions. In the context of this research, these understandings related to classroom practices that were responsive to the demands of OBE, because the events pertaining to the study revolved around the implementation of this approach and students' take-up (Adler and Reed, 2002) from the prescribed study guide. In responding to the research questions, participants reflected on their classroom practices and the reasons behind the choices they made as

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[18] In the context of this study, this term used by Henning et al. (2004) refers to the uniqueness of each participant's teaching context.

they facilitated learning. The aim was to elicit their understanding of OBE theory and practice.

- **Representing a multiplicity of view points**

In a case study, the focus is on a single unit, for example a programme, event, individual or group (Yin, 2003). Each case is a "bounded system" (Henning et al., 2004: 40), meaning that it is unique; it depicts specific people in specific places who engage in specific activities, thereby making a case study a situated activity. This is applicable to this study in that although these research participants were multiple entities, they all functioned within one unit, the module ACEEN2-6. The diversity gave rise to multiple understandings and interpretations of the phenomenon under investigation. Each school was a specific unit and each participant a specific individual whose understanding of events was governed by his or her frame of reference. The boundedness thus pertained to the exclusiveness of each teaching and learning context; indeed, the situations were so varied that one could not even replicate a lesson plan designed for the same grade.

- **Providing useful insights**

Because this particular study focused on active students registered with Unisa, it offered the rare opportunity of prolonged engagement with students in their work environment, rare because Unisa is a distance education institution and lengthy student contact is uncommon. The prolonged engagement with the participants generated detailed findings which will feed into materials development, ultimately improving the quality of the offering and enhancing learner support.

- **Evaluation of practice**

Yin (2003) avers that a case study can also be an evaluation of practice, with the following characteristics: use of multiple tools to capture data, focus on insider perspective, knowledge of programme recipients, and the need to collect contextual and detailed information. This study made use of all these measures in order to establish design validity.

In spite of these advantages, some case studies have been criticised for their boundedness because their results cannot be generalised. To counter this argument, Bassey (1999: 144) argues that it is possible to develop "fuzzy generalisations" from carefully conducted case studies. Denscombe (1998: 31) concurs, adding that "although a case is in some respects

unique, it is also a single example of a broader class of things", meaning that there are some aspects of the case study that can be generalised. In the context of this study, the aim was not to prescribe the findings but to invite policy makers and teacher educators to enter into dialogue regarding the generalisations. This would mean that the generalisations that emanated from this study relate not only to the ACE programme but to policy pertaining to continuing professional development of teachers at Unisa, in South Africa and beyond.

2.   RESEARCH DESIGN

Following Babbie and Mouton's (2001: 55) definition of a research design as "a plan or blueprint of how one intends to carry out the study", this section presents a conceptual map of the research theories and processes.

This thesis probes the practices of students in order to determine their understanding of the OBE approach to language teaching. To research these issues, an interpretive perspective grounded in a qualitative design was the most appropriate. What follows is an explanation of these two theoretical constructs.

2.1   THE INTERPRETIVE RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

In the interpretive tradition, knowledge is constructed not only through observable data, but also from capturing the insider perspective through descriptions of "peoples' intentions, beliefs, values and reasons, meaning-making and understanding" (Henning et al., 2004: 20). The aim is to obtain data that is based on the creation of meaning, as opposed to statistical analysis. Qualitative researchers are interested in how people make sense of their world and the meanings they construct; hence the basis of all research tools designed for this study was interpretation. The study was therefore in the interpretive paradigm because the emphasis was on making students' meaning constructions central.

As an interpretive researcher, I sought to gauge participants' understanding of theory and practice by engaging in deep interpretive investigation of phenomena. To this end, I interrogated knowledge systems (also known as societal discourses) to look for the way in which these students made meaning in their lived work experiences, and what meaning they made. This is consonant with the observation by Henning et al. (2004: 20) that the qualitative researcher should strive to get a deeper understanding of the issues "through mental processes of interpretation which are influenced by and interact with social

contexts". I achieved this through the use of multiple research instruments that enabled me to gather data reflecting multiple meanings by participants interacting in specific social and historical settings, namely the schools. This process was necessary as it tied in with the focus of the research, which sought to gain deep-level understanding of the students' practice through their experience of educational reform and perceptions of the daily working environment from the standpoint of unique contexts and backgrounds. Working in this tradition determined my choice of paradigm.

2.2 THE TWO PARADIGMS

Historically, natural scientists and social scientists have kept their domains separate through the way they conduct research. The former operate in the quantitative paradigm, while the latter have their roots in the qualitative. These two competing paradigms are rooted in different traditions. The quantitative paradigm operates from the positivistic naturalist notion that views the basic function of research as the uncovering of facts and truths that are independent of the researcher. According to various researchers, some of the main defining characteristics of studies in this tradition are structured guidelines and the defining and pre-determining of concepts, variables, hypotheses and methods of measurement before the study begins. Knowledge is assumed to be static phenomena that are out there, waiting to be discovered mainly by scientific means involving deductive processes. The emphasis is on empirical observation and measurement as well as theory verification (Cohen and Manion, 1985; Marshall and Rossman, 1989; Cresswell, 1994; Cresswell, 2003; Henning et al., 2004; Leedy and Ormrod, 2005; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006). Being objective is a central aspect of this research design, hence the research method that is characterised by an etic (outsider's) perspective in data collection, analysis and interpretation (Paola, 2001). According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006: 46), the assumption is that the world is ordered, "knowable and objective".

Unlike the quantitative approach, researchers operating within the qualitative approach adopt an interpretive perspective based on the assumption that reality is not easily divided into measurable variables, hence the emphasis on a holistic approach to research. In Leedy and Ormrod's (2005) view, this means interpretations develop and may even change along the way, making the research an inductive and subjective process. The research activities are centred on an emic or "insider perspective on social action" with sensitivity to the

context in which participants operate, their frame of reference and history (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 271). The intention, according to Cresswell (2003: 8), is to "look for the complexity of views" of the participants regarding the situation being studied. The research design of this particular project reflected the above-mentioned characteristics. In particular, it chimed with Mouton's (1996) conceptualisation of qualitative research as explorative, descriptive and contextual: it aimed at exploring OBE implementation within particular contexts (urban, semi-urban and rural schools) as well as the take-up from the study materials. It was descriptive because the four data collection instruments were meant to provide in-depth, context-bound information that helped to explain the phenomenon under investigation. Depth of enquiry, as opposed to the quantity of enquiry, is a distinguishing feature of the qualitative paradigm (Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Holliday, 2001; Paola, 2001; Henning et al., 2004; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006).

Some researchers (Paola, 2001: 21) posit that, because of the different views of reality, there is a dichotomy between the two paradigms, with natural scientists claiming that theories developed from the qualitative perspective do not necessarily reflect "the truth about the natural world but rather mankind's assumption about the world". They are particularly concerned about what they claim is the lack of rigour in a study that is not based on hard facts but on perceptions. Despite this criticism, social scientists and educators have rejected the pure traditional sciences model, opting instead for non-naturalistic perspectives in their explanation and interpretation of human behaviour. Viewed from this perspective then, social reality is not an isolated entity but is relational and subjective (Holliday, 2001). In this study, the personal, informal, descriptive discourse based on observation, reflection, experience and narratives was an integral part of the research methodology and was considered as generating data that was as valid as that generated through the detached, impersonal scientific methods. It stemmed from my epistemological stance that social meaning is created during interaction and that, by implication, individuals produce different meanings and interpretations because their view of reality is based on different frames of reference.

2.3   THE QUALITATIVE APPROACH
In order to do justice to the complexity of teaching as social practice, I opted for a wholly qualitative approach. This is consonant with Freeman's (1996) assertion that research within

the scientific genre that is characterised by passive, detached language is not quite suitable for articulating what teachers know about teaching and learning. To obtain a comprehensive picture in answer to the research questions, one would need tools that capture the essence of classroom dynamics, which are depicted by a process of negotiation involving such variables as the students' beliefs about language learning, learning strategies, as well as the context within which the learning experience takes place. One cannot therefore be prescriptive about classroom pedagogy. In addition, learning and teaching are extremely versatile phenomena and one cannot study them without entering the world of the participants to get an insider perspective. The qualitative paradigm allowed me to enter the world I was researching and share in the participants' experiences in order to find out their understanding of practice. During the field work, I sought to gather subjective meanings from the participants, which meanings were created during discussions and interaction with them in between lessons and after school. This is because, within this perspective, "knowledge building is based on observational and interactional ways of knowing" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006: 15). The aim was to capture lived experiences of participants in their natural working environment (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). Typical of qualitative design, the research was open and there were no preconceived notions or hypotheses, because the idea was to allow the action to develop naturally.

Researchers (Holliday, 2001; Henning et al., 2004; Cresswell, 2004) agree on the active role of the qualitative researcher. In this study, I met the participants in their own world to obtain a full picture of the research problem and holistically determine the students' views about the object of study. The research participants and I were co-creators of meaning; together we built the knowledge that would provide answers to the research questions. My voice was pronounced, because I was largely the analytical agent and my knowledge, understanding and expertise determined what happened to the data.

The data gathering tools were as follows: a lesson observation schedule, in-depth interviews, informal multifaceted observations and the analysis of records schedule. The different instruments were appropriate for this study because classroom practice is complex and cannot be contained in one technique.

Because it was based on the qualitative paradigm, the study conformed to the following six characteristics of qualitative research as described by Cresswell (2003: 181-183):

- Qualitative research takes place in a natural setting. I visited schools and observed teachers interacting with their work environment. This enabled me to develop detailed knowledge about the individual students and share their experiences as I collected context-bound data.

- Qualitative research makes use of multiple methods. The research utilised four data collection tools that were aligned to the qualitative paradigm. The interviews were interactive and, together with lesson observations and examination of documents, aimed at sourcing "thick" descriptions.[19] In addition, I kept a reflective journal for recording data that I had not categorised.

- Qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured. I entered the research field with an open mind, adapted and refined interview questions as I perfected the art of interviewing and learnt from the gaps emerging from previous interviews. This was a deliberate and reflective process: after each interview, I listened to the tape and made comments which I took into account in the next interview. In this way, it became an unfolding research model.

- Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive. Because the research was iterative by nature, data interpretation was on-going. I interpreted the data, drawing conclusions about its meaning and further analysed the themes and categories, stating questions learned and asking questions.

- Qualitative research takes into account the meaning that the researcher personally brings into the study. During the field work, my personal self became inseparable from the researcher self. This was because as a researcher in the qualitative tradition, I was an active participant in the research process and my interpretation of events, actions and words was based on my frame of reference. During the research, I continually tried to identify my personal biases, values and interests and interrogate them.

- Qualitative research uses complex reasoning that is multifaceted, iterative and simultaneous. Because of the use of numerous data collection tools, I constantly had

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[19] This notion was coined by Geertz (as cited in Henning et al., 2004: 6), and refers to rich data which is more than facts. The opposite, thin descriptions, refers to bare facts and empirical content.

to establish links between the types of information they generated. There was also some cycling back and forth from data collection and analysis to problem-solving. For instance, whenever I identified gaps, I went back to the participant for additional information. The intention was to develop an accurate conceptual picture of participants' views and actions.

As a researcher working in the qualitative paradigm, I sought to obtain thick descriptions. In other words, the emphasis was on reflection and interpretation, giving the whole process an interpretative, qualitative approach which focuses on the importance of meaning. Accordingly, I noted the nuances as well as in-depth meaning in the words and expressions in an attempt to capture the conceptual richness of the respondents' experiences. In other words, I made meaning from the data by seeing the bigger picture and forging deep insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The intention was to capture the lived experiences of the participants by recording their perceptions of the world in which they worked. To this end, I

- wrote notes on my observations to enhance the thin descriptions on the lesson observation schedule.
- took note of the participants' non-verbal communication, the language and tone of voice, when they articulated their experiences and concerns. This happened when I was interviewing, analysing records, observing a lesson or conversing informally.
- observed the learning climate as I collected the data and tried to draw parallels with other contexts in the study.

In other words, because this is an explanatory and descriptive design, I had to describe the phenomena under investigation by probing beyond the surface information and looking for meaning beyond the bare facts, whether these were interview responses, classroom behaviour or written documents.

3.   THE RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Between 28 May and 14 September 2007, I visited eight schools in Gauteng and Mpumalanga. I spent a total of five days with each student during which time I was able to build rapport and credibility with the participants and the Heads of Department of Languages in each school. I observed my students' teaching, interviewed them, examined

learners' written work and other records, and discussed their experiences and concerns. Participants were informed beforehand that the visit would last five days. Thus the data reported in this study were based on teaching practices displayed in prearranged visits.

The aim was to get to grips with the contexts and histories of the students enrolled for this course, how far they had adjusted their classroom practices in line with the OBE approach to teaching language, and how the prescribed materials matched these realities. The ultimate goal was to ensure that the course was informed by on-the-ground realities, and in this way improve on my own practice as a teacher educator. Since the research centred on the understanding of a practice, it was embedded in social reality as the participants tried to interpret their working world. Spending time in schools also challenged my own assumptions about students and their practice, and I had to work reflectively.

3.1   THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS (APPENDIX D)

Initially, five tools were designed for this study. However, I soon found it was not practically possible to use the fourth tool — the reflection grid — which was designed to be filled in after each lesson. Because the students' timetables were full, there was hardly time to reflect on or discuss a lesson. The bell rang, another class came in, or we went to another class. The lunch-time slot was also used for consulting with other teachers, learners and the few parents who came when called to discuss their children's problems. After coaxing the first student to comment on each of the day's two lessons I had observed and noticing her frustration, I gave up because I still needed her co-operation for the rest of the study.

Data collection consisted of a mix of in-depth audio-taped interviews, lesson observations, and analysis of key documents. The interview was the main data-gathering technique. All these were supplemented by field notes based on informal observations which were entered in a reflective journal.

3.1.1 The interview (Appendix D1)

In order to comprehensively answer the research questions, it was necessary to interact with the research participants. To this end, I immersed the teachers' narratives in interviews. This enabled me to share in their lived experiences and probe for depth, in line with the interpretive framework as described earlier in this chapter. The intention was to give voice to what teachers "know and learn by virtue of their experience, combined with

close and disciplined examination of their practice" (Paola, 2001: 27). Accordingly, the interview schedule was specifically designed to obtain information on the personal nature of the participants' teaching experiences in relation to the implementation of OBE and take-up from the prescribed study guide.

In constructing the interview schedule, I first identified the themes that related to the research question: students' understanding of OBE and their attitudes to the approach, problems encountered in the process of implementation and perceptions of the study guide. I then formulated questions to unpack each theme. The questions were specially designed to elicit students' knowledge as stories of their classroom practice as well as their experiences and interpretations of the teaching situations, such as managing large classes and diversity.

In choosing the semi-structured format I opted for a type of communication that required active asking and listening for meaning-making. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006: 120) say this is useful "when the researcher has a particular topic s/he wants to focus on and gain information about and from individuals". In this study, the meaning-making process relied on close partnership between me as researcher (interviewer) and students as participants (interviewees). Because the focus was on the co-creation of meaning, I made a concerted effort to reduce the distance between the two of us and create a collegial atmosphere conducive to co-operation. This was necessary for making the relationship reciprocal and building the kind of rapport that enabled the two of us to comfortably share our stories and flesh out the critical aspects about the phenomena under investigation. The ultimate aim was to obtain data that was based on the creation of meaning, as opposed to statistical analysis. Information gathering therefore involved a dialogic process aimed at eliciting individual constructions regarding the phenomenon in question.

The interview was in the form of an in-depth interview guide. I piloted the questions on students registered in 2006. This gave me the opportunity to find out whether the questions would yield the kind of data required and eliminate any ambiguous questions. Each section had a topic which was followed by a set of questions aimed at eliciting information about that specific aspect of the research question (Appendix D1). While two or three short interviews with one participant would have been ideal, I was aware of the difficulty of gaining the same ambience with several interviews. I opted for one extended interview in

the hope that the conversation would proceed naturally as the rapport developed. In addition, there was always the difficulty of securing an appropriate venue.

For the interview itself, I used a tape recorder for accuracy in interpretation because it could always be played back for clarification. The first three questions elicited biographical data to put the interviewee at ease. After the warm-up, I directed the conversation towards establishing the students' understanding of the outcomes-based approach to English language teaching. In the second section, the questions focused on distal factors, such as the school and community. The intention was to identify any factors that facilitated or militated against implementation of this approach. The questions in the last section sought to determine the effect of the study guide on the interviewee's practice. As each interview progressed, I remained alert to clues that required me to follow up on what a respondent was saying till I was satisfied that data saturation, that is, the point at which I was getting no new information, had been reached. To this end, I probed to get the respondents' opinions not only from factual information but in a nuanced way by asking him/her to summarise, paraphrase, clarify or explain. According to Koekemoer and Olivier (2002), these techniques also promote the creation and maintenance of a relaxed atmosphere. However, in some instances my requests were met with uncomfortable silences, indicating that the interviewee had not even thought about the questions asked or issues raised.

Throughout the interview sessions, I was cognisant of the importance of my skill as an interviewer as this had a direct bearing on the quality of in-depth interview data. Questions were carefully formulated to obtain rich qualitative data on identified issues from the perspectives of these selected individuals. Capturing the participants' lived experiences is crucial to painting a comprehensive picture of each student's teaching context. Gubrium and Holstein (2002) concur, and emphasise the importance of eliciting descriptive data as a way of enriching the findings. As soon as I had the chance after the interview, I recorded my own comments on the context and what stood out in terms of non-transcribable text. Whenever I could, I made notes intended to capture the contextual factors such as body language. These were meant to augment the interview data. In this way, I tried to capture data "beyond the bare text" (Henning et al., 2004: 65). Thus the interviews were discursively oriented; the focus was not only on content but on clues in the respondent's discourse and action. In the interpretivist tradition, emphasis should not be only on what people say, but

also on how the respondents communicate these ideas. I was cognisant throughout of the discourse in action when the participant was expressing his/her thoughts. This stance is consonant with what Henning et al. (2004: 52) describe as the main purpose of an interview. They say it is to "bring to our attention what individuals think, feel and do and what they have to say about it [thereby] giving us their subjective reality in a formatted discussion". Kvale (1996) agrees, adding that because of the opportunity it offers the interviewee to share his/her life through knowledge, experience and language, the in-depth interview is a special kind of knowledge-producing conversation.

I was alert to possible evidence of the "genre game" (Henning et al., 2004: 58), where interviewees just mechanically follow the process but show no interest or add nothing new. They do not want to open up. Fortunately, these interviewees were eager to talk, mostly as a way of venting their frustrations about policy requirements they found difficult to meet. They entered into the spirit of interviews and in some cases used the opportunity to apprise me of the difficulties and problems that beset their working environments. In this case, the semi-structured format enabled me to give the respondents the latitude and freedom to talk about what was of interest to them. The questions were meant to guide the conversation to remain focused on the topic and at the same time allow the interaction to flow naturally. This is one of the advantages of semi-structured interviews identified by Nunan (1992: 152). He explains that the format "gives the interviewee a degree of power and control over the course of the interview while at the same time giving the interviewer a great deal of flexibility". Gubrium and Holstein (2002) observe that the flexibility of a semi-structured interview allows the conversation to take a new and unexpected direction that the interviewer had not envisaged. This happened on many occasions and, with the question in mind, I was able to steer the conversation back to the topic. My problem was striking a balance between allowing interviewees to go off at a tangent and maintaining the focus of the interview. I also tried the dialogic form of interviewing by encouraging participants to ask questions but they were not keen to do so.

I quickly realised that I needed to be sensitive to situational dynamics surrounding the interview context. Gaining this insider status required much reflexivity on my part. I had to be constantly mindful of how my own world (social and educational background, beliefs, feelings and assumptions) impacted on the interview process. I was aware that the

participants were from a different world and would interpret events and experiences from perspectives different from my own. Failure to recognise this might have prevented me from gaining new and deeper insights into the data.

One of the challenges was the constant interruptions and the presence of third parties whose personal space we had invaded. Thus in some instances the interviews were greatly compromised due to factors I had not anticipated. The biggest challenge was finding a suitable venue. In the end, I had to settle for the following with their attendant problems:

- *a storeroom*: grounds men were walking in and out and clanking noises from their metal tools affected the quality of the sound;

- *a library used as a store room*: a soccer practice session was taking place outside the room;

- *the principal's office*: there was a lot of human traffic and the telephone had to be answered;

- *the classroom*: the noise from the corridors was deafening;

- *the staff room*: there were background noises from staff and students and the bell kept on ringing.

Most of the interviews took place on my last day (Friday), because I needed the entire week to build trust and rapport with the interviewees. I was able to interview five teachers at their various sites. One teacher had to come to Unisa because of the frequency of power outages at the school. Interviews with the last two participants were rescheduled several times because in both cases school had been interrupted on the last days of my visit.

Because I was constantly looking for ways to augment meaning, I needed to examine the phenomena from a different perspective, this time by observing lessons.

3.1.2 The lesson observation protocol (Appendix D2)

The term *observation* implies not only seeing but also observing with other senses. Both processes are applicable in this research. The importance of lesson observation is confirmed by educationists who aver that the best way to capture the realities of classrooms in action is to spend time observing, documenting and analysing what goes on in there (Berliner, 2005; Pecheone and Chung, 2006). Berliner asserts that "to assess what we really want will require highly discerning observers who spend their time watching teachers teach" (208),

while Pecheone and Chung contend that "performance assessments that include evidence from actual teaching practice have the potential to provide more direct evaluation of teaching ability" (23).

During the five days I was with each student and depending on the variety of lessons (which in turn depended on how many different grades a student taught), I observed a minimum of eight and a maximum of ten lessons per student. The idea was to elicit data from different grades and possibly topics, and also to get a realistic picture of a student's teaching practice (practical competence), as opposed to "window-dressing" or show lessons. To offset the weakness of offering limited opportunities for student teachers to demonstrate their proficiency, I measured the student's competence across a full range of activities to ensure reliable estimates of teacher behaviours. In addition, the time spent with each student made it possible to infer from observations the extent to which their actual classroom practice conformed to what they said they had learnt in the course.

In structure, the schedule was adapted from that of Adler and Reed (2002). My decision to use their instrument as a benchmark was based on its focus on teacher competence in South African classrooms. In addition, the instrument was tested for validity; for its ability to accurately and fairly measure the teaching skills of teachers. However, the contexts differ: Adler and Reed's schedule assessed a variety of subjects, while this study relates exclusively to the teachers' application of subject-specific (English) pedagogical knowledge. Nevertheless, the categories and items share affinities with those for this study because they are designed to assess classroom practices associated with educational reform.

In content, the lesson observation instrument was an amalgamation of constructs. Its conceptual base drew from the Norms and Standards for Educators (DoE, 2000). More specifically, the core of the instrument was closely aligned to one of the seven educator roles as spelt out in this policy — *the educator as a mediator of learning* — which focuses on the teacher as a classroom practitioner. This is because the key words in the research questions — implementation and take-up — relate to practice. In drawing up the instrument, the focus was on the main characteristics of OBE in terms of tangible and observable indicators in the classroom as reflected in applied competence. Applied competence is relevant to this study because it is the blueprint for the expression of learning outcomes in a given learning and teaching situation. The items in the schedule

indicated the knowledge, skills and dispositions students should have gained by interacting with the study material as well as their understanding of OBE. My design adopted the same logical steps as Adler and Reed by fitting empirical information into predetermined categories. The categories focused on the needs of the research question because they were chosen specifically for their authenticity as representations of important dimensions of teaching in OBE, while the discreet items consisted of specified indicators which were structured to capture data on the relevant classroom practices expected in each category. In other words, the elements that it tested were core to the OBE classroom practices and therefore provided a valid measurement tool.

The instrument was in three parts: the first part focused on the contextual details such as lesson topic, grade and number of learners; the second was a ranked section consisting of predetermined categories based on the theoretical framework generated in the literature review: introduction (2 items), facilitation of learning (14 items), assessment (5 items) and conclusion (2 items). Each category ended with an open-ended reflective section in which I synthesised the findings in a narrative as well as entered low-inference behaviours[20] such as the general learning climate, teacher enthusiasm and confidence, classroom environment, and any nuances or unexpected events. In this way, the enquiry was balanced, because the categorisation allowed documentation of high-inference behaviours while low-inference behaviours and situations were recorded on the open-ended section of the instrument to enhance the data. I considered the schedule an effective tool for the information-gathering stage of classroom-based evaluation because it was not cumbersome and yet captured the key moments in a teaching episode. It involved careful and structured observations of key lesson events and appealed to the principles of learning and teaching according to OBE. In other words, it was designed to organise classroom observations in a systematic and manageable way. For analysis purposes, the schedule indicated four descriptors of achievement — *achieved*, which is a description reflecting mastery level; *partially achieved*, which is a description reflecting some mastery or moderate achievement; *underachieved*, a

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[20] High-inference behaviours are open to high subjectivity whereas low-inference behaviours require a low degree of subjectivity on the part of the assessor.

description reflecting under level mastery; and lastly *not achieved*, a description reflecting the beginning level.

This instrument focused on only one measure of teacher performance, namely classroom practice. In addition, the observation was limited to the identified categories. It was designed with the express intention of harnessing specific information that addressed a specific, focused issue within a design. In order to capture other aspects of practice which were omitted by the two instruments, I also analysed three types of the students' texts.

3.1.3 Analysis of texts (Appendix D3)

As comprehensively described in the literature review, data gathering was structured according to predetermined guidelines in the form of questions on each of the following three categories of records: textbooks, lesson plans and marking of learners' work. The aim was to determine the participants' implementation of OBE as evidenced by their choice of texts, by the structure and content of the lesson plans, as well as the nature and quality of their marking. I expected the process to yield a more textured understanding of the quality of teaching and assessment and to add any nuances that might reside in these sources.

The advantage of documents is that they are nonliving and therefore naturalistic forms of data which I could access at any time. Prolonged contact meant that I had ample time to examine the different documents because in all instances except one, I sat at the student's desk in the staffroom. The exception was a student who was also a Head of Department (Languages); I used her office during my visit.

3.1.4 The reflective journal

A reflective journal is an important research tool. It is the researcher's vehicle for recording his/her thoughts, frustrations, successes, and personal reactions to events throughout the field work. During the entire research process, I kept such a journal in which I recorded my thoughts, failed and successful plans, and frustrations. This was a way of adding a personal voice to the research process since I was an active participant in data collection and analysis. Because I was working in the qualitative paradigm, I could not be an objective bystander in the whole process. As stated in the previous sections, in qualitative research the researcher is an interested party who should be involved and whose worldview impacts on the interpretation of events. I therefore acknowledge the reality of my interaction with the

subjects of my research and my interpretation and analysis of the events based on my worldview.

The journal became my constant companion, my confidante and my wailing wall. The meta-notes were meant to harness the contextual factors that were not in the verbal responses, such as body language, tone and posture, as well as my thoughts and observations, because the meaning of utterances is seldom straightforward. The aim was to extract the richness out of the non-transcribable text. The rich data from the journal reflections was used to enhance the findings by substantiating or contradicting data from the other three instruments.

Research in the area of teacher development is extensive: the data collecting methods that are detailed in this chapter address a minuscule segment of a vast arena of concerns.

3.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE INSTRUMENTS
The instruments were not without limitations.

Observations: Although face-to-face observation gave me first-hand experience of the situation, my presence could have been seen as intrusive and therefore resented. I was a complete observer and my role was known. My presence therefore might have influenced performance by a participant to suit what *s/he* thought I wanted to see. In addition, I acknowledge that use of videos to tape lessons[21] taught could have not only enhanced the data but also made it more valid, because such lessons can be watched again for verification of findings.

Interviews: These allowed me to control and probe as well as observe the use of meta-language. However, as in observations, my presence could have led to biased responses and the venue might not have been convenient.

Documents: They enabled me to gain an insight into the language of the respondents. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) recommend them for their unobtrusive nature as they can be accessed at convenient times. However, because access to documents and texts depended on the participants, it is possible that I may not have been given access to all the

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[21] There was no funding for this project.

information I required. For instance, teacher 2 said learners did not have exercise books and that they used pieces of paper which were not available for me to view.

Each tool used in the study had potential to contribute different insights regarding the research questions, therefore the limitations indicated above justify triangulation — the use of multiple methods.

3.3 TRIANGULATION

Adoption of multiple instruments was in recognition of the fact that all methods have limitations; biases inherent in any single method could neutralise or cancel the biases of other methods. Although the tools gathered data in different ways, they complemented one another in that they all sought to find meaning embedded in the responses, actions, texts and living spaces of the participants. The interviews and the lesson observation schedule were meant to promote students' ability to reflect on their classroom practices by making them justify their instructional decisions. They enabled me to probe the students to critically analyse their pedagogical practice with a view to determining its strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, they provided me with the opportunity to interact with the students and hear their views, thereby narrowing the distance created by distance education. The interview was the main data collection tool, because it was of utmost importance to access the students' discourse regarding OBE practice and the impact of training provided. The documents gave me a lens through which I viewed practice from different angles. They also assisted me in determining the students' ability to navigate the curriculum. This is particularly important with case study research which, by nature, is a holistic and engaged process and so multifaceted that it is difficult to contain within a particular frame.

The aim of triangulation was to ensure that the phenomenon was investigated by means of different sources of information, thereby giving the findings validity, because the weaknesses of one instrument are offset by the advantages of the others. In Krefting's (1991) opinion, triangulation is a powerful strategy of enhancing the quality of research, particularly its credibility. Cresswell (1994: 174) avers that it also "adds vigour, breadth and depth to the investigation".

Triangulation enabled me to answer questions about the nature of phenomena, with the purpose of describing and understanding it from the various participants' points of view, to peel off the different layers of meaning to expose cross-case patterns that would lead to a

more thorough understanding of OBE practice and the impact of course materials. Throughout the process, the results were compared: similarities and differences among case studies and from each research instrument were identified. The aim was to obtain a holistic picture that would help me answer the research question and ensure consistency of the findings. This was important because teaching is a complex process and, as Freeman (1996) observes, connections between teaching and learning, regardless of how well supported by evidence, are only partially understood; the effects of teaching occur through numerous interactions, only some of which will be captured. My intention was to construct the participants' world through different processes, bearing in mind that human beings are by nature flawed. The array of data collection tools thus reflected my attempt at capturing this dynamic complexity.

I collected all forms of data at the same time during the fieldwork and then collated the information in the interpretation of the overall results.

4.   DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis is necessary for eliciting meaning from data in a systematic and comprehensive manner. In this study, data from each instrument was analysed separately. The results were then converged at the presentation stage. Below is a description of the process.

4.1   INTERVIEWS

There are three steps involved in analysing interview data: data transcription, description and case analysis. Once the audiotapes of the interviews had been transcribed, the information was analysed by means of descriptive content analysis as described by qualitative research experts (Cresswell, 1994; Gubrium and Holstein, 2002; Henning et al., 2004).

My role as a researcher was to interpret the participants' meanings from the data collected. This involved a thorough search for multiple levels of meaning by focusing on not only the content of what was said but also the discourse in which lived experiences were communicated. To this end, I followed a process similar to content analysis, which looks at ideas, but I went further, carefully examining relevant aspects of discourse and context. In other words, I not only captured speech acts in my search for deeper meaning, but also sought meaning in, for instance, the interviewee's speech episodes (the use of particular

words, imagery, and paralinguistic features), because these are all part of meaning-making in the communicative event. The intention was to highlight hidden meanings that were created during the process, because interview talk is complex and loaded with unknowns and hidden messages requiring a search for meaning beyond the superficial and denotative level.

The analysis procedure comprised four iterative processes, namely open coding, data description, case analysis and confirmation of results (Cresswell, 1994: 154-155; Henning et al., 2004: 104-107).

- **Open coding:** According to Henning at al. (2004: 105), this is a "process of inductive making of meaning, which is highly interpretive". As a starting point, the researcher needs to be very familiar with the contextual data to enable him/her to work with it confidently. Bearing this in mind, I read and re-read the transcripts, identifying common ideas throughout each of the raw text files and making comments against sentences and paragraphs. I looked for common patterns or similar units of meaning and grouped these into codes that answered the research question. Although it was a time-consuming and painstaking process, the repeated reading also familiarised me with the nuances of meaning in the texts.

- **Data description:** The inductive process described above continued until I could identify and describe prominent categories that reflected the content in the student's narrative responses. Congruent with the interview schedule's three sections, I was able to form three major categories: the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching (what the students thought and did), the factors that impacted on their thoughts and practices (effects of experience, environment and policy), and the students' perception of course materials (impact of the module). Through a process of constant sifting of data, I put all ideas relating to the same theme in one category. The process also involved the description of multiple levels of meaning within a transcription by noting such things as pauses, tone of voice and non-verbal cues. Emerging themes in each category were modified through multiple readings to find emergent patterns and prominent ideas relevant to the research question. These were reflected in the sub-themes which were representative of smaller units that I could comfortably work with to give structure to the research findings. Finally,

I reread the transcripts to determine whether the content was reflected in the categories, themes and sub-themes and to look for patterns and variations in meaning. At the same time, I was constantly reflecting on impressions, relationships and connections regarding the categories, themes and sub-themes in the whole study. I then made a visual display of this process which is presented at the beginning of the next chapter.

- **Case analysis:** I then moved to case analysis or recontextualisation of data (Henning et al., 2004: 107), which is the integration of the original data into the discussion of findings. The process allowed me to extract individual students' verbatim responses to a sub-theme to justify my argument. I picked verbal illustrations that comprised the most telling pieces of data that enabled me to make explicit the students' assumed knowledge of OBE-related pedagogy as well as the impact of the course materials. Student responses were examined for contradictions within the same respondent and differences and similarities among different respondents were identified. This comparison revealed the complex nature of the students' engagement with the course and OBE. Case analysis is reflected in both Chapters 5 and 6, which deal with data presentation and the discussion of findings respectively.

- **Confirmation of results:** Finally, independent re-coding of data by an expert was done in order to determine whether or not the same themes became evident and could be confirmed (Appendix E). This was followed by a consensus discussion.[22]

Since the interview was the main data collection instrument, the findings presented in the next chapter are based on the categories, themes, and subthemes that were generated following the steps described in this section. Findings from lesson observation and examination of records were infused into this framework and throughout the process the results were triangulated. The aim of this structuring was to organise the data to make it more accessible.

4.2 LESSON OBSERVATION

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[22] During the writing up of the thesis, the working title in the Coding Certificate (Attachment E) was changed to the current one.

Although I observed at least eight lessons per student, in my analysis I focused only on five, because in many instances students merely repeated lessons to different classes of the same grade. As a result, the variety of topics was limited.

Information from part one of the instrument provided the background knowledge and was not analysed. My focus was on parts two and three. Performance was judged against set criteria: against each item in a category, I ranked each student's practice according to the descriptors on the observation protocol, and then examined the rankings to determine a student's performance on each of the items. After each category, I synthesised the information in a narrative which also included inference data. This was subjected to global analysis, a process that involved reading the narratives to identify common themes and emerging patterns of teacher behaviour across all lessons to get a convergence of results. The aim was to determine the pattern of practice and conclude whether or not it was OBE-oriented. The results were integrated in the presentation phase where the convergence of findings was explained as a way of strengthening the knowledge claims of the study.

4.3   ANALYSIS OF TEXTS

The documents were subjected to global analysis, a process that involved a holistic reading of the different texts, extracting themes and identifying patterns. The reading was directed by multiple guiding questions on the principles that underpin the design of the texts students chose, their lesson plan designs and the quality of their marking. These were generated from the theoretical framework presented in the literature review. By benchmarking each text against the set criteria, I was able to make inferences about the depth of students' understanding of OBE and the impact of the study materials. The findings were integrated into data already gathered to enhance or add nuances in meanings. In other words, the data generated by the different instruments was synthesised into one composite whole.

5.   SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Structure for Observed Learning Outcome (SOLO) taxonomy was used as a framework for presenting the summary of findings. This tool is specifically designed to judge a learner's level of understanding in OBE. According to Killen and Hittingh (2004: 78), the purpose of the SOLO taxonomy is "to provide learners with a detailed description of their current understanding of some particular fact, concept, principle or process". The description of

concepts is relevant to this study, which seeks to gauge students' understanding and implementation of the OBE approach to English language teaching. I also deemed it appropriate that, after presenting and analysing the data, I respond to the research question succinctly. Therefore, based on the findings and discussion, the students' understanding was benchmarked against three levels of the SOLO taxonomy. [23]

6.   VALIDITY ISSUES PERTAINING TO THIS STUDY

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 98), participants sometimes change their behaviour when they are being watched, a condition known as "the Hawthorne effect". Alternatively, the researcher may choose respondents who are more positive about the phenomenon under investigation and because of this experimenter expectancy, they teach better. These are some of the issues that call for the need for internal validity, in other words, the extent to which an investigation is actually measuring what it claims to measure. If the study is wholly quantitative, this is easy to achieve because the figures can be checked. In the qualitative paradigm however, internal validity is blurred by the open-ended nature of the research process because unique experiences of individuals and groups may render comparisons invalid. In addition, the active participation of the researcher might bring in subjective views which could contaminate the findings. For these reasons, qualitative studies are often criticised for lack of rigour. Despite these concerns, this study can claim high internal validity because of the following features:

- ***Triangulation of data***

  Validity was ensured through triangulation whereby interview data was verified by data from lesson observation, records and the reflective journal.

- ***Using rich thick descriptions to convey findings***

  The research process itself was iterative. This enabled me to identify gaps which I then filled. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing me to deviate from the set questions in order to probe for details pertaining to the research questions. In this

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[23] Although there are five levels in the taxonomy, in this thesis, only the first three levels apply: *prestructural*, meaning the student does not engage with the idea but simply repeats information; *unistructural*, meaning the engagement with the new concept is at a very superficial level, and *multistructural*, meaning there is evidence of some understanding but it lacks integration with old knowledge. The last two levels, which are relational and extended abstract responses, do not apply.

way, the information retrieved during these discursive interviews was not ready-made but constructed during communication.

- ***Presenting negative or discrepant information that runs contrary to the themes***

  Researching classroom practice is complex. During the field-work I was constantly aware of diverse opinions and practices emanating from the difference in the participants' frames of reference and the teaching and learning contexts. From time to time I had to go back to participants to verify a point made and check for "negative cases" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006; Leedy and Ormrod, 2005), that is, instances where a participant presented divergent views.

- ***Spending prolonged time in the field for in-depth understanding and detail***

  I spent a total of five school days with each participant and was constantly aware of the multiple realities between schools and within each school. This long period afforded me the opportunity for continual data analysis and comparison. I also engaged in informal conversations with the teachers, noted nuances of meaning and observed the teaching and learning context in order to appreciate the general ethos of each school, taking note of salient events. The observation itself took place in natural settings to reflect reality. I found that the introspective and retrospective journal entries, though open to subjectivity, provided flavour and insights to the study which would be difficult to obtain in any other way. The keeping of a journal was also a means of researcher self-monitoring whereby I continually questioned all phases of the research process.

- ***Focus on the research questions***

  There was congruence among the data collection tools in that each one of them sought to answer different aspects of the research questions.

6.1 MEASURES OF TRUSTWORTHINESS

Currently, qualitative researchers have embraced Guba's Model of Trustworthiness (as cited in Krefting, 1990: 214-222) in qualitative research. It is a notion that underlies the whole research process, from the preparation of the field work and design of instruments through to the collection and analysis of data and impartial reporting of findings.

Trustworthiness consists of the following four criteria which were applied in this study:

- **Credibility:** I had prolonged engagement with respondents. I also checked the truth value of the findings by means of journal notes, triangulation, and use of an independent coder of interview transcriptions.

- **Transferability:** This was achieved through dense descriptions of data collection methods and analysis. Adler and Reed (2002), who carried out a similar study, maintain that fuzzy generalisations can be made in spite of the uniqueness of the situation. Beyond this, I accept the difficulty of replicating a study such as this one because of the very unlikely event of getting parallel classroom contexts and parallel status of informants, although the analytic constructs and method of data collection and analysis might be the same. The embedded nature of the study contexts makes them unique, and therefore the findings are difficult to replicate.

- **Dependability:** I collected information from different sources to ensure dependability in order to compensate for the possible weakness of one research tool with the strength of another. However, as Paola (201: 34) observes, "the social world in which the study takes place is fluid and cannot be frozen in time". For instance, I discovered that, because I was dealing with human subjects, at times the research took a totally different path from the one anticipated, and this militated against its dependability. All I could do was try to account for the changing conditions. To counter these negative factors, I attempted to obtain in-depth descriptions during the data collection process and made the analysis as transparent as possible.

- **Confirmability:** To ensure that the data collected was neutral and objective, I kept audio tapes of interviews and record sheets of lessons observed.

7. CONCLUSION

If take-up from the ACEEN2-6 module and OBE-aligned classroom practices are to be understood, these have to be contextualised in practices that are responsive to the needs of the research questions and the concomitant unit of analysis. Success of this classroom-based research process depends on the design of relevant research instruments and a detailed description of the research process, both of which are crucial elements of a sound research design.

This chapter has described the research methodology in detail. The first section set the context within which the research was conducted. Thereafter, a detailed explanation of the

two paradigms as well as a justification of using the qualitative approach was given. This was followed by the presentation and description of the three data collection instruments, leading to the explanation of the data analysis process. The chapter ended by addressing issues of validity and trustworthiness regarding this research. In the next chapter, I present the findings.

CHAPTER 5: DATA PRESENTATION

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter on data presentation begins with the biographical information of the participants. The aim is to contextualise the study by enhancing the graphic information in Appendix B. This is followed by an account of the school visits which is meant to ground the data-gathering process. In the rest of the chapter, findings are described to reflect the thick descriptions which are the hallmark of qualitative research.

2. CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY

2.1 THE PARTICIPANTS

Eight teachers, all of whom had at least 11 years of teaching experience, participated in this study. For ethical reasons, I shall refer to them as Students 1 to 8. Because teaching contexts are by nature fluid, the details below reflect each participant's status in the year 2007 only.

Student 1 had been teaching for 19 years after training at Hebron College of Education, obtaining a Secondary Education Teachers Diploma in 1987. She started by teaching in the middle school after which she moved to high school to teach English 12 years later. At the time the study was conducted, she was teaching Grade 11 English as well as Life Orientation in a township high school.

Student 2 had been teaching for 15 years after obtaining a Diploma in Secondary Education at Thaba Nchu College of Education in 1991. He started by teaching Setswana and then moved to English 10 years later. In 2007, he was teaching Grades 8 and 9 English in a township high school. In addition, he taught at an adult centre in the evenings.

Student 3 had 22 years' teaching experience. She trained at Khulusana College in the Eastern Cape, obtaining a Senior Primary Teachers Diploma in 1984. She initially taught isiXhosa and then moved to high school to teach English. At the time the study was conducted, she was teaching Grade 10 as well as Life Orientation in a township high school.

Student 4 had 25 years' teaching experience. She trained at Thlabani Training College for two years, to obtain a Primary Teachers Diploma in 1981. She taught Grades 6 and 7 for many years before moving to Grade 4 in 2003. The school is in an informal settlement.

Student 5 had been teaching for 16 years after obtaining a Senior Primary Teachers Diploma from the Transvaal College of Education in 1990. She taught different grades in different primary schools and at the time of the study was teaching Grade 4 in a township school.

Student 6 obtained a Secondary Teachers Diploma at Batswana Training Institute in 1974 and for the past 32 years had been teaching English in various schools and grades. At the time of my visit, he was teaching Grades 11 and 12 English in a township high school.

Student 7 had a Bachelor of Education degree from Vista University, obtained in 1993. He was unemployed for four years and then taught Afrikaans for another three years. He joined this rural school in 2000 to teach English to Grades 10, 11 and 12.

Student 8 had been teaching for 13 years after obtaining a Senior Primary Teachers Diploma from the Transvaal College of Education in 1992. He was unemployed for a year and then took up a post in a high school. In 2007 he was teaching Grades 10 and 12 English.

These findings indicate that all the teachers were initially trained before the introduction of the educational reforms in 1998. At the time of the interviews, the most experienced had been teaching for 32 years (Teacher 6), while the least experienced had 11 years' teaching experience (Teacher 7). All except one had diplomas from colleges of education that were disbanded by the National Department of Education when the responsibility for teacher training was passed on to higher education. The one exception was teacher seven, with a BEd from Vista. Teacher eight was trained to teach in primary schools. On completion, he was unemployed until he was offered a position to teach Grade 8. Now he teaches in the FET phase.

In this and the next chapter, these eight teachers are referred to as students, participants or respondents to separate them from teachers in general.

From their biographical information, it is evident that the students registered for this course work in a variety of contexts (township, informal settlement, rural). Some work in adult centres but these are outside the scope this study. The major finding at the onset of the study was that although the ACEEN2-6 module is specifically designed for teachers practising in the senior phase (Grades 7, 8 and 9), the students teach a variety of classes that range from the intermediate (Grades 4, 5 and 6) through senior to the FET (Grades 10 to 12) phases. In one school, the student (Student 1) is the head of department for the Languages

Learning Area. This finding indicates that the course design rests on a false assumption; instead of focusing on a specific phase, training should be generic to enable students to operate effectively in the different phases that are reflected in the findings. I had to confront this reality and accept responsibility for not having consulted stakeholders when the study guide was previously revised.

2.2   SCHOOL VISITS

Between the end of May and September 2007 I visited eight schools, seven in the Gauteng Province and one in Mpumalanga. Initially, I had intended to visit schools in different provinces, particularly in Limpopo (Polokwane) and KwaZulu Natal, but due to a lack of funding I had to limit my visits to schools that are easily accessible from Unisa. The school visits were supposed to take place in the second school term but a protracted teachers' strike meant that I could access some of the schools only at the end of the third term.

Arriving at the beginning of each day and leaving with the teachers at 3 pm, I had the opportunity to observe and absorb the environment and converse with learners, students and teachers. These close interactions enabled me to gain insights into the contexts within which teachers in deprived environments operate. From a socio-constructivist perspective, it is important to listen to teachers' voices as a way of empowering them as key decision-makers in professional development initiatives. By making them active participants in intervention research, "their professional development becomes something done *with* teachers and not *to* teachers" (Du Preez and Roux, 2008:89).

The study brought me face to face with grass-roots realities in schools which were all rich multilingual contexts. In all instances, English is taught as a First Additional Language (FAL), although in some environments it is the third or even a foreign language. In all eight schools, learners interacted with the language in the formal school context only. Outside class, they spoke their home languages.

2.3   CHALLENGES OF DEALING WITH HUMAN SUBJECTS

An on-going tension for data collection was the difficulty of securing adequate time with each student in his or her classroom. I soon realised that the research process is far from linear and tidy. Similar to Marshall and Rossman's (1989: 21) observation, I discovered that "real research is often confusing, messy, intensely frustrating, and fundamentally non-linear". In fact, my experience corroborated Freeman's (199b) conclusion that "research is a

recursive and iterative process. Plans may look perfect on paper but classroom dynamics are messy". For me, this was realised in the numerous variables that impinged on the learning environment, for instance class size, time pressures, attitudes, serendipity and so on. Thus, while abiding with the research process, I was well aware of the inner drama and the constant recycling of concepts and points of view. I also realised and experienced the logistical challenges involved in researching human subjects: frequent interruptions in schools and teacher absenteeism made it difficult to conduct and co-ordinate visits as per schedule. I constantly had to adjust and re-adjust my schedule to accommodate these delays and this impacted negatively on my study. In some instances, I had to attend Saturday classes (six out of the eight schools had these) to make up for the lost day. There were times when I thought the research had developed a life of its own. Despite these drawbacks, my five-day involvement with each student at each school enabled me to soak myself into the teaching and learning context in order to obtain the thick descriptions which are reported in this chapter.

Consent was sought from participants and permission to visit schools obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education(Appendix A). The actual dates for visits were negotiated with each participant (Appendix C). Thus the data reported here is based on interviews conducted and teaching practices displayed in prearranged visits.

3. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In this section, the major categories emanating from the interviews are presented. In each category, the themes and sub-themes are listed. This is the framework within which the data is reported and later discussed in the next chapter. Since the interview was the main data-gathering tool, findings from lesson observation and documents analysis are woven into the identified categories, themes and sub-themes.

3.1 CATEGORIES, THEMES, AND SUB-THEMES
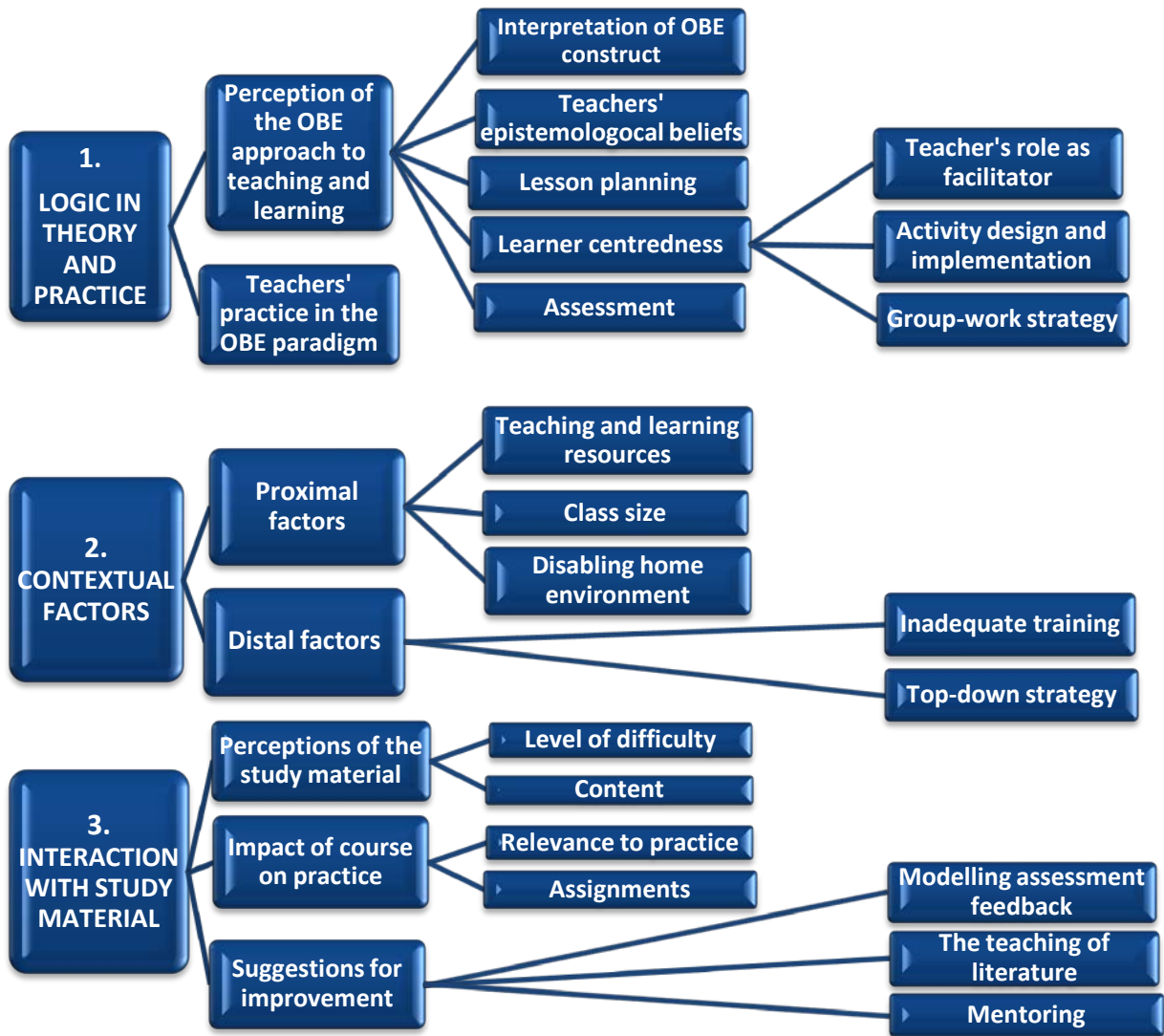
FIGURE 5: THE FINDINGS — CATEGORIES, THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

3.2 CATEGORY ONE: LOGIC IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

The questions in this category elicit data on the participants' mental constructions of the OBE phenomena and the participants' classroom practice. Each table below captures verbatim responses to a specific question.

3.2.1 Perception of the OBE approach to teaching and learning

This question sought to determine the participants' understanding of OBE within the context of English First Additional Language (FAL).

Question: *What is your understanding of the OBE approach to teaching and learning?*

Table 4: Perception of the OBE approach to teaching and learning

1	*OBE they say it's learner-centred and you have to teach according to outcomes. Learner-centred means learners do the work whereas in the old method we spoon-fed them. Now we give them a chance to express their views.*
2	*In OBE, we use group work. As you can see, Grades 10 and 11 are sitting in groups. In Grade 12, they are sitting in rows because we are still using the old method. This OBE I think it's a good system because learners get the chance to use their language and meet their inputs[sic].[24]*
3	*It is a teaching approach. Learners do a lot of talking. They have to learn for themselves. The advantage is that learning is learner-centred but this will only work if the teacher first did a practice with the learners then the learners is that can be independent.*
4	*OBE is about inclusivity. You have to know your learners, their age, background and first language. You should accommodate everybody, even the weak learners. I cater for their differences in IQ.*
5	*The teacher in OBE does not need a textbook. That is why we have no books. We use things like newspapers and magazines to teach.*
6	*OBE means the learner has to do most of the talking. My job is to facilitate, I don't stand in front of the class to teach. I use group work and correct them when they are wrong. The approach is activity-based but it does not encourage reading and writing because learners learn in groups.*
7	*I am not very sure about this approach, this OBE. It's confusing because first it was Curriculum 2005, then we had OBE and now we have NCS. But perhaps after I get more training, I will understand better.*
8	*My understanding is that we no longer do everything for learners. Meaning that when you give them activities, they have to they do most of their work. I just facilitate. In Grade 12 I still talk a lot because we are in the old method.*

The findings presented above show some similarities in the students' zones of enactment. Most of the participants perceived OBE in terms of learner-centredness (1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8),[25] but there was considerable variation in their understanding of this construct, as demonstrated by their use of terms such as group work, inclusivity, learner talk and teacher talk. One participant viewed OBE in terms of learning resources as opposed to pedagogy (5),

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[24] Errors in verbatim responses have not been corrected for the sake of authenticity. Subsequent errors will not be highlighted in this way.

[25] For ease of reference, in the presentation and discussion of data the students are henceforth referred to by number.

while another was totally confused (7). Only one respondent made the connection between OBE and outcomes (1). None mentioned important aspects such as the minimal focus on content coverage and the important role of assessment. Apart from Student 1, these respondents did not use the language of the official documents but expressed their understanding in practical terms. This was probably a good sign as it showed that they had, albeit unsuccessfully, tried to internalise the essence of OBE.

The responses indicated that participants had either incomplete understanding of the principles underpinning OBE or a vague perception of what OBE learning entails. A range of misinterpretations was evident: that teaching was no longer necessary because of the learner-centred approach; that group work was no more than putting learners in groups; that textbooks were unnecessary, and that OBE does not encourage reading and writing.

3.2.2 Attitude towards OBE

This question sought to determine what these participants thought about the new approach.

Question: *What is your opinion of OBE?*

Table 5: Attitude towards OBE

1	*It is a better way of teaching because there is no competition like in the past but they want us to do many new things. Ummm like creating our own curriculum according to the environment. In most cases we get new things every time. It's hectic for us but it's alright.*
2	*OBE it's a lot of time and energy from the teacher. And then if we try to follow the procedures of this OBE step to step at the end of the day you will found [sic] out you have run out of time and behind in terms of the pacesetter.*
3	*I think OBE is good but we need more training, I mean some practical. They must come here and help us.*
4	*In OBE they tell you that it is not good to memorise but in the old syllabus we were reading aloud and memorising whatever we were reading and at the end of the day we were able to read and write whatever and that helped us to a standard of vocabulary.*
5	*It's not easy this new approach. I am going to make an example about discipline. If a learner is not disciplined, she will never do it because she knows there is nothing that's going to be done he doesn't do their homework, he leaves the book at home, he comes late, he is out of uniform. The old approach was better because a child will learn very hard and sweat to get what he wants.*

6	*This OBE is confusing to us we as teachers. The way we trained as students in terms of lesson preparations we were trained to prepare the content of the particular subject or the particular portion we were going to teach. But now OBE has introduced the idea of making some lesson preparations not only the content. Each lesson has to be integrated with other subjects and with life outside school. Perhaps this OBE is taking us somewhere.*
7	*We are not clear with this OBE because it's still new. We are still learning about it. It is a new system.*
8	*I can say it's good but learners are not used to working on their own. They want us teachers to tell them everything. It's good because learners can learn. But I am struggling because the training is not enough*

The responses were varied, revealing mixed attitudes towards and understanding of this approach. Only two respondents (1 and 8) saw OBE as beneficial, citing the creation of relevant curriculum, a lack of competition and active participation by learners. The inherent discourse in the rest of the responses was characterised by numerous misgivings ("*it is demanding, it is confusing, it's not easy; it is time-consuming*"). Some of the perceived negative aspects were due to misconceptions, for example, that OBE promotes ill-discipline and discourages memorising. Students 3, 7 and 8 felt inadequate to implement this approach. This was likely to affect practice, hence the need for more training. The response by Student 6 was insightful: he alluded to the confusion emanating from having been trained differently and his comment about the importance (or lack thereof) of content showed some understanding of OBE. Student 7 was consistent in his claim that OBE was confusing. His response was vague, perhaps as a reflection of his uncertainty about the new approach and the need for more training. In all the responses, there was no conviction regarding the good aspects of this approach; during informal discussions; however, all teachers agreed that the schools had in principle accepted OBE. Yet, apart from inter-school cluster[26] meetings to moderate portfolio marking, there was nothing at the actual schools themselves to demonstrate this acceptance. The tone of the participants' voices was

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[26] This term refers to a group that comprises teachers from six or seven neighbouring high schools. In this study, their role was confined to administrative matters such as assessing learner portfolios, setting examination papers and moderating them; in other contexts, they also acted as communities of practice (see Chapter 7).

fatalistic and not born out of the conviction that the new way of teaching was necessarily better. On the whole, these responses revealed a state of unpreparedness for this educational reform.

3.2.3 The participants' cognitive scripts

The following question required respondents to reflect on their new role in the context of OBE.

Question: *What do you consider as the teacher's role in OBE?*

Table 6: The participants' cognitive scripts

1	*I think in OBE, learners have to learn for themselves. There is no spoon-feeding. I just facilitate. I know some teachers don't want to accept the changes. They don't see the benefit of it. Some don't even attend workshops.*
2	*As teachers we are used to standing in front of the class and telling learners what to do. We are still doing that. It is very rare that you find a teacher will walk among learners supervising them. They don't want these things.*
3	*It is not easy to accept the changes. We still tell learners what to do because we think it's important. OBE is actually mean the phasing out of the old method because it completely does not accommodate the old system. I see nowhere the old method is highlighted as being good. We should use the good in both approaches and not throw away one completely.*
4	*In the new system, learners should learn on their own but they are not used to doing things independently. Yes learners should do activities but the teacher should also teach.* *The advantage I see lacking in the new system is that in the old system learners could memorise some aspects and apply them later on.*
5	*It's sometimes necessary to stand in front of the classroom and do the lecture form and teach them things and drill it into them. There is room for the teacher to teach but it should not be overused.*
6	*I don't think I teach Grade 12 differently from Grade 11. Learners are used to being told everything. What they believe is a teacher should tell everything.* [27]
7	*In OBE the place of the teacher, the role of the teacher is very minimal. I think we cannot do away with teacher talk. We cannot do away with teacher explanation.*
8	*You see when we were trained at college we were supposed to be the ones who as teachers*

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[27]OBE and the National Curriculum Statement were phased in gradually. In 2007, it had not yet been phased into grade 12.

	to be the ones to impart knowledge but now things have turned around. I am not sure exactly how to approach the learners and then because of much challenges of learner-centred method, I am struggling.

From these responses it was evident that students struggled with a change in mindset and believed that the teacher-centred approach was better. This was either stated or implied. The underlying misperception of the teacher's role was aptly stated in the response by Student 7 but also implied in the responses by Students 1 to 5 and 8, who all believed in the teacher-centred approach where the teacher dominates. They thought that the learner-centred approach advocated in OBE gave the teacher very few responsibilities – another misconception. Student 8 was explicit about the difficulties faced by teachers who were trained to use the traditional approach. The response by Student 1 captured the teacher's role best of all, particularly her use of the expression *no spoon-feeding*.

3.2.4 Problems regarding implementation of OBE

The following question seeks to determine any negative views the students might have about OBE.

Question: *What problems do you have in using the new approach?*

Table 7: Problems regarding implementation of OBE

1	*There is a lot of writing. In OBE, a teacher has to do a lot for the learner but there is no time.*
2	*We have to do group work but it's not good. Group work makes the learners dependent on clever ones. Perhaps it's good for Model C schools where classes are small.*
3	*Most teachers are forced to leave learners and concentrate on paper work when they are supposed to teach. After that it's portfolios and more paper work. So many things that you fill in the portfolios, so many marks.*
4	*It can be a lot of admin. You do a lot of admin after hours.*
5	*With this OBE, you have got a lot of paper work that you need to do. The time that you spend with learners is little.*
6	*They introduce this continuous assessment system and it needs a learner to write and write. Our classes are big. There is no time to mark all that work.*
7	*It's alright. We will get used to it.*
8	*We have to do group work but it's not easy. My classes are big. 75 learners. We have*

	problems with discipline.

Most participants complained about the administrative chores that kept the wheels of OBE turning. Observation confirmed that this was a reality which ate into teaching and preparation time. In line with the OBE principles of continuous and transparent assessment, most of the work pertained to recording marks. The response by Student 7 was vague and my attempts to get clarification regarding what exactly was "alright" merely drew a shrug. This might indicate a lack of interest, a resistance to change or poor ability to express himself in English. The response by Student 1 was in total contradiction to what she said in Table 4, perhaps an indication of confusion on her part or that she was not applying her mind during the interview.

LEARNER-CENTRED PEDAGOGY

Since OBE is a learner-centred approach, students were asked about their use of a key learner-centred strategy.

Question: *What is your opinion of group work?*

Table 8: Learner-centred pedagogy

1	*I don't use it that much. Here is no time and learners just talk. It's a problem.*
2	*It's not easy. Sometimes you find that in a group of 8, only two learners come in with ideas. I think OBE was the best curriculum in Model C schools.*
3	*Sometimes when learners are in groups, they don't do the work you gave them but something else because we have big classes.*
4	*Group work is something which I do but not often. But I don't like group work because there is not much work done by the teacher. We are here to teach.*
5	*A large class like mine I find it difficult to do group work. Since they are sitting in 4 rows, I use those rows as groups.*
6	*Whatever is done in OBE is in group form and then we as teachers were convince that our learners have achieved a particular outcome. Only to find that only one or two learners have achieved that.*
7	*I give my learners tasks individually and when I group them, each one has done something. If I don't do that most of them do not do the work.*
8	*This group work is good for small classes. It takes time and I fall behind the pacesetter if I don't teach.*

The respondents' opinion on the use of group work was multidimensional, ranging from total rejection (1 and 4) to fatalistic acceptance (5) or tokenism (2, 6, 7and 8). Although students knew that group work was a core strategy in OBE, they were not keen to use it. During lessons observed, learners sat permanently in groups for every subject in all high schools except Grade 12. In the two primary schools visited, learners sat in rows. The students made no attempt to group them, perhaps because of space constraints. Regardless of the teaching arrangement, in the majority of lessons learners worked individually with the teacher controlling from the front. The learners' belief in the teacher as an authority — *"They say teach us. We want to learn"* (6) — did not make facilitating group work any easier. The general feeling was that group work was not feasible, either because of the large classes, disciplinary problems or sheer laziness of learners. Students 4 and 8 revealed a misconception about group work and their conception of what teaching entailed. When probed for reasons, Student 1 cited the big classes, time constraints and laziness, all of which were justified in her particular teaching context. The response by Student 6 showed a misconception of OBE: the approach is not about group work all the time. Most respondents identified copying as a problem but did not offer any creative solutions. On the whole, teachers revealed a vague understanding regarding the importance of this strategy.

3.2.6 Criteria for grouping learners

The following question was meant to elicit pedagogical reasons that determined the formation of groups.

Question: *How do you group your learners?*

Table 9: Criteria for grouping learners

1	*I take the weak ones and group them with the intelligent ones. But a disadvantage is that those that are weak become a laughing stock to those that are intelligent.*
2	*Groups are permanent. They are arranged by the class teacher.*
3	*I group them according to mixed ability for instance number 1s in one group number 2s in another group.*
4	*The classes are big and overcrowded so I use groups of four according to the rows.*
5	*They sit in rows. Sometimes they work in pairs; groups are difficult because there are too many learners in this class.*
6	*I balance according to gender and avoid friends sitting together.*

7	*The class teacher puts the learners in groups. I just teach.*
8	*It's the class teacher's job. In my class, I make sure each group has boys and girls.*

Regarding the criteria for grouping learners, only Student 1 gave a sound pedagogical reason. Student 3 had a warped opinion of mixed ability and, although not pedagogically sound, Student 6 had a criterion which was justifiable from a disciplinary point of view. For the rest, grouping was not purposeful because learners sat in permanent groups. None of the teachers took the trouble to change the class teacher's groups to reflect the demands of that particular learning activity.

3.2.7 Epistemological view of practice

The following question sought to determine the students' epistemological stance**.**

Question: *As a language teacher, which aspects of language do you emphasise in your teaching?*

Table 10: Epistemological view of practice

1	*Reading. Learners should be able to read.*
2	*I think it's comprehension. We do a lot of comprehension. You know, how to make sentences.*
3	*It's reading. Unfortunately we do not have a library.*
4	*Grammar is very important. Learners should know their tenses.*
5	*Vocabulary is important. Learners should learn new words to use.*
6	*They should be able to read and write and know what is a correct sentence.*
7	*I think grammar is very important because if a learner doesn't know grammar, he is not able to express himself. When they know grammar they are okay. Grammar is the foundation of language.*
8	*Reading is very important. If a learner cannot read, how can he learn? We need books for reading.*

Most of the students considered the structural aspects of language learning as most important (2, 4, 5 and 7), followed by reading (1 and 8). Probing regarding reading revealed they meant literacy, the ability to string words and sentences together, as opposed to intensive reading involving deep learning. Students 4 and 7 displayed unwavering conviction

regarding the benefits of grammar, but even those who identified other aspects such as comprehension, reading and writing still focused on correct sentences, that is, on form as opposed to meaning. It is important to note that although OBE emphasises the integration of skills, none of these students viewed language learning and teaching as involving all the four language skills in synchrony as emphasised in the study guide. Instead, they emphasised grammar in line with their beliefs about language learning.

3.2.8 Lesson planning

Teaching, like every activity, has to be planned. The study sought to determine the quality and quantity of planning by the participants. The table below displays responses regarding how often they planned.

Question: *How often do you plan?*

Table 11: Lesson planning

1	*One lesson plan can go up to three or four weeks. It's not daily planning. The learning programme guides us.*
2	*I get my planning from my schedule and my learning programme. Everyday lesson plans, no. I take my textbook and I teach. My learners are slow. Sometimes I do an activity for 3 days when I have plan it for one day. That is why I am de-motivated about planning*
3	*When you plan things, it not always goes according to what you plan. I plan weekly but it does not work.*
4	*This is OBE. We don't plan daily.*
5	*I plan monthly. The **cluster** leaders and the district officers they do not have a common lesson plan for English. You attend a workshop and they say you can choose from these whereby you choose. Then when the district officers come they will tell you this is not the right lesson plan. They are confusing us.*
6	*I use to plan but now I find everything is in the textbooks we use.*
7	*I do monthly planning but I don't follow it closely.*
8	*I do weekly plans but sometimes that plan takes me three weeks. My learners are slow.*

Different schools had different lesson plan templates, but they all required standard information such as outcomes, assessment standards, activities, and assessment. Student 2

did not plan at all, saying he used the learning programme. However, the same student later commented: "*Lesson planning is very important. You can't go to class without planning.*" This contradiction reflects the confusion caused by the transition from a culture of daily planning to weekly and monthly plans.

Most of the participants had either fortnightly or monthly plans which, upon examination, turned out to be merely symbolic (Appendix F). In all cases, there was no indication of which outcomes the learners were expected to achieve after a particular learning episode, indicating a disjuncture between planning and teaching. It was evident that the outcomes, assessment standards and activities were listed as procedure: often attempts to find out where the observed lesson fitted into the provided lesson plan yielded no results. In the lesson plans, the activities were indicated in broad terms, with a focus on grammar or content. In fact, the lists of what learners were expected to achieve in terms of outcomes and assessment standards were impressive but of very little if any practical use since there was not a single instance when a lesson plan was referred to in a lesson. Instead, the few lesson plans for the current and previous year were neatly filed in the teachers' portfolio. I got the idea that those students who planned did so as a formality to meet policy requirements. The information was scant and activities repetitive and lacking in creativity. Contrary to expectations, lesson plans and teaching practice were like oil and water.

3.2.9 Assessment

An examination of the documents in the participants' possession revealed a heavy emphasis on assessment. For instance, Student 1 had the following: National Protocol Assessment, Assessment Policy, School Assessment Plan, Record of Learner Assessment, and Assessment File. In addition, the teachers' copies of textbooks described in great and meticulous detail how assessment should be conducted. Lastly, the learners' OBE-oriented English language textbooks contained assessment standards and various rubrics for assessing tasks. This signified the important role of assessment in the OBE approach and, in particular, that assessment hinges on three pillars, as described in the literature review (3.4.4): transparency, fairness and reliability.

Students seemed overwhelmed by this information overload and most tended to ignore it, opting for what they were used to or what was convenient. Asked whether they used the numerous documents, Student 8 had this to say: "*Not very much. Sometimes I use the*

rubrics but other times no." The only exception was the portfolio essay. Here each participant adhered to the writing process, which required that a rubric be used for transparency of assessment. For this skill, students tried to toe the line because the evidence had to be included in the learners' portfolios which were periodically sent for assessment. Because of the participants' reluctance to use rubrics and other explicit criteria, assessment was mostly judgemental and did not always reflect the variety that was required of the OBE approach in spite of the numerous and varied assessment tools in the learners' textbooks and teachers' guides. Therefore, despite this information overload, there was a resistance to OBE assessment practices. For instance, if a pair- or group-work activity was suggested in the textbook, the teacher stuck to the tried and tested technique of getting answers from the whole class. The assessment tools (grids, checklists) provided in the various texts were largely ignored; teachers seemed to find them cumbersome.

The question below sought to determine the students' understanding of assessment practices in the OBE approach.

Question: *What is your understanding of assessment in the OBE approach?*

Table 12: Assessment in the OBE approach

1	*Assessment, well in the old way they wrote tests. Now I assess them continuously according to tasks set for the portfolio.*
2	*Assessment is the same as what is given by the department. The textbooks have used the same system of grids and rating.*
3	*We now use continuous assessment which means every task should be recorded and if a learner is sick during examinations, we use these records.*
4	*In the past, learners wrote examinations at the end of the year only but now they are assessed on the work they do everyday also.*
5	*This OBE assessment is too much work because we have to record marks all the time. In the past, we just waited for examinations and tests.*
6	*We now have continuous assessment which means if a learner does not write examinations, he is promoted to the next class using those marks.*
7	*Now we have to keep a record of marks they get during the whole year. It's not just exams. The class work is also important.*
8	*We do tasks for the portfolio and the marks also count. It's not just exams as in the past.*

Respondents were articulate about using formative as opposed to summative assessment as a sign that they were implementing OBE. All except Student 2 identified the importance of year marks, citing instances of absence during examinations. However, there were different perceptions regarding the essence of formative assessment. To some it meant recording all marks; to others, recording only those specified in the documents sent by district authorities. The formative assessment benefits of monitoring learners' progress, transparency of the process and reflection on learners' performance were not mentioned. Predictably, participants were very clear on those aspects of assessment that were required for the portfolio.

From the interviews it was clear that most of the assessment practices were governed by top-down instructions from the district, with the emphasis on the portfolio tasks. Although the choice of these portfolio tasks was left to the teacher, their nature was pre-determined at national level via the districts.[28] Teachers had to ensure that the tasks were executed according to schedule and that took precedence over everything else, as confirmed by Student 2: "*We haven't written a test on language yet. It is not yet requested for the portfolio.*" Thus, assessment was portfolio-related and -bound because this was what the education district officials examined when they visited schools. Consequently, students made sure the set tasks were done and completed timeously.

3.2.9.1   ASSESSMENT OF ORAL TASKS

During lesson observation sessions, learning often stopped to give way to portfolio tasks. For instance, during one of my visits a student was informed that the oral assessment marks were due and she subsequently stopped all teaching and spent three periods sourcing the marks. The topic chosen by the HOD for all four Grade 10 classes was *South Africa is a perfect country.* Because the classes were big (this particular one consisted of 56 learners), for the next three days the procedure was as follows: learners walked in, they greeted, then the teacher took out the name list and called each learner in turn to come to the front and say something after which she appended a mark against the learner's name.

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[28] In primary schools, this was not applicable. The choice was either made by the student or at cluster meetings.

To begin with, the choice of topic was inappropriate. The word *perfect* is a misnomer and is open to numerous interpretations. For a Grade 10 class, a more specific and relevant subject would have provided fertile ground for the generation of ideas, especially if learners had been asked to prepare. Secondly, the student did not give any guidance or input before the process commenced, nor were the outcomes spelt out. As a result, learners were not sure of what was expected of them and there was so much repetition of content that even the learners themselves were restless with boredom because, while this was happening, the rest of the class sat idle instead of being gainfully engaged. During this tedious process the teacher stoically listened and recorded a mark after each "presentation". There was no attempt at interrogating learners' ideas so as to stimulate deep thinking, broaden perspectives or promote insight. The aim of the exercise was to generate marks, therefore her interaction was limited to the words "next" and "silence". The mark allocation was subjective, as there was no benchmarking mechanism such as a checklist or grid.

3.2.9.2 ASSESSMENT OF WRITING TASKS

Examination of learners' class work books and portfolios showed that extended pieces of writing such as essays, projects and even paragraphs were very few and done only for the portfolios. In Grade 4, where portfolio tasks were not imposed from above, I did not see any extended pieces of writing beyond the sentence level.

The essays were "sanitised", given that they were the final products. The learning that had taken place through successive drafts was not evident, so the emphasis was on the final product as opposed to the process. However, the final assessment was transparent because the rubrics had to be included as evidence that the due process had been followed. Because of these expectations, this was the only task where learners received some feedback. At two schools participants admitted to having learners write the final drafts in pairs or groups because the classes were so big (between 48 and 75 learners) that the students could not cope with the marking load if learners wrote individual work. The rest of the tasks in the learners' books consisted of numerous comprehension and grammar pieces of a very structural nature, the answers of which were provided in the teacher's copy.

The OBE-oriented textbooks were loaded with formative assessment activities, but in all instances marking was done by the student and the concept of continuous assessment as involving self, peer and group assessment was ignored, even in instances where this was

suggested in the text and the appropriate grid provided. Participants not only viewed this as a waste of time, they also preferred to do the marking themselves because of their belief in the teacher as an authority.

In Grade 12, teaching and assessment were very examination-driven: as one teacher admitted, "*Our results are good. When we get them to Grade 12, everything is based on past exam papers so we train them for the examination so that they know what to expect.*" This notion was supported by another student who, when asked about her plans for OBE in Grade 12, had this to say: "*In Grade 12 we don't play. We teach for exams.*" This comment was instructive; it revealed the student's attitude to OBE as well as her idea of what teaching entailed. Participatory learning that is encouraged in the OBE approach was seen as "playing" which, because of the need to pass examinations, was replaced by teaching, meaning examination-focused drill work.

3.2.10   Participants' views on assessment

An important dimension that the study brought to light was that of expectations from district officials that were not necessarily written down as policy but had to be complied with nevertheless. These had an even greater impact on what participants did than policy directives. In this respect, the following comment was telling: "*With assessment, the problem is what the Guide* [Study Guide] *says is different from what they want at the **cluster** because at the **cluster** the main thing they want is to make sure that the learner does not fail no matter what. If a learner does not answer the topic you must find a way to allocate marks for what has been written*" (1).

I also found that students struggled with areas of contradiction between what the study guide advocated and the demands of policy, and the gap between what was feasible or mere rhetoric. For instance, Student 6 had this to say about assessment: "*The study guide says learners must assess themselves and each other but this is Grade 12 and I do the assessment because of portfolio marks.*" The course and policy therefore did not always transmit identical messages, which led to confusion.

3.2.11   Observational evidence from lesson presentations

Contrary to their interview responses, in their actual practice students positioned themselves in control of their lessons. In the majority of cases, they dispensed the

knowledge and directed the lessons. Often a lesson was introduced with the words "Take out your books", then the page number, after which the class continued from where they had left off the day before. Learners were not told the lesson outcomes and if it was a writing task, the teacher told learners to write individually, with hardly any interaction to determine the learners' understanding before application. It seemed as if students were going through the motions without applying their minds to the processes involved in facilitating learning. Lessons were not timed, and when the bell rang, learners just stood up and left, while the student did not attempt to conclude the lesson.

Questioning was controlled by the student who called for answers from individual learners. The questioning techniques did not elicit higher-order thinking skills or stimulate learner thinking. The focus was on content knowledge as opposed to skills: the participants emphasised the *what* and *where* questions at the expense of the *how*. There was no probing when the responses were incorrect. Instead, the participant simply provided the answers. I got the impression that, although students were aware of new classroom practices, they preferred to continue operating in their comfort zones which they found less demanding.

In the few instances when learners interacted in groups, the discussions were tightly indexed to the questions the student asked, mainly from the textbook. All groups did the same work. Participants also depended on the answers provided in the teacher's books and avoided open-ended questions, citing lack of time and high noise levels as reasons for not seeking elaborate answers. Class interaction was therefore teacher-controlled. In high schools, lessons were typified by one-word or one-sentence answers. In the Grade 4 classes, there was a lot of chanting, with learners responding in unison to the student's questions and, perhaps because of the large classes, little individual tutoring or feedback. Written work was tightly controlled, with hardly any activities leading to substantive learner-centred practices. As the discussion in the next chapter will show, this rigid approach could be evidence of the students' poor language proficiency among other things.

Extended tasks — projects, presentations or performances that involve data handling, self-expression and communication skills, team work, critical and creative thinking and problem-solving to enable learners to learn holistically and exercise higher-order thinking skills — were the exception rather than the norm. In one instance, when Student 3 was supposed to give a project to meet the demands of the portfolio, she gave a reading passage and asked

learners to answer the set questions in the textbook. There was no attempt at manipulating content to reflect the nature of the task. I doubt whether this participant understood the pedagogical rationale behind project work.

The same mechanical procedure was followed in literature lessons. Learners sat in groups but one learner read for the whole class. In one instance, they came to the end of a short story they were reading and, without any comment, the student told the next learner to begin reading the next story. There was no effort to help learners interrogate ideas in the text, relate the subject matter to their lives, stimulate the learners' interest or expand their horizons. To this student, the teaching of literature was just a mechanical reading process devoid of reflection. In another literature class based on the short story *The Suit*, the participant asked questions, all of which were content-based and therefore tested lower order skills. The play is very relevant because, apart from being set in South Africa, it deals with the common social problem of infidelity that learners could identify with, but the student lacked the enthusiasm and creativity to manipulate the content for the learners' benefit. In most of the lessons I observed, the problem seemed to lie in the absence of an explicit teaching point to give the lesson direction; things just happened and stopped when the bell rang, indicating that students did not bother to organise the learning space for their learners. Unfortunately the timetables were so full that there was no time to discuss these issues.

On the whole, teaching was a mechanical process devoid of introspection. I felt that students wanted me to see and understand their plight, because there were numerous disabling factors which detracted from provision of quality teaching.

3.3   CATEGORY TWO: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

The findings presented in this section seek to answer the question: *What learner-characteristics and environmental constraints were found to enhance or impinge on the implementation of the OBE approach?*

Under-girding the learning and teaching context is the environment in which the process takes place (situated learning). All the schools were situated in disadvantaged areas, making the implementation of reforms such as OBE challenging. The learning and teaching atmosphere revealed a context of complex and demanding challenges, requiring a teacher who was adaptable, confident and reflective. These challenges can be grouped into two:

proximal and distal factors. The former pertain to situations that directly impinge on learning and the latter on those factors that affect learning indirectly.

3.3.1 Proximal factors

Interviews and lesson observation revealed the harsh realities within which students worked, chief of which were big classes and a lack of resources, a disabling home environment, and full timetables. All of these militated against effective implementation of OBE.

3.3.1.1 BIG CLASSES

Although there was adequate furniture in all classrooms that I entered – each learner had a desk and chair – in four of the cases the classrooms were so crowded that students had very limited room to manoeuvre. The smallest class consisted of 48 learners and the biggest 75. These big numbers militated against individual attention in line with the OBE principles of high expectations and expanded opportunities. The situation also impacted on grouping learners, resulting in participants resorting to permanent prearranged groups so as to maintain order or, as in the case of primary schools, joining adjacent pairs to make groups. Both these were technical arrangements devoid of sound pedagogical principles regarding how groups should be formed.

Closely linked to the problem of large classes is the issue of resources.

3.3.1.2 RESOURCES

Resources in this context include all materials used to enhance teaching and learning. Seven of the schools depended on the government to supply them with learning materials. The one exception was the primary school that opted not to buy books at all (Student 5).

- **Textbooks**

Texts are important: through their representation of the social world and the legitimising of cultural norms they are crucial in reinforcing and realising the OBE vision. During my visits, I did not come across instances of state-provided additional resources beyond the textbook and chalkboard. At all six high schools learners had textbooks for English language. Judging

from the texts available, publishers had exploited the new market created by the educational reform and responded by churning out a variety of language textbooks to meet the demand.

Titles of textbooks

Below are the titles of textbooks the students used.

Table 13: Textbooks in use

1	*My Clever* (Grade 11)
2	*Study and Master* (Grade 8); *Advance with English: An outcomes-based course for Southern Africa* (Grade 9)
3	*English for All* (Grade 10)
4	*Reading, Writing and Speaking* (Grade 4)
5	No textbook
6	*English for All* (Grade 11); *English for All* (Grade 12)
7	*Advance with English* (Grades 10, 11, 12); in addition, *Let's use English.*
8	*Focus on English* (Grade 12)

For literature, the lessons were based on four texts, namely *South African Short Stories, Encounters*, *Focus* and *A Handful of Life*, all of which are collections of short stories. In three schools, there were not enough books to go round. For instance in one school, Grades 8 and 9 were studying the same text, *Focus*, and the school had received 50 copies to distribute among 350 learners — an administrative nightmare.

From the above table, it is evident that a wide variety of OBE-oriented language texts was available. They came with full apparatus: teachers' guides, assessment guides and in some, as in the case of *My Clever*, planning guides as well. The layout was similar for all the new texts, which followed the well-oiled and familiar script of a passage followed by activities based on the text. Each unit was based on a theme that learners could identify with. For example, Module 2 of *My Clever* (Grade 11) was about personal development. It focused on themes such as *Coming of age, The art of communication* and *Leadership*. In *Keys to English* (Grade 9), the topics were meant to encourage, educate and guide young people. Examples were: *You are what you eat, Great things lie ahead, Partners with nature* and *Reading novels.* Tasks covering the four language skills were contextualised within the theme,

beginning with intensive reading followed by speaking, listening and writing. In most instances, grammar was also contextualised. For instance, in Unit 2 on the theme *You are what you eat,* there was a grammar section dealing with the language structure 'used to', another on the use of the conditional 'would have', and yet another on antonyms, all generated from the topic of obesity. The same pattern was evident in *My Clever*. After reading, discussion and writing, learners were asked to identify apostrophes in the extract and explain their functions. Therefore, the OBE principle of integration of knowledge and skills had been adhered to in these OBE-aligned textbooks.

Contrary to reports that teachers did not use textbooks, observational evidence revealed an over-reliance on prescribed texts. Learners were fed the steady textbook diet from one day to the next in an evidently monotonous routine. The tasks set were also textbook-bound, allowing little room for learner creativity and development of criticality. Because all learners engaged in similar activities during lessons, there was no evidence of provision of expanded opportunities or remedial work. Rather, uniformity was the norm, with very little if any use of supplementary material, partly because such material was not available. In four instances (1, 6, 7 and 8) where the student had an additional textbook, there were usually technical problems because the photocopiers frequently broke down. This often disrupted a whole lesson as students tended to use the machines at the last minute and were at a loss when they could not make copies. This lack of adequate planning was characteristic of the teaching and learning contexts I witnessed. At one school, the fact that learners in the same grade shared literature books often resulted in chaos: after the bell rang, the student had to collect and count books before taking them to the next class to distribute them. This administrative chore reduced the time allocated to teaching and learning. I was and still am convinced that problems such as these could be solved by the participants themselves; all they needed was enthusiasm and good will.

The lack of a meaningful culture of learning exacerbated the problem in that some learners did not bring books to school. I witnessed instances when a group of learners just sat passively throughout a lesson because none of them had brought the textbook and the student, having given up, simply ignored them.

The two exceptions to all the above were the rural school (7) and a primary school (5) in an informal settlement. At the latter school, the student did not even have a teacher's copy of

a language textbook because, according to her, the HOD and the headmistress, that would be contrary to the principles of OBE. Accordingly, the school did not buy textbooks. *"This is OBE. Textbooks are not necessary. The teacher should be resourceful,"* said the headmistress. This misconception emanated from the OBE requirement that the teacher should be inventive and make use of materials from diverse sources. At this school, accessing other resources was difficult because of the deprived environment. The parents could not even afford to buy school uniforms; for most of the children, the only decent meal they got in a day was from the school's feeding scheme. During my visit, there was therefore no evidence of texts from the outside world, not even newspapers, which under normal circumstances would be freely available. Teachers had to scrounge around for materials and this particular student used books that had **long** been discarded by other schools. Examination of the learners' class work books revealed the shocking reality that they had done very little work. The class had read one three-paragraph text on *The Hare and the Tortoise* the whole of the first term and learners were reciting it off by heart. My visit was at the end of the second term and learners were reading another passage of five paragraphs titled *Scrapman,* which the teacher had photocopied from a very old textbook. The content (dragons, snow, and London airport) was far removed from the learners' world, particularly since it was a Grade 4 class. Because the passage was irrelevant, learning was at a surface level. Learners chanted the passage daily as if it was part of a ritual or as confirmation of the student's belief in memorisation as an effective way of learning language.

At the rural high school, learners had two textbooks, one of which was not OBE-oriented. This student (7) was a firm believer in the effectiveness of the audio-lingual approach, parts of speech in particular, which he believed were the key to mastering the English language. He proudly shared the secret of his matric students' examination success by stating that he spent the whole of the first term teaching the Grade 10 classes parts of speech. During our conversations it was clear that the teacher had very little idea of, let alone interest in, OBE. During the five days I observed his lessons, he did not once make use of the OBE-oriented text. The textbook he used was very grammar-oriented, as were the lessons observed. Convinced of the benefits of the traditional approach, he viewed OBE teaching strategies such as group work as impractical and a waste of time, and therefore showed strong resistance to this approach.

- **Choice of texts**

Only two students (1 and 7) had the privilege of choosing texts. Because of her position as HOD, participant 1 could choose textbooks; Student 7 had the same authority because the HOD was not an English teacher. At another school the choice of textbooks depended on teacher teams and the HOD; consequently, at an individual level students were not quite convinced that the text they used was the best (3). In one case, the heads of department of the various learning areas made the choices. "*The head of departments and one teacher choose the books*" (6). In the rest of the cases the choice of texts was arbitrary; teachers ordered books from catalogues: "*We recommend what we want but sometimes the books just arrive … All of these we never choose them. They just arrive*" (2). "*Publishers bring so many things to school. We don't have time to go through them to see which is right because there is so much and we are not familiar with the books. In the end, we just choose*" (2, 4 and 8). Only Teacher 1, perhaps because of her position as HOD, made an informed choice which she was happy with.

When asked about the criteria for choosing texts, this is what the respondents had to say:

Question: *What would you look for if you were asked to choose a textbook for learners?*

Table 14: Criteria for choosing textbooks

1	*A book that covers the curriculum according to what was decided at the **cluster** meeting. It must have everything including the work schedule and learning programme. It should have graphs and pie charts and learners learn to interpret information.*
2	*The content. No topics like gangsterism and alcohol but also how many books we have, books that are enough to accommodate the class.*
3	*Passages that are relevant to the New South Africa like Human Rights. Themes like HIV/Aids that show the environment in which the learners live*
4	*Variety of English for different IQs.*
5	*A book that is associated with a learning situation. Right now, I use what I can get.*
6	*Does it cover everything: composition, comprehension, grammar? Will the learners understand the topics?*
7	*It should have a lot of extracts where we train learners in terms of language. Does it have grammar which we need?*
8	*It should have comprehension passages that learners can understand and some grammar.*

These responses were consistent with those the respondents gave regarding their epistemological view of language learning. The emphasis was on the relevance of content and importance of grammar, in line with the participants' classroom practice which was content- as opposed to skills-based. Student 7's emphasis on grammar was also not surprising, given his belief in the audio-lingual approach. Participant 4 was consistent in her conceptualisation of OBE as reflecting inclusivity, while respondent 5 identified the importance of context, a key principle of the OBE approach, although she did not realise this. Ironically, the texts she gave learners were very much out of context. This was one of the dichotomies between theory and practice that this study identified. The most perceptive response was from Teacher 1. She demonstrated insight by referring to curriculum needs and development of critical thinking skills when learners interpret information. This could be attributed to her adequate training in OBE implementation as well as her position as HOD.

- **Other resources**

At one primary school there was an unused computer lab because none of the teachers was computer literate. At the second primary school, in an informal settlement, computers had been donated but later stolen before learners could benefit from them. At the rest of the schools, the only computers were in the school administration block. Because of these resource constraints, learners were not being adequately prepared for the technologically-dominated life outside school. In addition, lack of resources affected the quality of learning, as in the case of the comprehension task given as a project (3.2.11).

For various reasons (full timetables, theft of books) there were no operational libraries at any of the schools. The library rooms were used for other things, such as additional classrooms or storerooms. Students bemoaned the lack of reading books, emphasising the importance of reading in language learning (Table 10, Theme 1). This was confirmed by the following remarks: "*We have textbooks but our learners need books for reading*" (6). "*Reading is very important. Once a learner can't read how can that particular learner write? He cannot express himself in English*" (3). The lack of supplementary reading material was a common feature at all the schools. It was an obstacle that I believed students could overcome, provided they were committed, resourceful, able and willing to co-operate with nearby schools. Communities of practice, as I suggest in chapter 7, could play a vital role in ensuring the availability of libraries among clusters.

3.3.1.3 DISABLING HOME ENVIRONMENT

Of the schools visited, two were in informal settlements, one in a rural setting and the rest in townships which were very near informal settlements. During my conversations with the participants, the negative impact of the learners' home environment featured prominently. When asked whether they gave homework, most of the participants answered in the negative. Their reasons reflected a disabling environment of which absenteeism and late arrivals were symptomatic.

Participants articulated the challenges in response to the following question:

How much support do learners get from home?

Table 15: Learner support

1	*Very little. For example homework. There is no point of giving homework because the parents will not supervise.* *Our learners are from the poorest of the poor.*
2	*We have problems. Some parents work away from home leaving the children in the care of an elder child. When they come home for the weekend, they are too busy to bother about school work.*
3	*Their parents are unemployed and their children they suffer in that they don't get support from them whatsoever when it comes to learning. The parents are illiterate. There is a parent we invited to discuss her son's work. She came drunk. They steal.*
4	*It is difficult to teach English. Learners don't get the support from home. The parents don't speak English. In Grade 4 I have to start from the basic, the phonic awareness and move to the vowels.*
5	*The learners come from the informal settlement and families are very poor. These learners spend afternoons selling sweets and fruits to put food on the table. There is no time to do homework.*
6	*Our learners do not get support from home. Sometimes when we call parents, they come drunk. Learners leave books at home. It's a problem.*
7	*Some children live with grandparents who are illiterate who do not know school matters. We are struggling. They leave books at home. They come late. They are hungry. Some don't concentrate.*
8	*Some learners are heads of households. They have no time for school work when they reach home because they have to look after the young ones. At this school, late coming is a problem.*

All participants complained about the lack of support from home, which impacted on discipline, homework and punctuality. For instance, they reported that only a few learners did homework. The rest either copied from the few or simply left the books at home, thereby rendering the exercise worthless. Consequently, most students did not give homework. Some respondents also complained that without corporal punishment there was very little they could do to make learners comply. The impact of these disabling factors was very obvious. During my visits, it was not unusual to see learners roaming in the school yard either because they had arrived late or they had been sent out of class for disrupting a lesson. The parents' support for the children's education was minimal; very few bothered to come and discuss schoolwork with teachers, even when summoned by the school. Students also reported that instances of theft of school property by the community were rife. Children who headed households had problems in attending school and in concentrating when they did, because of responsibilities at home. Given these disadvantaged environments, exposure to English was minimal (during class time only), resulting in a lack of practice and little progress. All this had a negative effect on the implementation of an educational reform which requires intense participation by the learner.

At five of the schools, the classroom atmosphere reflected an aura of want and deprivation. Some of the classrooms were in a state of disrepair, with windows broken and ceilings falling down. The walls were scantily adorned with visuals educating learners about HIV/AIDS and posters from the different provinces marketing their tourist attractions. There was no sign of English language materials or learners' work displayed on the walls.

3.3.2 Distal factors

The findings of this study highlight three factors that contributed to the marginalisation of teachers and an increase in workload: a lack of adequate training, inadequate time on task, and the use of a top-down strategy by authorities.

3.3.2.1   TRAINING

Apart from exposure to the course, the only other factor that could account for the possible improvement of practice for these participants was the training they were supposed to have had in OBE implementation. To establish this, they were asked the following question.

Question: *How much training have you had in using the OBE approach in the English language classroom?*

Table 16: Training in OBE methodology

1	*One year (Saturday mornings) with Unisa.*
2	*One week for English. I'm still struggling because we still need to be trained extensively with OBE.*
3	*Three weeks over the past two years but only one week for English.*
4	*One week for Life Orientation.*
5	*Three days. It's not enough.*
6	*None for English but three for Life orientation*
7	*Not much. I think as time goes on we will improve from where we are now.*
8	*Three days last year and three days in March this year. We need more training.*

Generally, there seemed to have been a dearth of training opportunities for these participants, who felt their preparation for the OBE implementation was inadequate in terms of duration, quality and focus on English. The responses showed that training was minimal and even haphazard, because sometimes teachers were not given enough advance notice. In addition, two students had not had any training in English teaching methodology at all. The only exception was Student 1. Perhaps the length and quality of her training accounted for the insightful answers she gave throughout the interview.

The underlying discourse of these responses was frustration regarding training because inadequate training impacted on the students' ability to implement the new approach. The comment by Student 7 was worth noting. It was vague and showed a lack of interest. He represented those teachers who were set in the old ways, which they believed to be better. The little training or workshopping he might have had had not made much difference. His comment was different from a similar but more focused response from Student 2 which reflected a need to learn.

The rest of the participants expressed disappointment at both the duration and poor quality of training. "*You find that they want to cover everything and it becomes so difficult because their time is limited. The work that you are going to teach with one year maybe you are*

being taught in two hours" (3). "*The one week workshop was useful but the time was not enough because I could see there is a lot of challenges*" (2). Similar sentiments were echoed by Student 8: "*The workshops are too short and facilitators cover a very wide scope in a very short time, that is why one cannot pick up enough information. If we get enough time, I am sure that we can cope with this OBE.*"

Participants identified three shortcomings regarding training. Firstly, they complained about the gap between the classroom reality and the ideal. The demonstrations during workshops were not realistic because the teachers acted as learners, a situation which did not reflect the big classes and restlessness of the learners in school. "*They taught us to apply many things but when we come back to class it was not easy to do*" (6). Furthermore, respondents complained about the quality of training sessions, adding that facilitators were unsure of themselves: "*The workshops that I went to did not have much because even the facilitators who were helping were not quite sure on some of the things we wanted to know*" (3). One participant identified the lack of consistency: "*They keep on changing things. They say don't use this method, use that one. Next time you go to the workshop, it is something different. They keep on changing things*" (1). Finally, participants reported that most of the training did not focus on English didactics but on general curriculum issues such as how to do a work schedule and how to make learning programmes. "*Most workshops focus on learning programmes and work schedule and how to derive outcomes from there. They don't train you how to teach*" (3). Training in the teaching of English specifically did not happen often. "*I know we receive letters telling us about this training for Life Orientation or Geography or whatever. But I haven't seen anything of English things and at school we don't really have that kind of support*" (4).

Participants' responses pointed to the need to equip facilitators with the necessary knowledge and skills to respond to the teachers' needs with insight and conviction. That there were very few workshops for English was disturbing, more so because it is the language of teaching and learning.

3.3.2.2 EFFECTS OF THE TOP-DOWN STRATEGY

The last distal factor identified was the top-down strategy of the authorities. Participants felt they were mere instruments for putting into practice the National Curriculum Statement on OBE principles, and that the authorities were not cognisant of the contextual factors

militating against its implementation. Authorities made demands of teachers who in turn had to obey without question. One such sore point was the portfolio. Participants said it disrupted learning and teaching time but they were obliged to comply because that was what the authorities wanted. Respondents all agreed that they taught for the portfolio. Indeed, during my visits Student 1 spent a double period each per Grade 11 class on "tidying up" the portfolios in preparation for a visit by district officials. No other activity took place during that time.

Secondly, students complained that administrative chores took a large chunk of time they could use for planning and teaching. The following comment was telling: "*OBE we are always writing. They don't give us a chance to see the learners and to sit and do the work with learners. I have to study the programme, I do the schedule, I go to the lesson plans, they want me to make the portfolios. I have to attend workshops. The OBE workload is too much*" (2).

Lastly, those teachers who did plan complained about the confusion regarding lesson plan templates. These were in different formats, a fact that created confusion because visiting education officials did not agree on which template should be used. Participants found this lack of consistency confusing. "*They come and say this is the lesson plan then another one come and say that is wrong. You must use this one. They should not confuse us*" (1).

The important finding regarding distal factors was that, apart from policy documents, the course was the only influence on these students. The workshops they had attended focused mainly on operational matters such as how to draw up a learning programme, were short in duration, and very few centred on the teaching of English specifically.

3.3.2.3 TIME ON TASK

Because of the contextual factors outlined above, teaching was often disrupted, resulting in a loss of time spent on actual learning. In five high schools and one primary school the student stayed in the classroom and learners moved around. This arrangement had a negative effect on time management, particularly time on task, because learners took a noticeable portion of the lesson time changing classrooms and settling down for a lesson. Another factor which ate into teaching time was the distribution, collection and counting of books after each lesson, particularly with literature books, which were often in short supply.

In addition, numerous school-related social activities impacted on time spent on learning. At one school, learning stopped on a Thursday to prepare for the Minister of Education's visit on the Friday. An atmosphere of excitement prevailed during preparations for the visit. Lessons were disrupted because learners had to clean classrooms and practise the national anthem. At another school, a learner committed suicide and all teachers went to the learner's home after break on a Monday to pay their respects. The following day, the student I was visiting spent half the morning on choir practice in preparation for the memorial service on the Wednesday, again disrupting learning because learners were left unattended on these occasions. At yet another school, I arrived on Monday to find officials from the Department of Social Welfare who had come to talk to and counsel learners on drug use. They took the whole day. On the Tuesday I was back, only to be told that the student's class had choir practice in preparation for a music competition. On the second day of my visit to Student 1, district education officials arrived to monitor progress because the school had achieved a 45% pass rate the previous year and had been red-circled. I could not observe lessons that day because the student, who was also the Head of the Languages Department, had to attend meetings. At yet another school, learners did not come back after break on a Friday. Teachers simply sat in the staffroom and chatted away until official dismissal time. From what the participant told me, this was not unusual. These were but a few of the numerous disruptions that I witnessed during my visits.

These findings reveal the presence of numerous negative forces in the learning and teaching environments of the schools in which this study was conducted. They impacted on the teaching practices of the students, who had to grapple with these obstacles even before they faced the marking load.

3.4 CATEGORY THREE: INTERACTION WITH STUDY MATERIAL

The participants in this study were enrolled for an in-service English teaching methodology course with Unisa. The findings presented in this section address the subsidiary research question: *What effect do the course materials have on the students' practice?* The intention was to gain an insight into the students' perception of the course with the aim of improving quality. From a student support point of view, it is important to listen to students' voices as a way of scaffolding learning. The data presented below are students' verbatim responses to each question.

3.4.1 Reasons for enrolling.

Why did you enrol for the module ACEEN2-6?

Table 17: Reasons for enrolling for course

1	*I want to empower myself in this learning area so that I can become a better teacher.*
2	*I want to improve my teaching of English.*
3	*I want to develop myself; I want to help the learners.*
4	*I want to understand this new approach. I want to learn new things.*
5	*I have registered for ACE because my English is not enough. I am upgrading myself.*
6	*I'm teaching English so I needed to expand it or the knowledge. I have difficulties in practice and in literature.*
7	*I'm doing ACE because I love English.*
8	*I want to learn new things about teaching.*

The need to improve practice was the main motivation for enrolling for this course because participants felt they were ill-equipped to teach the subject. Their need resonates with teacher expectations as articulated in the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) policy document, which indicates that the focus of teacher training should be on the three pillars of applied competence: foundational, practical and reflexive competences (cf. Chapter 2: 4.2.1). According to these responses, seven of the students hoped the course would improve their practice, while Student 7 was doing it to enhance the subject knowledge. It is noteworthy that this teacher was the only one with a degree in education. Perhaps he felt he had acquired enough skills, although his approach was very traditional. The rest of the teachers felt inadequate as practitioners who were expected to implement OBE. This study sought to determine whether their practice had indeed changed to reflect educational innovation.

3.4.2 Benefits of course material

The following question elicited the participants' perception of the impact of the course material on their understanding of the new approach.

Question*: In what ways has the study guide improved your understanding of OBE practice?*

Table 18: Benefits of course materials

1	*I learnt comprehension; how to proceed from the simplest to the most difficult question. I also learnt about teaching listening skills using recorded material.*
2	*I did not get enough training in OBE but the module compliment the knowledge. It helps me to understand what is assessment and how will learners be assessed. That the learner will be assessed in a number of ways and at regular intervals.*
3	*I learnt about different levels of questions to teach reading. My learners are more involved in participating in activities in class.*
4	*I like the lesson plans in the study guide but they are different from what we get from the district.*
5	*The course help me to improve my teaching methods. It teach me to read in order to know or have knowledge about teaching.*
6	*Stages of reading and the writing process. This is what they expect us to do.*
7	*I didn't get that much opportunity to go through the Study Guide. I can see that maybe I can be a bit better as a teacher in the classroom. It can develop me a lot.*
8	*The study guide give me some ideas about activities. My learners they do not want to research or to do things on their own. They want to be told all the time but I try and there are those who are eager to learn on their own.*

These responses indicated multidimensional benefits ranging from the teaching of language skills (1, 3, and 6), to designing learner-centred activities (3 and 8) and assessment (2 and 6). There was also the issue of aligning the materials with those from the district authorities. Where this happened (2), the student's understanding was enhanced; where there was a contradiction (4), it resulted in confusion. Of note was the response from Student 7, who had not even read the whole study guide. This teacher got good matric results and was therefore convinced of the benefits of his own way of teaching.

3.4.3 Level of difficulty

Participants were also asked about the level of difficulty of the content of the course.

Question: What is your opinion of the level of difficulty of the study guide?

Table 19: Level of difficulty of course materials

1	*Average for an ACE student.*
2	*It's just like everything else, if you try hard, you will succeed. I have to study hard.*
3	*With no tutor to advise, I find some of the units difficult to understand.*

4	*It is just right.*
5	*The language is alright It is good.*
6	*I can say it is easy because I understand when I read.*
7	*I understand everything that I read.*
8	*The language is not difficult. It's just the time. There is no time to study.*

Judging by these responses, the materials were generally considered to be accessible. One participant expressed the need for closer guidance by tutors. This and the response by Student 2 showed the need for contact with lecturers/tutors. Students could not work on their own, as expected in distance education. Their concerns speak to the need for narrowing the transactional gap between lecturer and student in order to scaffold learning in the distance education mode. The programme I propose in Chapter 7 is embedded in communities of practice as a way of meeting this need.

3.4.4 Relevance of content

The following question sought to determine the relevance of the course content to the teachers' practice.

Question: Which were the most relevant units of study and why?

Table 20: Relevance of course content

1	*Units on the four skills because OBE is about the skills.*
2	*Units 2 and 5. They help me to assess reading comprehension. I learn about testing using the different types of questions and teaching different reading strategies.*
3	*Teaching learners writing. I teach them to brainstorm then write drafts. They must talk.*
4	*Units that teach us about teaching reading, writing and oral. The units are properly arranged in order that enables me to understand.*
5	*Teaching reading. In Grade 4, some of the learners cannot read so now I can help them.*
6	*The writing process and also reading. With essays, we have to do the writing process, the same as in the study guide.*
7	*Everything is relevant because that is how they want us to teach.*
8	*Units on reading, writing and assessment. Some of the ideas we cannot use them because we don't have recorders.*

All respondents agreed that the content was relevant because it was in line with expected teacher practice, particularly with the teaching of the four skills. Of the skills identified, the study units on writing and reading seemed to have had more impact than listening and speaking, perhaps because the former are more practically oriented than the latter. Once again, Student 1 displayed a deep level of understanding of OBE and even used the official terminology. Of note were the focused responses by seven participants which contrasted sharply with the response by Student 7. This participant was consistent in giving vague responses (in this case typified by the word *everything*) that could indicate a lack of understanding or ignorance since he had not read the whole study guide.

In the distance mode, most of the learning and teaching takes place through assignments. The following question sought to determine the relevance of the assignments set on the course to the students' practice.

3.4.5 Relevance of assignments

Question*: Which assignments did you find relevant and why?*

Table 21: Relevance of assignments

1	*Assignments 2 and 3 because us teachers we have to know how to plan and we have to know how to teach comprehension. Assignment 1 is tricky because it is multiple choice.*
2	*All assignments are relevant especially the lesson planning.*
3	*Lesson planning because we are teachers and have to plan. Multiple choice is a good assignment but tricky.*
4	*They are relevant because they are about what I do with my learners everyday in class especially lesson planning and reading.*
5	*All assignments are relevant especially lesson planning.*
6	*Assignment 1 was hard because some of the answers were not in the guide. Assignment 2 teach me to think when planning and Assignment 3 teach me how to set questions.*
7	*I did not finish Assignment 1 but Assignment 2 on lesson planning was easy.*
8	*Assignment 2 was relevant and easy. I failed Assignment 1.*

All respondents agreed on the relevance of Assignment 2 (lesson planning) but had mixed feelings about Assignment 1. The latter was a multiple-choice assignment and questions were drawn from the entire study guide. It consisted of 52 items that required the students

to analyse information as they reflected on the various aspects of teaching: planning, task design, facilitation skills, and assessment. Some students felt it was tricky because of fine differences among items, while others expected to find direct answers in the study guide. The latter could be a reflection of an inability to apply knowledge to new situations, as expected in the OBE approach. Although Student 6 alluded to setting comprehension questions, her classroom practice contradicted this because she relied on those in the textbook. Only two respondents referred to Assignment 3 (an optional assignment) because most students did not attempt it.

An important aspect of learner support involves being able to take cognisance of the students' opinions regarding the materials they use. The following question required input for future revision of the study guide.

3.4.6 Ideas for improvement

Question: *What would you like to see added in the study material?*

Table 22: Ideas for improvement

1	*Examples of how to teach the skills especially oral. We need more debating tips and how to set OBE questions.*
2	*Topics on what is happening in our classrooms today should be added to assist teachers in dealing with the situation.*
3	*Model answers of assignments so that I know where I am wrong.*
4	*How to deal with inclusivity. Some of our learners are from Mozambique and Zimbabwe. I have to help them.*
5	*I would like to see more grammar and guidance on how to write academically when writing assignments.*
6	*How to teach literature.*
7	*They must include a unit on how to teach literature because we don't know. Even how to choose these books. Which ones are best for our learners.*
8	*We need answers to different assignment so that we know where we are wrong. Also how to teach literature.*

The responses were indicative of each student's individual needs. Three respondents expressed the need to learn how to teach literature. This was important because, although the course was designed for teachers in the senior phase, these participants operated in a

variety of contexts including the FET phase, and they found themselves unprepared for the roles they had to perform. The teaching of grammar was not covered in the study guide; therefore, participant 5's response indicated the mindset regarding what should be taught. Lastly, the course should cater for different learning styles, as implied in the need for model answers (3). The same student earlier expressed the need for a tutor. She most probably has a global learning style and learns best from concrete examples, unlike people with an analytic style who are comfortable with learning on their own.

3.4.7 Reflective comments

I recorded the following reflective comments from informal talk. They are not part of the mainstream tape-recorded interview. I asked the participants to reflect on whether the course has met their expectations.

My practice has improved since I was going through this course. I am confident when I go to the classroom. I am learning to make my lessons interesting (3)*.*

The study guide was useful in understanding the National Curriculum Statement although it has a little bit challenges when trying to do it in real situation (4)*.*

My practice has improved a lot in planning. Also my vocabulary has increased because I practise some new words that I meet when reading the study guide (5)*.*

The course helped me to see the importance of involving learners in more activities that they do alone (6)*.*

Sometimes it is difficult to do what is in the Guide because we lack the resources. (8)

Expressions such as *making learning interesting*, *involving learners and improving my teaching methods* reflected the students' understanding of their new role as mediators of learning, though this was not reflected in their practice. However, there were still regrets regarding a lack of resources and contextual constraints which made it difficult for students to implement the ideas in the study guide.

On the whole, the course had had varied influences on the students, which indicated that each individual had a unique outcome route following engagement with the course materials. The course provisions were the same, the input was standard, but the consequences for participants were disparate and individual, perhaps due to each one's unique learning and teaching context. The participants found the course beneficial, because they could relate the content to their classroom experiences. However, this knowledge was

not supported by observational evidence, signifying that the participants were aware of the changes they should implement but, due to the numerous factors already mentioned, they continued to practise in the old way. I found that students referred to the guide only in those instances where it shared common ground with the textbook or where it complied with policy requirements.

4.   CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the research findings have been reported. The categories, themes and sub-themes provided the framework within which the interview questions and participants' responses were displayed. Data was taken verbatim from interviews, while the findings from lesson observation and documents were brought in either to support or contradict the interview data.

Although the need to improve practice was the main motivation for doing the course, the general picture that emerged was that of students struggling to align their teaching practice to OBE. The findings revealed a general (though at times unwilling) acceptance of the new approach. Because of their training during apartheid and many years of practice, these participants felt threatened by the proposed changes, which for some ran against the grain of their perceived notion of teaching.

In the next chapter, findings are discussed and conclusions drawn.

CHAPTER 6:   DATA INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

1.   INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the interpretation and discussion of findings presented in Chapter 5. These relate to what students[29] said, what they did and my own observations. The intention is to answer the first three subsidiary questions:

- *What is the students' theoretical understanding of the OBE phenomenon?*

- *To what extent are the students implementing OBE in their classroom practice?*

- *What effect do the course materials have on the students' practice?*

The discussion is structured around the themes and subthemes identified in the previous chapter but grounded in the overarching metaphor of mediation, a notion which encapsulates the expectations regarding teaching practices in the OBE approach. These should reflect a learner-centred approach to planning, facilitation and assessment of learning. Because teaching and learning are context-bound, the chapter ends with an analytic discussion of factors that were found to disable the students' capacity to implement OBE. The diagram below presents the conceptual framework of the discussion.

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[29] In this chapter, the eight students are the participants. The term *teachers* refers to classroom practitioners in general.
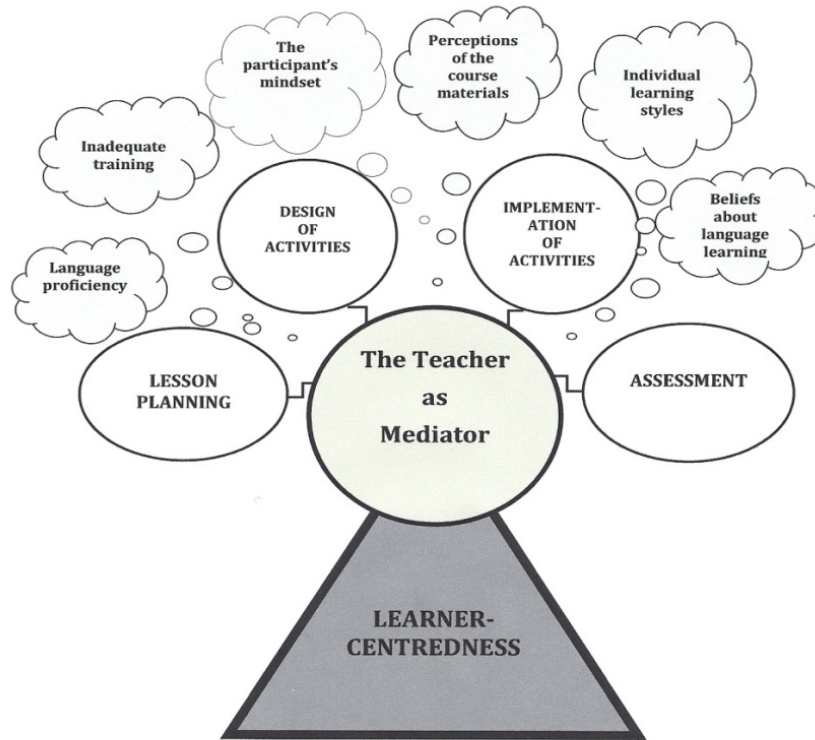
FIGURE 6: FACTORS THAT SHAPE STUDENTS' IMPLEMENTATION OF OBE

2. THE THEORY OF MEDIATION

This theory has been comprehensively discussed in the literature review (cf. Chapter 3: 3). I restate the main characteristics here because it is against these that the participants' understanding and practice of OBE are determined. In other words, mediation provides the theoretical base that should guide the students' practice.

One of the ideals of OBE indicated in the NCS is to encourage the development of critical thinking skills (cf. Chapter 3: 3.1). This implies that teachers have to base their teaching on, among other things, constructivist principles that provide learners with opportunities to develop as thinkers. The emphasis is on the learner, while the teacher's role is to mediate the learning experience. From a constructivist perspective, mediation entails involving learners in activities of cooperation and shared experience, emphasising the uniqueness of each learner and accepting individual differences (Fraser, 2007). Unlike the transmission and reception method where learners are passive recipients of information, the constructivist view of learning promotes active participation for developing critical thinking skills through helping learners construct their own knowledge, solve their own problems and understand

their own thinking processes. The teacher as mediator should constantly be aware of this goal. This view of teaching is consonant with the tenets of OBE and the vision of the NCS that "learners should become independent and responsible life-long learners and teachers should become mediators of learning" (DoE, 2002: 8, 9). For effective implementation of OBE, the teacher's theoretical orientations should be aligned to the construct of mediation. In practical terms, this means aligning all aspects of classroom practice to the needs of the learner.

3.   MEDIATION FOR LEARNER-CENTREDNESS

An outcomes-based approach to teaching places the learner at the fulcrum of any learning activity, while the teacher mediates the process (Van der Horst and McDonald, 1996; Claassen, 1998; Fraser, 2007). In the OBE model (cf. Chapter 3:2.3), the learner is an active participant in the learning process while the teacher acts as facilitator whose role is to create conditions that are conducive to learning. Accordingly, the distinguishing feature of OBE, the notion of learner-centredness, permeates all the other aspects of pedagogy such as planning, design and implementation of appropriate activities, accommodating diversity, and assessment. Understanding it is therefore crucial to effective OBE implementation. In this section, I analyse participants' responses to show their varied interpretations of the essence of learner-centredness. This variety was demonstrated by each individual student's attempt to internalise the OBE construct. All of them revealed a conceptualisation that was simplistic, if not flawed. Its effects were seen in implementation that was at a very superficial level.

To some students, learner-centredness denoted a lesson dominated by learner talk while the teacher watched: "*Learners do a lot of talking*". Contrary to this understanding, the kind of talk advocated in this approach is not just talk but guided didactic conversation (Holmberg, 1983). Learners interact in the context of specified activities intended to develop particular cognitive skills. They do not just talk; the talk is goal-directed. During the learning process, the teacher defines the learning space and drives the learning process from the background while scaffolding learning (Vygotsky, 1978) and removing the scaffold as learners become independent and move from i to i + 1. (Krashen, 1981).

Closely related to the above was the interpretation reflecting the teacher's role: "*Sometimes the teacher should teach. Yes learners should do activities but the teacher should also teach.*" Implied in these responses were views of learner-centredness that excluded the teacher from teaching. The underlying discourse was a form of protest about what Jansen (1999: 213) terms "the disappearing teacher". This was not only a misconception of OBE practice but also a fear and resentment of the teacher being relegated to an inferior position in the teacher-learner relationship. Because participants equated learner-centredness with leaving the learners to learn unaided, they felt threatened and disempowered by the educational reform because they did not see themselves playing a key role in the learning process. Students felt their authority eroded, particularly with the accompanying regulation that forbade them from administering corporal punishment, hence the interpretation that OBE promoted ill-discipline. Harland and Kinder (1997: 74) state that "there is an emotional experience inherent in any learning situation" which could lead to resistance of new ideas. This feeling of being excluded could partly explain the students' mechanical approach to teaching.

Contrary to the participants' perception, the mediator does not leave learners alone but creates the learning space for learners to talk and s/he intervenes when necessary. Falik (2001) terms this intentional intervention. This intentionality is different from the traditional role of the teacher: teaching is viewed not only in terms of implementing activities but more in analysing effects of instruction on students' learning. The idea is consonant with Du Plessis's (2009: 260) metaphor of journey-based learning where learning is process-centric as opposed to outcome-centric. The focus is on the skills needed to enable the journey's end to be reached. Because the metaphor "encourages engagement in the form of discovery, critical thinking, and co-operation", mediation should focus on both the learner's performance and the thinking behind the performance. This important analysis of learning enables teachers to identify weaknesses and then tailor future teaching to improve on them. Learner-centred teaching is therefore not haphazard — as was evident in the majority of these participants' practices — but deliberate.

A third interpretation reveals a simplistic view of learner-centredness: "*I don't stand in front of the class.*" The teacher-learner role referred to here had little to do with the kind and depth of facilitation required in mediation. What determines whether learners are actively

involved or not is not the physical position of the teacher but how learners manipulate language. The teacher should be able to scaffold learning from any position in the classroom. In fact, there are times when the teacher needs to stand in front of the whole class to give input or clarify a point. This is all part of mediation. In other words, the teacher needs to know when to teach and when to allow learners to learn.

The different interpretations discussed above revealed personalised versions of this construct which inherently affected practice. Contrary to these perceptions, the teacher's role is pivotal to the entire learning process. The benefits of active teacher participation are clearly articulated in the research findings by Hiebert et al. (2007: 54): "explicit instruction involving frequent feedback, frequent transitions from teacher modelling to student practice have been known to be effective strategies". Learner-centredness is not, therefore, allowing learners to do as they please but allowing their active participation within defined parameters. Learner-centred classrooms are supposed to be supportive and caring places where learners engage in substantive and extended conversations that lead to learning. This is according to the teacher's roles as defined in the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000), which require a high level of cognitive processing as opposed to the mechanical approach that was evident in the participants' practice. Instead of step-by-step instruction that is meant to reproduce expected answers as in the traditional approach, the teacher as mediator should encourage expression of the learners' own ideas. Learners engage in "authentic pedagogy" (Newmann and Associates, 1996: 18), which involves teachers who help them understand ideas and topics through meaningful conversations in a socially supportive classroom.

In both teacher-centred and learner-centred approaches learners provide responses to given stimuli such as homework and tests and, based on the responses, the teacher gives feedback in the form of marks, praise or suggestions for improvement. What distinguishes mediation from the older approach is that the teacher intentionally intervenes and assists the learners by directing the learning process in order to achieve the intended results. It is a process that involves "encouraging learners to monitor their learning progress, encouraging them to develop a belief in their own success and involving learners in activities of co-operation and shared experience" (Grosser and De Waal, 2008: 43). The focus is on the learner. Scaffolding, as opposed to transmission, is the essence of teaching. Given this

perspective, I consider the roles of teacher and learner to be symbiotic and not in opposition, as viewed by the research participants, and the two processes are not mutually exclusive.

An important dimension that militates against implementation of a learner-centred approach is the learners' attitude. The following comments are instructive in this regard: "*Learners want us to tell them everything and we do because we cannot let the period go to waste*" (6). "*With English learners are not used to expressing themselves so I teach the way we used to teach in the past*" (2)*.* By fronting themselves as victims, these students attempted to justify the continuation of teacher-centred practices. The comment by Student 2 was noteworthy because it revealed that for educational change to become a reality, both teachers and learners should change their cognitive scripts. Learners should understand that learning is an active process which requires them to manipulate language in order to gain new concepts. The teacher cannot do it for them. The learners' low level of language proficiency is a reality in environments such as those described in this study, where English is a second or even foreign language. Students can help expose learners to the language by designing learner-centred interactive activities instead of adopting a defeatist attitude. On a different level, these comments indirectly pointed to the participants' resistance to new ideas while they hid behind a discourse of victimisation by learners. Students were uncertain about the changes that were being advocated and therefore seemed to have decided to remain on firm ground with the tried and tested practices which they justified in different ways.

The point of the preceding discussion is that a prerequisite of effective implementation of OBE in teaching English in second-language contexts is adequate knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of this approach. As Morrow (2007: 86) argues, the professional practice of teaching is necessarily theoretical and should not be de-theorised: "Good theory is, potentially, one of the most effective catalysts of change and innovation." In this regard, Jiménez Raya (2009: 222) observes that "there is a general acceptance that teaching is a socially constructed activity that requires interpretation and negotiation of meanings embedded within the classrooms and schools where teachers teach". This constructivist perspective emphasises the construction of knowledge by teachers themselves. Theory can only inform classroom practice to the extent that teachers can make sense of theory. The

theoretical foundations of OBE are adequately covered in the study guide and demonstrated in the different OBE-oriented language texts students used, yet teachers' misinterpretations of OBE theory in this study impacted negatively on learning.

Knowledge of the essence of mediation and the construct of learner-centredness in particular, are pivotal because on them rest the purposeful implementation of all facets of classroom practice (cf. Literature Review: Part Two). Underlying the whole process is a consideration of the learners' context and needs which determines the choices the teacher makes to scaffold learning. The following discussion focuses on these different aspects of the participants' classroom practice, beginning with their art of lesson planning and their conceptualisation of the essence of OBE.

3.1. NEGOTIATING THE CURRICULUM

Successful mediation for learner-centredness begins with reflective and thorough preparation. The following section examines how this understanding is reflected in the students' ability to manipulate the curriculum, as evident in their planning for facilitation and a focus on outcomes as opposed to content.

3.1.1 Lesson planning

From an OBE perspective, a plan is an instrument for mediation. In the NCS document (Grades 10-12: 5) lesson plans are described as "units of deliverable learning experiences", reflecting their function as working documents. From this perspective, planning gives the mediator the opportunity to reflect for action. According to the criteria generated in the literature review (Chapter 3:3.4.2), a lesson plan should clearly articulate the topic and outcomes, activities should be learner-centred and logically sequenced, assessment should be formative and there should be a clear alignment among these components.

The participants' planning practices ran contrary to these expectations. Planning was done on set templates imposed from above and students filled in the spaces provided. Perhaps because of these space restrictions students adopted a defective and at best mechanical attitude to lesson preparation. They most probably did not feel ownership of the process and were demotivated. Commenting on the demerits of the top-down approach, Carl (2005: 223) observes that "teachers are regarded as mere recipients of curriculum that is developed by specialists elsewhere". This lack of involvement in the initial stages is

detrimental to successful implementation. Teachers should not only focus on the micro-curriculum but on the macro aspects as well. Properly executed, the development of lesson plan templates should be a joint project between authorities and representatives from schools.

In spite of comprehensive coverage of this topic in the study guide, the findings in this study paint a picture of practices devoid of purposeful planning. The planning behaviour of the participants can be arranged into three categories. First, there were those who did not plan at all because they did not see the need; then there were those who did weekly plans; and lastly those who planned monthly. Close examination of all plans revealed a disjuncture in logic — the clear alignment of outcome, assessment standard, activity and assessment was missing. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that the fortnightly or monthly plans did not indicate what was to be covered in different lessons. The few activities stated lacked essential detail and were repetitive and pedestrian. In other words, information was scant and lacked insight. Ideally, a plan should be detailed enough for another person to use in the teacher's absence. This was not always the case in this study because some of the information in the plans was vague. For instance, under "Expanded opportunities", a student wrote *the learners were given more work.* The nature of the work and why it was suitable was not indicated, a sign of very rudimentary planning.

At implementation level, the approach was similar throughout because none of the students referred to a lesson plan before, during or after lessons, suggesting their awareness of the futility of their planning. In all cases the few lesson plans were neatly filed in the portfolios, obviously for the benefit of authorities. They were symbolic relics. Because they did not view lesson plans as working documents, students did not see the need to alter them in any way; there was no evidence of reflective notes on the success or failure of their practice. Lesson planning was a rigid entity separate from teaching and learning instead of being a fertile field of creativity.

Contrary to the above practices, effective planning involves predicting learner responses, then adjusting planning to suit the complex and changing situations in the classroom. In other words, lesson plans should be dialogical or interactional and designed with foresight and with outcomes in mind. The teacher should constantly interrogate the lesson plan to determine what is and what is not working and include suggestions for improvement. As

mediator, s/he should treat the lesson plan as a working document and understand the crucial nexus that exists between planning and teaching. Classrooms are extremely complex places where moment-by-moment decisions that affect learning are made, resulting in interactive lesson plan structures. These in-flight decisions are a way of translating and transforming plans into action. I found the lack of rationality in the students' planning evidence of an uncommitted attitude towards lesson design.

The students who did plan designed the same lesson plan for different classes, showing that they were either not convinced of the benefits or they were not prepared to make appropriate adaptations. In OBE, every lesson plan ought to be unique. It is meant for the teacher to teach a specific topic with specific aims to a specific group of learners at a specific place and time. This combination of particular circumstances will never be the same again, which is the reason why every teacher has to keep planning (Christopher, 1992). Lessons can sometimes be repeated, but mediation requires modification of the previously used lesson plan, as some aspect of the circumstances will be different. If the teacher evaluates the success of each learning experience carefully, honestly and critically, considering its strengths and weaknesses, s/he will never use the same plan monotonously, year after year and one class after another, yet this seemed to be the norm in the lessons observed. Properly designed, the weekly or monthly plans should reflect a continuum of the progression of concepts covered during the time. In line with this process, the outcomes should be progressively more complex. This essential detail was lacking in the lesson plans because there were usually two or three activities on lesson plans that were meant to last a week or month. As a result, a lesson plan spanning two weeks had the same number of activities as one spanning a whole month. Overall, there was a lack of purposeful lesson planning, yet this is pivotal to successful mediation for learner-centredness.

The problem as I saw it stemmed from inability by participants (and perhaps the education officials, because teachers are mere instruments or recipients of lesson plan templates) to understand the difference between a lesson and unit plan. Because OBE is based on the constructivist framework, unit plans that cover an entire unit of work and may span weeks can be used. However, these should not replace lesson plans which reflect daily learning experiences and are fluid and adaptable to learners' needs. These participants had unit plans which they were unable to use because they were operating from a tradition of lesson

plans and probably found unit plans too broad and devoid of much needed detail. Embedding CPD in communities of practice as I propose in the next chapter would give students such as these a chance to contribute to the debate on lesson design. The dialogue would also resolve the confusion surrounding the use of various templates as reported in the findings, because all stakeholders would have given their input.

Lastly, a purposeful lesson plan should be unique in the provision of situated learning by using resources that reflect the context in which the learning takes place. The plans examined were lacking in this regard; they were not contextualised in the particular learning environment. For instance, a text on the theme *The Family* did not reflect this concept as those particular learners experienced it in their environment. Some of the learners were heads of households and the majority lived with their grandmothers. The idea of a nuclear family as presented in their textbook was foreign to these children. As mediator, the student should have adapted the content at the planning stage of the lessons to make it relevant to the learners' lives. Normally, learner demographics determine the outcomes and the way the teacher plans to proceed in the lesson. One would not therefore give these learners a passage on snow at the London airport as Student 5 did.

When asked to comment on the relevance of the assignments in Module ACEEN2-6, all participants identified the assignment on lesson planning as being the most relevant to practice. As the findings demonstrated, however, the participants' practice gave the lie to this statement. Evidence pointed to a gap between the learning of new skills such as how to plan, and their transfer to the students' repertoire in classroom practice. The contradiction between the study guide's daily plans and the weekly and monthly plans advocated by the district officials could account for this dichotomy. Participants acknowledged the importance of lesson planning — the focus of Unit 9 of the study guide — but it would seem that change of practice did not emanate from what the students deemed as good professional practice but from demands of policy. As a result, the participants' planning practices were at best symbolic, detached from the classroom experience and promoted surface learning (Appendix F).

The results of inadequate planning were evident in the seeming lack of direction or haphazard way that characterised the students' practices. They needed to be empowered to negotiate the curriculum by taking charge of the planning process.

3.1.2 The essence of OBE: outcomes versus content

Central to OBE is the importance of outcomes. The literature review (Chapter 3) indicates that transformational OBE hinges on a clear articulation of outcomes. These determine the instructional procedures as well as assessment for a particular learning experience. While some critics argue that stating outcomes at the onset imposes boundaries on learning experiences which cannot be predetermined, others such as Mahomed (1999) contend that it is advantageous to state them as well as the criteria for their achievement because this gives implementers a sense of direction. The study guide for the course ACEEN2-6 advocates the latter view. Students are expected to share with their learners the outcomes and assessment criteria at the onset of the lesson to help learners monitor their progress. This is in line with Spady's (2008) first key principle of clarity of focus (cf. Literature Review: 2.1) From the perspective of mediation, spelling out the outcomes at the onset and sharing them with learners enables both the teacher and learners to work towards a common goal. For learners in particular, it enables them to take charge of their learning because they know why they have to engage in the different activities. Articulating outcomes is therefore a key aspect of learner-centredness. This is emphasised in Unit 1 of the study guide. In addition, the guide leads by example: each study unit begins with a list of outcomes to be achieved.

Because the teaching approach is outcomes-based, one would expect the participants to identify the importance of outcomes as a main distinguishing feature. Instead, the responses revealed multiple and varied interpretations, some of which were fundamentally flawed (cf. Chapter 4: Table 2). Notably, only one out of the eight participants understood OBE in terms of outcomes. The rest of the responses were a reflection of each student's personal quest to understand this phenomenon. From a socio-constructivist point of view, meaning-making is a process that is governed by experience, context and culture; therefore, each respondent conceptualised a different aspect of OBE according to his/her frame of reference. It could also be argued that this was a transitional stage of understanding similar to the interlanguage stage of language learning. Because the students had been practising for a long time, a successful transition of their cognitive scripts from a content-based model to an outcomes-based one was bound to take time.

During discussions it was clear that students were familiar with the learning outcomes for the Languages Learning Area, but their practice showed they had compartmentalised this knowledge and were unable to link it with either activities or assessment. The participants' ignorance of the significance of outcomes perhaps stemmed from the policy documentation emphasis on Learning Area outcomes, which are broad and therefore vague in the context of a single lesson. This was exacerbated by the manner in which the outcomes and assessment standards were written. They did not promote knowledge and reflection. Instead of using abbreviations and numerals as they did, students should have been encouraged to write outcomes out in full. This would have enabled them to internalise the contents of what they wrote and perhaps form meaningful associations among the three important components: outcomes and assessment standards, activities and assessment.

In the OBE-oriented textbooks, outcomes were stated at the beginning of each unit and, in some of these same texts, at the beginning of each activity as well. In fact, there was an over-emphasis on outcomes: they were indicated in the learners' textbooks and explained in the teachers' copies, as well as in NCS documents, to constantly remind teachers that the competencies to be achieved needed to be spelt out. Despite this information overload, none of the participants shared outcomes with their learners. They did not even deliberately focus on the smaller outcomes before each activity. Even the one participant who had identified outcomes as the essence of OBE did not reflect this in her practice. When asked why, she had this to say: "*You know learning outcomes, you know assessment standards but you are not used to that system of communicating the assessment standards and outcomes to learners*" (1). This response echoes Blignaut's (2007) contention that one of the reasons policy initiatives fail to penetrate the classroom practices of teachers is that practices grounded in history and continuities in education are more influential than novel ideas which challenge the teacher's belief system about what and how to teach. Given the numerous changes in policy since Curriculum 2005, these students — and teachers in general — are likely to continue to be confused and demotivated.

On a different level, the above response could indicate a lack of conviction about the importance of stating outcomes, the student's inability to relate theory to practice, or simply a lack of reflection on practice. Blignaut (2007) contends that such behaviour is typical of resistance to implementation. He argues that when teachers see nothing wrong

with the way they have been doing things all along, they resist attempts to change their instructional practices to reflect policy.

These students had adopted neither the theory nor practice of OBE as an outcomes-based approach. They had not made the required conceptual shift because they had not internalised this concept. Internalising is the final stage of three cognitive processes: "*knowing* of the concept which might lead to *understanding* and finally *personalising* as revealed through various practices and reflections" (Wang and Ma, 2009: 239, my emphasis). By defining OBE in terms of outcomes, Student 1 had attained the knowing and understanding stages. The rest of the participants had not even entered the knowing stage and still viewed the teaching of language in terms of acquisition of content as opposed to skills.

3.1.3 The role of content

In OBE, content is not the focal point but "the vehicle for the achievement of knowledge, skills and values in a particular field of learning" (Mahomed, 1999: 167*).* Unlike outcomes, content is not prescribed because teachers are expected to select the content that best enables learners to achieve the intended outcome. However, because these participants were initially trained to use the content-based approach, they struggled with that shift in mindset. For instance, a participant, after reading a short passage about heroes, tried to get a discussion going around this theme and started asking questions about Nelson Mandela. After the lesson, I asked her the relevance of the discussion. Her reply: "*Nelson Mandela is a hero. They must learn about him.*" This teacher seemed unaware of the role of content as a vehicle for teaching the four language skills, yet this is what the study guide emphasises. Her focus during this language lesson was on Life Orientation, not English.

OBE signifies a move away from memorisation of content as an end in itself to a more thematic approach that encourages learners to work with content "in pursuit of greater understanding. Content is important but it is more important to translate it into meaning and meaningful action" (Vandeyar and Killen, 2003: 125), hence the shift in emphasis to outcomes. The weekly or monthly lesson plans had learning outcomes and assessment standards written out but the activities were content- as opposed to skills-focused. Knowledge of theory, their learners and the learning and teaching environment should

enable students to make informed decisions about lesson design, while adequate skills training should empower them to manipulate the curriculum for the benefit of the learners.

3.2   THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF LEARNER-CENTRED ACTIVITIES

Designing and implementing learner-centred activities, together with assessment, constitute the essence of a teachers' daily work and therefore account for the success or failure of a learning experience. Designing activities rests on the teacher's ability to manipulate available resources for the benefit of learners. As the findings showed, the schools suffered from a lack of basic educational resources in varying degrees, ranging from no textbooks to only one textbook each per learner. In three of the schools, teachers had copies of texts other than those prescribed but these were not used during my visit. Reading material was mainly limited to textbooks and a few prescribed literature texts that were shared among learners and, in some instances, several classes. In terms of resource provision therefore, I did not find any significant differences among the three types of schools: urban, informal settlement and rural. This situation of want had a negative effect on teaching and learning, since learners were likely "to experience inadequate cognitive and language stimulation" (Goldenberg, 1991: 2).

In his study of implementation of OBE in Grade 1 classrooms, Jansen (1999: 214) found that the "varied implementation strategies, including non-implementation", were mainly due to the availability or non-availability of resources. In well-resourced schools, teachers practised OBE principles even when they doubted their benefit or were uncommitted to the educational reforms, because the sheer weight of resources demanded some level of OBE implementation. This was unlike under-resourced schools, where the teacher had to go out of her/his way to introduce variety. The findings of this study chime with Jansen's. As the data shows, the participants' strategy showed lack of implementation. Their practice was a negation of the expected role of the teacher, which requires that s/he uses a variety of sources to design and implement learner-centred activities that enhance the learners' cognitive development to enable them to achieve the intended outcome(s). As mediator, the language teacher in the OBE classroom is expected to be a critical consumer of information who is adept at choosing appropriate content from different sources. This principle is the basis of the misconception that teachers need not use textbooks. The "*textbooks are not necessary*" myth emanates from the NCS requirement that teachers

should be resourceful. In reality, this does not exclude textbooks but cautions against dogmatic adherence to a text to the exclusion of other more suitable learning resources. It is a notion that implies variety, not deprivation. While Student 5 understood the need to use a variety of texts, she was not resourceful enough to access these and therefore depended on texts that had been discarded by other schools; texts that were, as the findings showed, irrelevant and lacking in variety. This confirms Blignaut's (2007: 59) contention that "if teachers construct ideas that misconstrue policymakers' intent then implementation has failed because teachers understand ideas differently". This seemed to be the case at this entire primary school.

Currently, there is talk of the Department of Education providing ample resources in the form of full textbooks and workbooks. However, as the findings revealed, mere provision is not enough: teachers need the skills to manipulate the resources for the benefit of the learner and for this they have to be adequately trained and workshopped into comprehension, acceptance and implementation of policy. The findings unearthed problems associated with workshops where the time was inadequate and officials were confused and incapable of providing for this primary need. The other option therefore is training which should be comprehensive and focused on solving implementation problems. The programme I propose in the next chapter is rigorous and designed with this in mind.

OBE advocates the use of authentic texts to approximate real life in the world of the classroom. Authentic texts are recommended, as they enable learners to relate learning to the real world by "representing the natural complexity of the real world in class" (Fraser, 2007: 8). In the environments in which this study was conducted, resources such as newspapers and radio programmes were accessible. As a demonstration of foundational competence, the students could have been proactive and innovative by exploiting these available resources to enhance learning. Unfortunately, they were either too uncertain, overwhelmed or unconcerned about the new approach to inject new or different resources, hence the reliance on single prescribed texts even in instances where they had access to other books. Photocopiers could have facilitated that process but these were used to photocopy exercises from the prescribed textbook for pasting into the language exercise books or portfolios. Only in the rural school did the teacher use different texts, but this often led to a fragmented selection from different books for individual lessons, the majority

of which were grammar-based. As stated in the previous chapter, the language books in use provided a wide variety of activities. Ideally, students had to choose and adapt these instead of following the textbook from page to page. In OBE the mediator should be able to design and select a multiplicity of activities so as to expand "the number, range, and kinds of opportunities students are given to learn and ultimately demonstrate their learning successfully" (Spady, 2008: 3). This positive manipulation involves aligning the activity with the needs of the particular class. The ability to manipulate learning content is a pivotal feature of learner-centredness, because the teacher can structure learning according to the learners' abilities to ensure success. In designing activities therefore, a teacher should consider relevance in all its dimensions. First is the relevance of the outcome: an activity should focus on attaining a specific goal in a learning experience. Other factors to consider, such as age, sex, interest, background and learning style, are contextual. These mental processes are prerequisites of effective mediation of activity design.

The same principles of variety and inclusivity that guide the design and selection of texts are applicable during implementation. During this process, the mediator infuses diverse instructional strategies to cater for learner differences, and ensures a gradual progression from the least to the most challenging as described in the transportation metaphor (Literature Review: 3.3). Grosser and De Waal (2008: 45) emphasise the importance of "adjusting the strategies to suit the learners' preferred learning styles". Both these facilitation processes are a demonstration of practical competence. In other words, the facilitator should manipulate the same tasks differently to reflect a focus on different outcomes, and deviate from the text by extending the activity when necessary. This is aligned with the concept of mediation of individuation, which emphasises the "accommodation of the uniqueness of learners and that independence and diversity should be valued during teaching" (50).

In this study, participants just followed the textbook; they neither designed activities nor catered for individual differences in any way. For instance, at two of the schools learners were put in different streams according to ability. The student did the same work in the same way in the different classes of the same grade (10 a, 10b and 10 c), despite the advice

on page xxx[30] of the prescribed text *English for All* which reads: "*We encourage you to adapt the materials in each unit to suit both your needs and those of your learners and add any other texts you may wish to add.*" In the lessons observed, as well as in the lesson plans, there was no evidence of learner-centred practices. Regardless of whether the suggested activity involved pair or group work, participants opted for whole class activities (citing time constraints) which they controlled. The only justification was that it was in the textbook. This was a negative form of manipulation because it disadvantaged the learners. It was also a negation of the essence of mediation, which implies the creation of an enabling environment where different learners' needs are accommodated, as expected in a learner-centred learning environment. Because all classes had to move in synchrony through the textbook, when learners got something wrong the student simply provided the answer instead of asking leading questions to elicit the correct response. As mediator, the teacher should allow learners to solve problems instead of providing the solution. In brief, the study found an over-reliance on textbooks; they were an indispensable resource for the provision of tasks for learners. Practices such as these lead to disempowerment and lack of professionalism.

The students' routinised procedures revealed a lack of reflective practice. A reflective practitioner continually questions classroom actions with the aim of creating the best conditions for the learners' cognitive development (cf. Literature Review: 4) In the lessons observed, this introspection was lacking: the teaching point was not made explicit, even in the rare instances where the teacher made a concerted effort to help learners work with new forms in a sustained way. In addition, there was no attention to how previous and subsequent tasks were related and whether or not the strategies used were appropriate to the learning context. It was a mechanical process. The students' practice was consistent with research by Sonn (2000: 259), who found that many teachers were unable to think independently beyond the content of their prescribed texts. It was a negation of OBE design and facilitation principles of relevance, interest, creativity, and the facilitator's role of framing to scaffold learning (cf. Literature Review: 3.3). According to Shulman (2004: 203), a teacher needs, apart from subject knowledge, knowledge for teaching. In explaining the

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[30] This is the actual page number.

latter, he isolates the following strategies as crucial to making new concepts accessible to learners: "powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations and demonstrations — in a word, the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others". Through these, learners discover for themselves, become familiar with what they know and are able to internalise new concepts and new ways of thinking about things. As indicated in the literature review, the teacher needs to create scaffolding to help learners become independent (Vygotsky, 1978). In their lessons, participants depended solely on the strategies in the textbook, regardless of their relevance to the teaching context.

The participants' practice therefore demonstrated a lack of reflection for action and in action (Farrell, 1998). Critical self-reflection enables the teacher to focus on the intended outcome while designing learning activities that respond to the learners' needs. In the absence of other resources such as the internet or libraries that learners can easily access, the teacher should be innovative. For instance, instead of giving learners a comprehension passage, Student 3 could have used the resources available in the area to design a project task that engaged learners in deep learning while taking their particular needs into consideration. Project work is encouraged in OBE because it involves interaction and enables learners to integrate the four language skills. Most importantly, it promotes problem-solving, which in turn fosters the development of critical thinking skills. That this participant confined herself to the only resource available, namely the textbook, resulted from apathy born out of a lack of critical self reflection. It also reflected a lack of confidence to operate outside the confines of the textbook, because this required pedagogical knowledge and a flexible and in-depth understanding of the subject matter. Learners' project work consequently lacked depth. This same weakness was evident in observed lessons. Participants were not proactive: not only were lessons textbook-bound but there was a total lack of innovation, for instance, designing visual aids to motivate learners, or using the activities creatively. Contrary to this practice, OBE requires teachers to be "reflective practitioners and strategic decision-makers who understand the processes of learning and development … who can use a wide repertoire of teaching strategies" to accommodate individual differences (Darling-Hammond, 2006: 122). As mediator, the

teacher should design and implement stimulating activities that stretch learners to their limits.

The effect of this narrow approach to teaching was evident in the students' facilitation practices. They concentrated on facts as opposed to language issues pertaining to the four skills, and there were no prompts to stimulate deep learning. For instance, during a Grade 10 lesson on the giving of directions, the student used chorus work and imitation to help learners follow the arrows instead of focusing on the language structures appropriate to this type of situation. What was needed was for learners to see through the map and instructions to the language that is used when giving directions. That done, the student needed to help learners apply this skill in new situations. This would have been a way of making new knowledge part and parcel of the learners' linguistic repertoire. Therefore, in implementing activities, the teacher should be consciously aware of transfer of learning and deliberately guide learners towards the attainment of this goal. To achieve this, the teacher should be able to make an activity authentic by drawing parallels between what is in the text and real-life situations. In the context of this example, learners could have been given a practical task of directing a friend home or to the shops. As it was, the lesson ended with very simplistic map reading and the answering of literal questions because the student did not apply his mind to what learners needed to learn from the experience. The situation was exacerbated by the restricted nature of interactions. These were mostly teacher generated and characterised by word- or sentence-level responses. There was no encouragement of fluency in learners' productions, as expected from a mediator. The participants' decisions revealed that their understanding of practice was limited to a few traditional techniques; they did not have an array of pedagogical skills to draw on and seemed to ignore suggestions in the study guide. In my opinion, they considered the course materials as a separate entity from their daily classroom routines; their behaviour signified resistance to professional growth. As I suggest in the next chapter, communities of practice should provide a secure environment for students to experiment with new strategies.

The students' handling of literature texts revealed mere surface understanding of the learner-centred pedagogy expected of a mediational approach. In a literature class, the focus should be on the development of criticality. However, the lessons were pedestrian and devoid of insight. For instance, the mechanical procedure described in the findings

(individual learners read to the whole class while they sit in groups; the teacher's content-based questions) was a disturbing sign of the student's ignorance of sound pedagogical knowledge relating to the teaching of this genre. There was no questioning to meet a variety of purposes (encouraging learners to predict events, explain and justify actions), let alone promote multiple interpretations of the text. The emphasis was on information recall, which was a reflection of the content-based approach. Teaching (practice) was regulated by the student, in contradiction with the interview responses (theory). Van der Linden and Mendonca (2006: 48) observe that these practices inhibit the acquisition of more analytical and reflective competencies which require an open and independent mind. In a learner-centred classroom, a mediator should assist learners to interact with and interrogate the text. The aim is to enrich their lives and help them become more perceptive readers of literary texts. Contrary to this view, the style of teaching I observed was mainly that of pedagogical control typical of reductionist learning processes. There was no evidence that students had internalised the theory presented in Unit 5 of the study guide, which focuses on reading.

Nowhere was the issue of diversity more pronounced than in the two Grade 4 classes. The differences in language proficiency were striking, probably because of the change in the medium of instruction from mother tongue to English in this grade. At one end of the scale were learners whose speaking and writing skills were average for the grade. On the other were those who were barely literate in English; the best they could do was to copy what the student (teacher) wrote on the board. In this intellectually diverse learning environment, the participants fed all learners a similar academic diet which, in the case of the student in the informal settlement, was impoverished by a lack of basic materials such as textbooks. In both classes, fast learners did not hide their restlessness and fidgeted all the time, while the slow ones (who sat on one side of the class) were largely inactive, obviously finding the work too challenging. Both participants took a medium course by operating at the pace of the average learner. They were too overwhelmed with work to make an effort to create an enabling environment where, as expected in a learner-centred learning setting, each group of learners would work at its own pace to ensure success. Contrary to the OBE tenet of providing expanded opportunities (Spady, 2004: 2008), everything was done in tune with the school bell.

Teaching in these primary school classes was characterised by much chanting during which learners repeated what the student had said or recited a poem they had memorised. This contradicted the practice of a mediator who demonstrates practical competence. Teaching language with a focus on meaning requires the teacher to expose learners to situations that encourage them to generate meaning, even at a very elementary level, such as generating sentences in Grade 4. The chanting could be a reflection of the teachers' epistemological beliefs, because in their responses some participants regretted what they thought was the elimination of memorisation in the wake of OBE. This was a misconception. There is a place for memorisation, if there are sound pedagogical reasons for it, but it should not be overemphasised because the focus of this approach is creation of meaning as opposed to repetition of content. Contrary to expected practice, these two participants emphasised memorisation and regurgitation of content. This chimed with their belief in the traditional method: in their lessons, there was a clear privileging of form over substance. The teaching behaviour could also indicate a lack of reflective competence which, in this context, entails employing multiple teaching strategies, "justifying the learning mediation chosen and considering possibilities to overcome barriers to learning" (Nieman, 2007: 2-3). Because of numerous contextual challenges however, schools did not have the capacity to address the needs of slow learners.

In both primary and high schools and across teaching and learning contexts the participants lacked the creativity and resourcefulness to accommodate individual differences by introducing variety and making learning interesting. Given their context, they needed to interact with teaching material on two levels. Firstly, they needed to use activities from other sources to enhance learning; secondly, they needed to choose and grade the materials from the prescribed textbook to reflect the learners' needs, as opposed to the blanket application that I witnessed during my visits. For instance, the study guide unit on the teaching of oral skills gives creative practical suggestions, but all oral lessons I observed were very simplistic and pedestrian, contradicting what participants reported in this category. Perhaps the teachers had not internalised these ideas beyond the surface level and hence could articulate but failed to implement them.

In brief, the teachers' practice did not meet the requirements of applied competence: their understanding of OBE theory was superficial (foundational), their practice did not reflect a

mediational approach (practical) and it was devoid of reflexivity. This observation resonates with findings of a study by Brodie et al. (2002: 114-115) which show that, regardless of teachers' contexts, qualifications, grade, access to resources and subject knowledge, their take-up of learner-centred practices is flawed.

A discussion on the design and implementation of activities in the OBE context is incomplete without a focus on a key strategy in learner-centred teaching, namely group work.

3.2.1 The group-work strategy

Brodie et al. (2002) posit that in order to achieve a substantive notion of learner-centredness certain forms of classroom organisation are better than others. One of these organisational forms is group work. From a constructivist perspective, knowledge is generated by participants during interaction, hence the central role of interactive activities such as group and pair work in language learning. Interaction is a crucial instrument for developing higher order thinking skills in the language classroom. Instead of using the familiar direct instructional approach, in group work teachers encourage learners to discover knowledge by engaging in problem-solving tasks that involve co-operation and negotiation of meaning to promote critical thinking. In the process, learners learn how to learn and take control of the learning process. Working co-operatively in groups is therefore a very important way of bringing learners to a shared understanding of new ideas.

Participants' responses indicated mixed attitudes about this strategy, ranging from outright rejection — citing numerous reasons such as noise and time constraints — to unwilling acceptance. Students felt they had to use group work to comply with policy directives. Consequently, in all high schools, Grade 8 to 11 learners sat in groups. However, as in the case of lesson planning, this was a mere physical arrangement, seemingly to comply with the expectations of learner-centred pedagogy. Participants had neither internalised nor embraced it as a strategy. Quite the opposite: they seemed to think that, pedagogically, the practice of OBE learning activities was best achieved through the group-work technique and that working in this structure was more important than what learners would learn from the activity. This was confirmed by observational data.

The OBE-oriented texts in use had numerous group-work activities, yet the use of this strategy was mere tokenism lacking in meaningful learner-learner interaction. In their

practice, the students mainly used the transmission method and led the discussions while learners did individual work in their groups. It was evident that the participants' "individuated codes of practice" (Harland and Kinder, 1997: 73) were informed by the traditional teacher-centred as opposed to the OBE approach they were expected to implement. They totally missed the concept of group work as collaborative learning. In the rare instances when learners worked on a task in groups, the teacher gave the same task to all groups, resulting in repetition during the presentation stage. Because of big classes, group reports went on for two or even three teaching periods, thereby defeating the purpose because learners got bored and restless. It was apparent that students did not understand the essence of group work as a pedagogical tool. Their approach was reflective of the "educator-oriented and content-based teaching approach of the past" (Fraser, 2007: 1). In Mohammed's (2006: 382) words, "teachers had got the shell (the names of strategies and methods) but not the pearl [understanding] inside it".

To be effective, group work should be carefully planned and executed. The group activity should be goal-directed and this goal (outcome) should be shared with learners. Grouping itself should reflect the nature of the task; it should not, as was the case in these schools, be permanent. If group work is well thought out, learners will not, as the participants reported, sit back and let a few do the work, because each one is given a role to play. The task should be structured to reflect learner involvement at a deep level. The task of the mediator is to "effect communication between the learner and his fellow learners and the learning contents (subject matter)" (Fraser, 2007: 5).

Goldenberg (1991: 5, 6) refers to group-work interaction as "instructional conversations" to capture the essence of the didactic nature of learner talk. He posits that, instead of being textbook-bound, group discussions should be geared towards "creating richly textured opportunities for students' conceptual and linguistic development" (2). The teacher as mediator should allow learners to experiment with language, keeping everyone engaged in substantive and extended conversations and guiding them even when the interaction is going in an unexpected direction. This means the mediator has to monitor learner talk and give appropriate feedback which s/he might not have thought of before. In this regard, group work should have a focus because, "while the topic might shift as the discussion evolves, it remains discernible throughout" (3). To this end, the discourse in group

discussions should be characterised by multiple turns and utterances that build upon previous ones as the teacher guides students towards increasingly sophisticated levels of comprehension while they generate novel utterances and widen their horizons. By implication, learners are expected to take responsibility for their learning, be independent, and understand their thinking processes. To achieve this, the teacher should be confident enough to deal with uncertainty arising from open-ended interaction.

As an aspect of learner-centredness, group work aims at "stimulating the learners' cognitive development to extend it to new horizons" (Nieman, 2007: 32). There are therefore no black-and-white responses such as those reflected in the participants' practice. Because language is a primary vehicle for intellectual development, instructional conversations should take place in the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1991), where learners expand their linguistic horizons and obtain new understandings with the assistance of the teacher, who orchestrates meaningful classroom discussions. Mediating group work therefore "highlights among other things, the important role of focused shared activity during learning" (Miller, 2003: 820). This is different from learners learning unaided and just doing a lot of talking, as reported by participants.

In the observed lessons, talk remained talk, with little evidence of the cognitive or social skills being developed. I did not see any attempt by students to develop the learners' critical thinking skills by encouraging them to take risks and challenging their ideas or engaging them in discussions that generate multiple perspectives. The teaching process was more of a recitation format in which the student initiated some interaction by asking a question and learners responded. Meaningful group interaction that results in deep learning was lacking, as there was a general unwillingness to allow learners to express their individuality, innovativeness or initiative. The students' lack of confidence in the use of English meant that learners were not given opportunities (through questioning) to bring up something new. As a result, there was hardly any evidence of extended discussions in groups. This student behaviour is consonant with the view of Brodie et al. (2002: 100), who caution that "group work can also be used in ways which do not achieve the substance of learner-centred teaching".

Because of the misconception that group work means less work for the teacher, in some lessons the teacher stood in front and waited when learners worked in groups. In cases

when s/he walked round the classroom, there was neither monitoring nor interacting with learners' ideas. The focus was on maintaining low levels of noise. Contrary to this type of facilitation, mediating group work is a complex process, following the three stages of input, practice and output. To begin with, the facilitator defines the learning space by spelling out task expectations. This is followed by the practice stage during which learners perform a variety of speech acts by using a range of language functions such as initiating and responding to discourse (Ellis, 1997). During these interactions, the teacher should pick up and elaborate on or extend the learner's contribution with input-rich utterances. The final stage is uninhibited practice using spontaneous language. The mediator strategically joins in the discussion, building up, challenging or extending a contribution, clarifying and instructing where necessary and ensuring the discussion proceeds at an appropriate pace. These processes are meant to provide cognitive scaffolding which entails keeping everyone engaged in meaningful and extended conversation and, most importantly, bringing in individual contributions to enrich and extend the discussion. While crucial, the facilitator's role is less direct because it involves driving the process from the background. Accordingly, and contrary to the participants' perception, group work does not mean less work for the teacher. Rather, it implies heavy responsibility that requires creativity and resourcefulness. In this study, the fact that learners sat in permanent groups for all subjects, and that in six of the eight cases the teachers could not give sound pedagogical reasons for grouping learners, showed a lack of take-up both in form and substance of this strategy. Unit 8 of the study guide gives comprehensive advice on how to organise and facilitate group work, but there was no evidence of the students' application of the theory in their practice.

One of the benefits of purposeful group work is the generation of higher quality ideas during problem-solving sessions resulting in deep learning, which is a prerequisite for the development of critical thinking skills. Scholars such as Biggs (1999) explain that learners who adopt a deep approach to learning seek to understand what they are learning, are actively interested in the learning material, try to relate ideas in a subject to ideas from other areas, and attempt to base conclusions on evidence and reasoned arguments. The emphasis is on application of the knowledge and skills to solving real-life problems. Such learners are able to take responsibility for their learning, as recommended in OBE. Conversely, the surface approach is one where learners neither seek to internalise meaning

nor reflect on the learning experience; they are motivated by fear. These learners tend to be passive recipients of information who just reproduce what they read or hear. As is characteristic of the surface approach, turn taking was strictly controlled by the teacher in most of the lessons, leaving no room for learner experimentation with language. Answers were predetermined, even as the learners sat in groups. There was no attempt to develop the learners' critical thinking skills by encouraging them to take risks and challenging their ideas or engaging in discussions that generated multiple perspectives.

- **Factors impacting on the successful use of group work**

In this study, the students' belief systems as well as the disabling contextual factors were found to militate against the use of group work.

According to the findings, one student (7) rejected the strategy outright: "*Group work is a waste of time because only a few learners participate. The rest just sit and sometimes start talking about other things during the lesson.*" This participant's response reflected a negativism borne out of resistance to new ideas because of his belief system. As Morrow (2007: 77) succinctly puts it, "the quality of professional practice is thus much more crucially dependent on the quality of the thought of its practitioners". Rejection of group work could have emanated from the student's meanings of teaching. Referring to numerous research studies, Van den Berg (2005) concludes that greater attention should be paid to the identification of teachers' meanings and how they impact on classroom practice: teachers build their own opinions or meanings on the basis of their own experiences and knowledge of actual practice. In doing this, teachers may adopt or reject the opinions of others. In this instance, resistance was a hindrance to enacting new practices.

All pedagogical acts are affected by the conceptions that teachers have about the act of teaching, the process and purpose of assessment and the nature of learning. Such conceptions act as mirrors through which teachers interpret their own teaching and may act as barriers to change. Given this view, efforts to change the pedagogical practices of teachers may be doomed to failure unless those conceptions are acknowledged, challenged and changed.

Two contextual factors were found to militate against successful implementation of the group-work strategy — classroom space and class size. Firstly, in six of the eight cases the

classrooms were small, such that there was limited space to manoeuvre. Space gives the teacher room to move around, enabling him/her to monitor individual learners' work and give input. This is important during group work, because part of facilitating learning involves listening to learners' input, assessing its worth, affirming or offering suggestions or extending the input for deep learning. The second, class size, was even more disabling. There were at least 10 groups in a class and therefore, even with the best intentions, a student could not reach every group within a period of 40 minutes or one hour. Participants were overwhelmed with class size and this led to general apathy, which in turn created a situation where the student was oblivious to contextual factors that affected learning, for instance individual differences, differences in learning styles, language and cultural factors. Students were more concerned with the level of noise as opposed to the quality of interactions. This way, they became disciplinarians as opposed to mediators of learning. Grosser and De Waal (2008: 45) posit that demonstration of practical and reflexive competences entails the ability to take cognisance of contextual factors and manipulate them to enhance learning.

The findings discussed in the preceding sections share some affinities with those of Brodie et al. (2002: 104-106) on the use of the group-work strategy. These scholars found take-up on form (theory), but no substance, that is, the participants failed to put the theory into practice. In this study, there was neither take-up of form nor substance of this strategy.

Chisholm (1993) contends that fundamental pedagogics, the corner-stone of the previous South African education dispensation, left teachers with a set of approaches that actually blocked the development of critical and innovative teaching strategies. The students' misinterpretation of group work is one such approach: because of policy demands, group work "became **the** choice rather than a choice" in their classrooms; it was a routine and unexamined practice as opposed to a learning-focused activity (Marneweck 2004: 167).

3.2.2 Provision of flexible time-frames

Apart from using a multiplicity of teaching strategies to accommodate learners' needs, an important aspect of learner-centredness is the acknowledgement of learner diversity in the provision of flexible timeframes. Consequently, time is "viewed and used as a flexible resource, not as a calendar or schedule-bound definer of the educational process" (Spady, 2008: 3). In all lessons I observed, students operated within the confines of strict timetables

which were so full that there was hardly time for flexible pacing of learners. In addition, the big classes (the smallest class size was 48 learners and the biggest 75) made it almost impossible to give individual attention. My observations led to the conclusion that teachers had simply given up. The lack of flexible timeframes had a negative impact on provision of remedial work for the weak learners or expanded opportunities for the bright ones although this was stated in the lesson plans. During informal conversations, teachers expressed the need to cater for this diversity in ability but I did not witness any such initiative on a practical level, confirmation that participants had adopted the form as opposed to the substance of this aspect of OBE. Adequate training that addresses these issues would help in empowering students to make informed decisions on how to navigate contextual issues.

3.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The preceding discussion has shown that participants' responses were evident of a narrow and reductionist view of OBE. Their conceptualisation of the complexities of teaching and learning processes was too simplistic. The students' diverse mental constructions of OBE represented a struggle to come to grips with the required mind shift and this was reflected in their practice.

The educational reforms resulted in instability so that teachers became mere instruments as opposed to reflective decision-makers in the classroom. This had a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning and learner achievement in these schools. What emerged from the preceding discussion were practices that did not conform to principles of OBE in three key pedagogical areas:

- a lack of evidence of purposeful planning that was underpinned by the principles of OBE;
- organisation and management of activities in the classroom that were not indicative of the notion of learner-centredness; and
- the absence of structured and controlled interactions between teachers and learners and among learners.

The students' struggle was on two levels, namely content knowledge and pedagogy, and in particular learner-centredness, which requires learners to generate new utterances out of the boundaries of what has been predetermined by the teacher. In terms of the actual mediation, the students' approach was at times defective but generally pedestrian and

devoid of creativity. For instance, there was no selection and sequencing of tasks in relation to the learners' current knowledge, no attempt at acknowledging learner diversity, or getting learners to think and interact meaningfully. Although in six of the eight cases learners sat in groups, students shunned group work and opted to tread on the familiar ground of avoiding uncertainty through following the textbook and adjusting tasks to fit into the teacher-centred mode. Accordingly, there was a clear disjunction between the participants' claims and practices. Students declared they were doing things differently than before, yet in reality their practice remained the same; they were still clinging to their old ways of teaching in the belief that the way they had always taught was better. They were doing what they felt comfortable with and what was familiar from years of experience, in spite of having exposure to new methods. For those who tried, the implementation was either symbolic or merely on a surface level. The claim that they were implementing OBE could have emanated from confusion or a survival strategy of parroting what they believed they were expected to say about their teaching. The participants' situation of uncertainty is aptly summed up by Samuel (1998: 582):

> The challenge is to strike a balance between externally delivered reform processes such as enactment of new educational policies via legislation and internally driven reform processes, such as investment in the reformulation of teachers' personal thinking and collegial conceptions of their abilities to effect change from within their own contexts through a respect of theory and practical pedagogical considerations.

The situation described in the preceding sections is not unique to South African classrooms. It shares many affinities with Goldenberg's (1991: 2) observations. Quoting a United States Department of Education-sponsored national study of direct lesson observations, he says the findings reveal that

> teachers do most of the talking in classrooms, making about twice as many utterances as students do … students do not produce any language … When children respond, they provide only simple information recall statements, a pattern that limits the students' opportunity to create and manipulate language. As a result, such children are limited in their opportunities to produce complex language.

Sonn (2000: 257-265) concurs. In his summary of findings, he explains that although one of the main goals of educational systems is emphasis on the development and improvement of instruction in critical thinking skills, much of today's classroom learning is focused on activities by which the learner acquires facts, rules and action sequences and the majority of

lessons require outcomes only at the lower levels of cognition: knowledge, comprehension and application.

So far, the discussion has addressed the mediation aspects of planning and the design and execution of learner-centred activities. To complete the circle, the next section addresses the participants' assessment practices.

4. ASSESSMENT

One of the cornerstones of OBE is assessment. From the documentation in the teachers' files it was evident that the backbone of this approach is sound assessment practices based on achievement of specified outcomes. It emerges from the literature review (Chapter 3:3.4.4) that assessment in the OBE context should be transparent, fair, reliable, valid and focused on outcomes that require higher-order thinking skills, such as problem-solving and analysing and synthesising information. In language learning, learners are tested for their ability to transfer knowledge and apply it to new situations as opposed to mastering content. Since the emphasis is on continuous assessment (CASS), teachers should decide whether the purpose is formative, diagnostic, summative or developmental.

The findings revealed that OBE-oriented textbooks were loaded with assessment tools such as checklists, grids and rubrics. There was an abundance of grids in the learners' books. In each case, the grid was explained and benchmarks given to assist the teacher. In fact, assessment-related information was very dense. For instance, in the textbook *Keys to English Grade 9*, Unit 2 on the theme *You are what you eat,* there was a self-assessment task on page 28, a peer assessment task on page 36, and on page 37 a summative writing task that had to be marked by the teacher. This variety was meant to provide evidence of learner achievement in as many dimensions as possible. In the study guide, Unit 7 deals comprehensively with OBE-oriented assessment practices.

During lesson observation, however, there was not a single instance when the student asked learners to self- or peer assess. Assessment was student-controlled and conducted in the traditional way which in the case of these participants was also the familiar way. The grids were seldom used and where they were, the teacher had no theoretical basis for doing so, save that they were in the book. This resonates with Pahad's (1999: 248) observation that "assessment guidelines cannot be implemented effectively unless teachers understand

why they are assessing, what they are assessing and how to assess in a manner appropriate to the purpose of the assessment". The participants' assessment practices were therefore in contradiction of the notion of learner-centredness and, in particular, the principle of helping the learners to take charge of their learning.

As I watched this practice play out repeatedly, I wondered whether it emanated from the students' lack of confidence in their learners or resistance to a learner-centred practice that might erode the students' authority. Perhaps, because of their shallow understanding of CASS (Chapter 5 Table 11), students were not aware that they could play a supportive role in assessment by giving learners opportunities to monitor their own learning progress (self-assessment). This strategy helps learners to develop insight into their learning processes and identify their weaknesses.

Judging by the numerous language-related tasks in the learners' class-work books, these teachers seemed to interpret continuous assessment to mean more frequent formal tests (continual testing) which contributed to a year mark. This was one of the numerous misinterpretations of OBE that I identified in this study. Contrary to the participants' perception, continuous assessment is not about frequency. It is about tracking learners' progress along a continuum of increasingly difficult and sophisticated tasks. Formative assessment should be part of the activity, either embedded in it, as in teacher observation, or flowing naturally from it, as when different groups present their findings. In other words, assessment should be used in an integrated way. For instance, a teacher can give a task to assess learners summatively, then, after giving comprehensive constructive feedback, "provide opportunities for learning in areas where weaknesses had been identified" (Pahad, 1999: 267). What should be measured are not only tests but class-work activities and other forms of observed behaviour that demonstrate change. As facilitator, the teacher observes, notes strengths and weaknesses, and then provides remedial work or opportunities to extend successes to new areas when learners are ready. This stage of remediation requires the teacher to be creative and resourceful in the design of activities. It is a process that requires him/her to constantly reflect on and monitor learners' progress in order to provide them with different pathways to success. The participants' practice was devoid of this reflective approach to assessment: there was no indication that assessment should support

learning. Examination of learners' books revealed that teachers did more marking than assessment.

Vandeyar and Killen (2003: 101) contend that "entrenched assessment practices seem to be hampering the government's efforts to transform school education". They posit that the teachers' inability or unwillingness to change assessment practices according to policy and curriculum guidelines may be due to ingrained conceptions of assessment. Generally, teachers' different conceptions of assessment lead to different practices: those who view assessment as a means of gathering data on which to base decisions about learning and teaching will integrate assessment into their practices and emphasise formative assessment as in OBE; those who view assessment as a mechanism for making learners accountable for their learning emphasise formal, summative high-stakes assessment and those who view assessment as a valuable tool for gathering evidence about school accountability emphasise the generation of marks. In this study the accountability approach to assessment was favoured because the authorities encouraged the generation of marks. As a result, the OBE conception of assessment as enhancing teaching and learning as advocated in the study guide was minimised.

4.1   QUESTIONING PRACTICES

Missing from the participants' mental repertoires was the crucial role of questioning as an assessment tool. From an OBE perspective, teachers' questioning is part of continuous assessment; it enables them to monitor the level of learners' understanding and tailor subsequent interactions accordingly. This is all part of "in-flight" thinking. Focused questioning that elicits deep thinking is a vital tool for the learners' cognitive development. In other words, teachers need to develop the critical thinking skills of their learners by encouraging learners to ask questions, examine assumptions and scrutinise evidence as opposed to memorising and regurgitating information. Mindful of the outcome, the teacher should design different levels of questions that test the learners' depth of understanding. In the study guide, this aspect is covered in detail in Unit 5 on intensive reading.

Because teaching and learning are context-bound and therefore fluid, the teacher cannot adopt a rigid approach where all questions and answers are textbook-bound, yet this was a common feature of the participants' practices. Where questions were open-ended and required multiple turns at talk, the student confined the activity to one or two

contributions. There was no indication that the student had considered what questions to ask and why. In the few instances where a student probed for higher-order thinking, s/he did so intuitively, unaware of his/her actual engagement in the teaching of such thinking. The depth of insight regarding the impact of questions was missing; in evidence was a mechanical process devoid of introspection where participants did not track the learners' thought processes by asking probing questions. Overall, the questioning techniques were not effective enough to invite learner discussion and inspire higher-order thinking as required in the OBE approach. Questioning remained an entity separate from continuous assessment.

Lombard and Grosser (2004: 213) cite research that proves the educator in South Africa plays a major role "in the deficiency which exists with regard to the utilisation of cognitive skills". Among the factors that negatively contribute to this problem are teacher-centred methods, emphasis on memorising and recall, and educators who are not sure about how to teach and evaluate thinking skills, partly because they have not been taught to do so. These weaknesses were the norm rather than the exception in the participants' practices, which were mechanical and indicated a lack of understanding of the important conceptual day-to-day decisions they had to make. This resonates with Pahad's (1999: 254) observation that teachers' approach to assessment is "unthinking, mechanical, and indeed even illogical". The following practices were evidence of the participants' inadequate conceptualisation of the essence of outcomes-based assessment.

Firstly, the teachers did not spell out lesson and activity outcomes even though these are the basis of sound assessment practices. The teacher should be very clear about the purpose of the activity and share it with the learners. For example, the teacher who spent three English periods on an oral task clearly had one intention only – that of recording a mark against each learner's name as per directive. From an OBE perspective, this was supposed to be a demonstration of a particular oral aspect where the criteria had to be made known and assessment guidelines made transparent. Instead, it was a subjective activity devoid of transparency and validity; a mechanism for generating portfolio marks.

Secondly, the practice of marking essays using a marking grid did not emanate from the teachers' conviction regarding the benefits of transparent and valid assessment practices but was a response to the demands from authorities. As a result, the sanitised essays in the

learners' portfolios were the final products. Contrary to OBE practice, the drafts, which indicated the process of learning that had taken place, were not considered as part of assessment. In this approach, assessment is not an end in itself but is developmental for monitoring purposes. By implication, the assessor should interact with the work in progress, in this case the learner's writing process, giving comments at each stage. For cognitive development this is more important than the final product because the focus is on the learning experience. Pahad (1999: 252) succinctly expresses this view of OBE assessment when he explains that it places the learner "on a continuum of learning in relation to selected specific and critical outcomes and is borne out of continual reflection on the part of the teacher". For this reason, examinations and tests should not carry much weight because they focus on lower-order skills and information recall.

4.2 PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

The OBE approach advocates creativity and resourcefulness in assessment practices. In this regard, teachers are required to design their own learning pathways to meet the nationally defined outcomes. Unfortunately, this flexibility was not reflected in assessment practices of these students, partly because of the numerous policy guidelines that defined spaces within which they had to assess learners. One such example was the position of the portfolio for CASS. In principle, the idea of CASS is pedagogically sound. It means that assessment is not a once-off event as in the traditional approach but reflects a learner's progress throughout the year. In practice, the year marks from the learners' portfolio tasks were used side by side with summative examinations in computing the final grade. Because of the demands from the district authorities, there was an overemphasis on portfolio work resulting in assessment being driven by the need to produce these marks. As the portfolios were what the district officials examined when they visited a class, students made sure these were neatly done with up-to-date mark lists.

In high schools, outcomes for each portfolio task were broadly defined to give the individual teacher autonomy over what to teach; however, students were unable to exercise this freedom because there were direct prescriptions concerning what, how and when a skill was tested, leading to uniformity among schools. In the schools visited, the choice of the actual tasks was left either to the HOD or teacher teams, thereby leaving no room for teacher discretion in the process. As a consequence, the stringent control measures in place

regarding the formative assessment tasks were a contradiction in terms: learners were not assessed when they were ready but were subjected to the regime of predetermined, once-off assessments that took place at set times and were closely monitored by the education district officials. In addition, giving the same assessment task to all classes in a grade not only robbed the student of autonomy but was contrary to the OBE tenet of accommodating learner diversity.

In primary schools where tasks were not imposed, this too was open to abuse. An examination of learners' exercise books showed that the tasks leaned heavily on accuracy at the expense of fluency. Such tasks were convenient because they were easy to mark, teachers did not comment and, above all, the answers were provided. This enabled students to meet the number of tasks set by authorities. In addition, the emphasis on form confirmed the participants' belief in the importance of grammar.

Because these participants merely followed instructions and their conceptualisation of OBE assessment practices was flawed, they were unable to complement the top-down decisions with practices gained from their own insights. Pressure from above compromised their assessment practices which were directed by survival (complying with demands by authorities) as opposed to sound pedagogic principles. This probably explains the theory/practice dichotomy: interview responses showed that participants were aware of formative assessment practices detailed in the study guide and policy documents, but this knowledge was not reflected in their practice except in the few cases where they had no choice.

Once again, these findings are not new. They resonate with those by Adler and Reed (2002), who found that teachers might use the form, which in this case is the asking of questions, but not the substance, because the questions yielded the type of responses that the teachers wanted to hear. The students' practice revealed the limited way in which they had adopted this conception of assessment.

4.3   NEGATIVE IMPACT ON ASSESSMENT
Two issues impacted on OBE assessment practices by participants in this study: contextual factors and the place of examinations.

- **Contextual factors**

Transformational OBE with its philosophy of success for all is regarded as the key to improving quality of learning at all levels of education but, unless the contexts that support this initiative improve, change will be very slow in coming. Morrow (2007) acknowledges the important role of context. He argues there is nothing like teaching in its pure form because the contexts in which teaching and learning take place have a positive or negative impact on the process.

From the findings it was evident that contextual factors impinged on the successful implementation of the OBE assessment practices. The nature of the required assessment presupposed the existence of adequate resources for operational purposes. Resources such as libraries, computers and internet facilities are important; they give the teacher and learners access to information which can extend the learners' mental horizon by exposing them to vast information sources. Such a situation improves the quality of both learning and assessment, because the teacher can focus on higher order mental skills for the development of critical thinking by encouraging learners to access and manipulate the different types of information. In addition, exposure to technological resources is important if one is to function effectively in the 21st century. An example in the context of this study is the learners' project work, which lacked depth because learners could not access knowledge. They were therefore deprived of meaningful research activities where they could critically engage with different sources of information. Consequently, opportunities for cognitive growth were limited and their work suffered from a poverty of ideas. In addition, given the resource constraints that have been identified, assessment practices tended to be test- as opposed to project-based. Properly manipulated, resources could result in quality and meaningful assessment because the student could draw on a variety of strategies and sources of information to enhance the learning experience and promote critical thinking.

The big classes and overcrowded classrooms that characterised learning environments in this study militated against optimal assessment practices because peer or group assessment became difficult to organise and monitor. First there was the problem of movement in overcrowded classrooms and then, more importantly, students were unable to facilitate groups meaningfully by assessing learner contributions, given the time limits. Ideally, a teacher should monitor the assessment process to ensure each learner is pushing forward

the boundaries of his/her understanding. Furthermore, contexts (class work, homework, individual work, group and pair work) should vary to give learners different opportunities to demonstrate competence. Due to the disabling factors identified in this study, learners were denied access to a range of appropriate assessment types and contexts because participants doggedly persisted with what was feasible or convenient.

The disabling home environment also militated against assessment. Scholars (Todd and Mason, 2005; Morrow, 2007; Ramphele, 2008) have argued that if the environmental factors are not conducive to learning, we cannot anticipate successful implementation of this approach. Environmental variables such as support in the home and a goal-directed and cohesive classroom environment are crucial for learning. As the findings of this study indicate, learners lived in deprived circumstances that negatively affected their school work. They were deprived of the factors such as a supportive family environment and individual attention from the teacher. This in turn negatively influenced the type and quality of assessment. For instance, students reported that they rarely, if at all, gave homework because learners did not have the time or space or resources at home. This had a direct effect on the culture and quality of learning. A related factor was the administrative chore of checking whether the work had been done and that there had not been any copying from others, both of which could be quite daunting in large classes. Limitations such as these made the aim of introducing OBE, which was to prepare learners for a globally competitive and technologically sophisticated economy, difficult to realise.

Assessment practices also placed a heavy administrative burden on students. For instance, the Assessment Policy Document (DoE, 2000) states that each learner's strengths and weaknesses should be recorded. Given the large classes and full timetables that I witnessed, this became a burden and negatively affected preparation and teaching time. The requirement also led to the persistence of traditional assessment methods which were not in step with OBE.

- **The place of examinations**

Although Cockburn (1997) associates the need to record and report marks to authorities as typical of pre-OBE assessment practices, the practice was rife in all schools visited because the portfolio marks took precedence over everything else. The format of assessment procedures which Cockburn criticises as being "dictated by rigid bureaucratic structures that

stipulated when and how assessment should be conducted" (5) still remained, as did the two examination blocks in June and November. In spite of the OBE emphasis on continuous assessment, in the FET phase, the major percentage of marks (75%) was still based on written examinations while continuous assessment (CASS) made up only 25% of the total.[31] This situation was exacerbated by the contradictory roles of being expected to complete the textbook and prepare learners for the examination, as opposed to teaching for life as expected in the learner-centred approach.

The continued emphasis on examinations is a barrier to implementation of OBE assessment practices. In this approach, each learner should progress at his/her own pace and be assessed when ready. Contrary to this requirement, the matric examinations are nationwide and schools that do not achieve high pass rates are red-circled. As a result, learners are taught for examinations, particularly in Grade 12, and teachers will soon be doing the same in Grade 9 once the national examination is introduced. This was but one of the numerous contradictions in how the approach was being implemented. For instance, at one school, a head of department (Languages) discouraged group work for essay writing, thereby depriving the learners of the opportunity to generate and share rich ideas. Her reason however was valid from the perspective of the OBE principle of aligning teaching and assessment. She argued that since the examination (assessment) required learners to work individually, they should do the same throughout the year: *"Learners write examinations individually and if they are used to working in groups, they get lost on examination day."*

In addition to the above, the emphasis of pencil and paper tests by the National Department of Education encouraged uniformity of not only what was taught but also how it was taught and assessed across schools and students had to conform. This was contrary to the OBE principle of expanded learning opportunities that presupposes individual attention and accommodation of each learner's needs to ensure that they give their best and succeed. The predetermined testing episodes were a negation of the principle of providing flexible time frames to cater for individual differences vis-à-vis the pace of learning. These contradictions created uncertainty, resulting in difficulties in adapting to OBE teaching practices. Spady

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[31] In the Senior Phase, it is 75% continuous assessment (CASS) and 25% examination.

(2008: 2) acknowledges that from the onset there was obvious conflict between the paradigm of learning reflected in these features and modern-day education as we know it.

The contradiction regarding assessment practices was very striking in Grade 12 because teachers taught and assessed for examinations, as demonstrated by the following responses: "*Learners have to pass exams. There is no time for non-exam activities*" (8). *"In Grade 12, we don't play*" (6). The last comment was revealing of the teacher's attitude towards OBE. It reflected the teacher's perception of the notion of learner-centredness and validated the use of teacher-centred pedagogy that involved minimal learner involvement. Accordingly, the main strategy in Grade 12 was drill work based on past examination papers. Judging from the emphasis on examination results, even those teachers who had some belief in the new approach had to resort to the tried and tested traditional approach.

Thus, although assessment should be formative and developmental, the findings of this study show that it was a mechanical process devoid of insight. Teaching was still tied to examinations because of the emphasis on portfolio assessment tasks. Although not based on any pedagogical orientation, this view is consistent with research findings by Lee et al. (2003: 56). They report that the traditional talk and chalk method appears to be "more effective for guaranteeing good performance on public examinations than other approaches that introduce a variety of teaching techniques". This probably explains why Student 7 achieved good results in spite of his resistance to the new approach.

It is clear that policy directives, and in particular the place of examinations, contributed significantly to the gap between theory and practice. In spite of the OBE thrust on life-long learning, results of this study confirmed that examinations still played a powerful role alongside the prescribed continuous assessment tasks. Teachers knew that if the pass rate was below expectations, their jobs were at risk. Perhaps a change in the nature of the examination questions itself would bring about a change in pedagogy. Till such time that there is a synchrony between examinations and classroom practice, teachers will continue to drill learners to pass matric while they claim to be implementing OBE, which advocates teaching for life.

4.4 FEEDBACK AS AN ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

Feedback plays a crucial role in enhancing learning achievement (Hattie, 1992). This includes, apart from comments on written work, oral corrective feedback and remedial

work by the teacher. Learners can also evaluate each others' work and give feedback. Feedback informs the teacher of the progress made and the cognitive processes involved and helps in the identification of future learning pathways. All these are crucial aspects of learning mediation. A prerequisite for all feedback is that it should be constructive because it is not an end in itself but a learning tool, as discussed in the literature review (cf. Chapter 3: 3.5).

In this study, feedback on essays was more of a routine than a tool for cognitive growth. It did not reflect the learners' progress because comments relating to the learner's generation of original ideas and expressing them were lacking. Consequently, it was difficult to draw valid conclusions about a learner's achievement of the intended outcome. Because of policy requirements, students expended more time and energy in recording and using assessment information for reporting rather than learning purposes. In other words, assessment was not meant for monitoring and evaluating purposes, but for generating marks for the year mark. It therefore failed in its dual purpose of informing the teachers of learners' progress and providing the basis for reflection on teaching.

Examination of the teachers' comments showed an emphasis on form at the expense of fluency. They were general and at times vague, indicating that students were unaware of the importance of constructive feedback; they were used to focusing on grammar and pointing out the errors, as opposed to attending to the substance of the message and giving comments that reflected both the positive and negative aspects of a learner's effort. For instance, a comment such as *Good work. Keep it up!* would encourage a learner but not contribute anything to his/her language development because of a lack of detail which would result in inadequate substantive scaffolding. Similarly, a comment such as *Watch your grammar* was vague. Learners needed to be empowered through accurate reinforcement: the student needed to "focus the learner's attention on a specific problem area and suggest how s/he can improve" (Nieman, 2007: 33). Feedback involves specifying the good aspects of a piece of work, challenging ideas in order to expand the learners' horizons and identifying areas for improvement. This way, the process becomes developmental because identified weaknesses inform the design of future activities (cf. Chapter 3: 3.5). In this study, the few positive comments were of a general nature, as the above example shows; the bulk

of the feedback related more to language error correction than concept development; it therefore did not reflect the substance of OBE assessment practice.

4.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this study, assessment was weak and routine. Students adhered to assessment as a matter of "administration practices that have to be executed without understanding the principles on which they are grounded" (Vandeyar and Killen, 2003: 133).

One of the major challenges for this group of students was the lack of understanding of the theory behind OBE and therefore the basic principles of high quality assessment. Their interpretation of formative assessment was at a very superficial level and they seemed unaware of this, justifying their actions by stating that they were meeting the demands of policy that prescribed the number of tasks to be given to learners per grade. Because of a lack of rubrics and explicit assessment criteria, assessment was mostly judgemental and did not always reflect the variety that was required in the OBE approach. Participants had not internalised the key role of assessment, which is to provide information about learners' stage of cognitive development and identify their needs. This lack of insight could also be because participants were trained to obey instructions and were therefore not adept at juggling curricular elements in spite of their teaching experience. Traditional assessment methods were still very much in use because teachers were clinging to outdated assessment methods that were not in tune with OBE practices advocated in the study guide.

Vandeyar and Killen (2003: 133) blame the teachers' poor quality assessment on a lack of guidelines on fundamental principles of good assessment practices. They contend that "teachers cannot be expected to apply assessment principles that they do not understand". However, documents that I examined and the study guide contradicted this observation. The guidelines existed, but the conditions under which the participants worked (restricted timelines, big classes and heavy workload) were not conducive to the implementation of sound assessment practices even if students understood them. The apparent perception held by students that assessment was a matter of technical procedure (something that must be done to satisfy the bureaucrats) rather than a matter of professional judgement (something that should be done to help learners learn) probably emanated from a dire need to survive in their challenging working contexts.

Learner-centred teaching is an important element of OBE classroom practices. Evidence discussed in this chapter reveals that while the participants thought they had embraced the paradigm shift and most believed they were working within its principles, their teaching remained teacher-centred. This perspective confirms Harley and Parker's (2006: 875) view that

> South African teacher educators have embraced OBE uncritically and scripturally as a political rather than a pedagogical project. Implementation is at a very superficial level. Most of it is in the form of adhering to policy by ensuring that the portfolio tasks are done properly and are up to date.

Teacher educators expect students to develop classroom practice from the theoretical constructs embedded in the study materials. In reality, although these students applied theory in every professional decision they made and action they performed, they were not able to state explicitly the theoretical frameworks within which they worked. For example, their choice of whole-class as opposed to group work strategy and whole-class as opposed to self- or pair-assessment was more to do with time constraints than the benefits of a whole-class approach. Training should help students rationalise theory into practice instead of viewing these as two different entities.

The insights emerging from the discussion in this chapter are consistent with world-wide research that suggests teacher-centred practices are resistant to change. For example, findings from a study by Lombard and Grosser (2008: 573) show that

- teachers dominate classroom interaction.
- teachers lack the cognitive skills to teach and evaluate thinking skills.
- teachers emphasise assimilation and recall of information.

In another study, Mok and Ko (2000: 185) analysed about 200 lessons and found a dichotomy between policy and practice in the following three areas:

- There were no examples beyond those in the textbook.
- Learners were not encouraged to ask questions.
- The teaching point was not spelt out.

The researchers also found that the teachers' instructional routines were characterised by exposition, textbook and sometimes chalkboard and driven by mastery of content.

In the South African context, Chisholm et al. (2000: 78) have this to say regarding Curriculum 2005, which preceded the current curriculum:

> Generally, the responses point to changes in classroom arrangements such as group work and learner-centred activities where the teacher plays the role of facilitator. However, as it is often the case that when these concepts are implemented in the classroom, teachers showed evidence that they had embraced the form rather that the spirit and content of ideas. Teachers may be aware of the need to make learners participants in the learning process. However, this was understood more in procedural terms, rather than as something which promotes learning.

The fact that this study was conducted seven years later and identified the same problems is telling.

5. FACTORS FOUND TO IMPACT ON PRACTICE

The preceding discussion has detailed the students' classroom practices against the background of OBE expectations and foregrounded serious deficiencies. However, effective mediation is not an event but a process that stems from within the teacher and is affected by numerous factors which can be grouped into three categories: poor training (inadequate workshop training, ineffective training course); weakened teacher agency (the top-down approach by authorities, a lack of resourcefulness and creativity, and the participants' conservative mindset (negative attitude to the educational reform). The next section addresses these issues, indicating how each had a negative effect on the participants' attempts to mediate learning in the OBE language classroom.

5.1 TRAINING

Overall, the situation in these schools was that "it's business as usual" because the high level of knowledge and skills needed by students to implement this major educational innovation was not being sufficiently addressed. Findings indicated that students had received training through workshops and the ACEEN2-6 course offered by Unisa, both of which were found to be inadequate.

5.1.1 Workshops

Before and during the phasing in of the OBE-driven NCS, workshops were conducted throughout the country to equip teachers with skills to implement the educational reform. Students reported that their concerns were not adequately addressed at workshops because of the perceived unwillingness or inability of workshop facilitators to engage critically on the issues relating to OBE implementation. Consequently, training sessions did

not deal sufficiently with issues at a practical level. The main focus of training sessions was on administrative aspects of teaching such as drawing up learning programmes at the expense of the practice of teaching. More disturbing was the lack of training workshops that focused on the teaching of English. As a result, students were ill-equipped to deal with the issues that confronted them in an OBE English language classroom.

The participants' sentiments regarding the inadequacy of training are well documented, as demonstrated by the following examples:

- In their report, Chisholm et al. (2000: 2-3) ascribe such factors as training that emphasises terminology with little attention paid to the substance of OBE as a factor significantly contributing to difficulties in implementation.

- These sentiments are echoed by Pithouse (2001: 154-155), who found the training session she attended on the implementation of Curriculum 2005[32] very inadequate. In particular, she complained about the unwillingness of facilitators to engage in issues that mattered, the poor planning, and the poor standard of facilitation:

  > I believe this workshop was poorly planned and facilitated. The high level of knowledge and skills required by teachers to implement a major curriculum innovation was not acknowledged and teacher requests and concerns were not adequately addressed… Facilitators did little to demonstrate to us the creative use of teaching and learning resources and methods that would be required for the effective implementation of C2005 in our classrooms.

- Hill (2003: 104) reports on criticisms of three training workshops in KwaZulu Natal and the Western Cape which teachers found alienating.

That there has not been any significant improvement since these weaknesses were identified is indicative of problems beyond the scope of the ordinary teacher. They are challenges that those involved in the design of educational change should confront honestly.

5.1.2 The module *Teaching English: General Principles (ACEEN2-6)*

Apart from the little training they had had and the policy documents in their possession, the only other influence on the participants' practice was the course material in their study guide. Judging by their responses, these students found the study guide very relevant

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[32] This was an OBE-oriented curriculum which preceded the current National Curriculum Statement.

because they reported advances in knowledge and skills at various levels. However, observational evidence showed that there was little confirmation of transfer of the skills to the students' repertoire in the classroom, this in spite of most of them having identified the need to change practice as the motivation for registering for this course. While the majority (seven) could identify with the content covered in the study units, in particular the teaching of the language skills, their practice remained largely traditional. As was manifest in the preceding discussion, they found themselves in a situation where the demands of the immediate situation, in particular policy directives, took precedence over everything else. Thus, while the data in category three (Chapter 5: 4.4.2) painted a picture of teachers who cognitively interacted with the study guide material and implemented new ideas, evidence of impact on practice was negligible. The materials were mentally accessible from the point of view that the students were able to identify what they had learnt from them. Such interaction was at a superficial level, a fact that was consistent with their revealed understanding of the OBE construct. In their practice, there was no evidence of acquisition of underlying theoretical knowledge of OBE that the study guide advocated. Rather, the positive responses were indicative of "zones of uncertainty" (Harland and Kinder, 1997: 75) in the participants' theoretical understanding. They revealed how students were mediating the space between what the course materials had to offer, the demands of policy and the reality of the teaching and learning situation.

The dichotomy between theory and practice was especially noticeable as regards lesson planning. While the participants identified Assignment 02 on lesson planning as the most relevant, their practice was in total contradiction with what this assignment required them to learn and do. There was no transfer of learning: some students still did not plan their lessons, while those who did, continued in the way they had always done before. In fact, as the discussion has shown, this aspect of mediation was at a surface level and devoid of any evidence of new learning.

Although the examination results showed that students understood the theoretical aspect of this methodology, this was not reflected in their practice, which showed negligible transition from a traditional and content-based approach to an outcomes-based approach to teaching language. This process entails a second and deeper level of mediation which is the negotiation of the pedagogical space between the old and the new in order to

internalise new ideas. I consider this cognitive transition a prerequisite for a change in practice because it involves a shift in mindset; a deconstruction of established constructs to embrace new ideas. Perhaps the process of personalising theories is too long and difficult to be achieved through a one-year distance education course. In addition, the absence of a practical component deprives students of the opportunity to experiment with new ideas under the guidance and with the support of lecturers. Consequently, the training that Unisa offers remains at an abstract level; there is a need for proper and adequate training where concepts are explained, justified and demonstrated in practical terms.

In my view, mismatches between the teachers' espoused and enacted practices that were a constant feature in this study reflected coping strategies by people at the receiving end of an innovation that was not feasible in the contexts in which they worked. At a deeper level, they revealed a defeatist attitude because teachers complied with policy as a survival strategy. That the study guide covered this aspect comprehensively had no impact on their practice, despite their responses.

Research results by Lewin and Stuart (2003: 692) show that "teaching methods in schools are slow to change in ways that reflect aspirations for improved pedagogy which training is intended to achieve". They cite the main reason as the failure of teacher training to embrace new practices to transform teachers.

John and Gravani (2005: 117) assert that "genuine consideration of the teacher's voice is central to the success or otherwise of a professional programme". Training programmes should not be designed from a deficit approach which does not consider the voices of the students; rather, they should be immersed in the students' realities. A related problem identified was a lack of continuous support in the teachers' working environments in coping with the challenge of new concepts and new classroom practices. For example, none of the schools visited held meetings or demonstrations on OBE pedagogy and yet this practical aspect was what the teachers needed to motivate them. Motivation is important for change of practice because it enhances enthusiasm to implement new ideas. The lack of support meant that whatever new knowledge these participants had gained was soon eroded from their repertoires as non-effective strategies because it was not practical to apply in their contexts, characterised as they were by poorly-resourced schools, big classes and a lack of a culture of teaching and learning. As Morrow (2007: 74) contends, "What is needed is whole

school development because improvements in practices of teaching depend on efforts of individual teachers as well as the organisational environments within which they work." Students needed to be empowered through critical debate and support at schools and during workshops. Harland and Kinder (1997: 81) concur, asserting that "institutional and management support is vital to effective professional development".

Because the training was inadequate, there were numerous facets of incompetency that it did not address, resulting in classroom malpractices. The ones that are most pertinent to this study — a lack of reflective skills, poor language proficiency, inability to use technology, a lack of critical thinking skills, a mismatch of learning styles — are discussed below.

A lack of reflective practice

Reflective practice has gained recognition as a crucial aspect of teacher education and continuing professional development (Birmingham, 2004; Mueller and Skamp, 2002; Dinkelman, 2003). It enables teachers to question their taken-for-granted assumptions about practice and in this way creates spaces for new ideas. Through reflection, teachers assume responsibility for their professional growth as they begin to perceive their practice from different perspectives.

Literature on reflection (cf. Chapter 3:4) tells us that reflective skills are developed when practitioners think critically about the contexts in which they work and the influence they as teachers have on their learners (Zeichner and Liston, 1996; Gimenez, 1999; Hiebert et al., 2007). This means reflection is an essential part of mediation. The end result of "critical reflection is cognitive change" (Yost et al., 2000: 41).

Reflective practice in this context entails examining issues of pedagogy and making choices based on what is best in the prevailing situation. In Gimenez's (1999: 136) words, it is a process "that acknowledges the thoughtful nature of a teacher's work". Evidence from the findings revealed that these students did not reflect much on the strategies they used, how the strategies worked and how they could be improved. In other words, there was no evidence of consistency in what governed the decisions that participants made. It all seemed to stem from convenience. The main problem was a lack of focus because the teaching point remained blurred, thus making it difficult to attend to learners' misconceptions, conceptions and requests for help in a way that promoted learning.

The lack of reflection on action, reflection in action, and reflection for action (cf. Chapter 3:4) was evident in the participants' practice:

- In most instances, learners worked individually while sitting in groups.

- In the few instances they engaged in group work, every group reported in a way that was repetitious and time-consuming, causing many learners to lose interest. This was especially conspicuous in the oral lesson referred to in this study (cf. Chapter 5:3.2.9.1). The same lesson was repeated from class to class with no adjustments made to suit the particular group of learners.

- The same amount of work was covered in single and double periods. The teacher simply hurried through the activity during a single period or stretched it either by extended teacher talk or allowing them to finish a piece of written work in the double period.

- The textbook was followed religiously without selecting or adjusting tasks to align them to the different classes in the same grade. More capable learners were not given challenging tasks. If they finished before time, they sat idle even if the lesson plan indicated extension work.

- Lesson planning was more of a token than preparation for teaching. It was considered an unnecessary chore.

- Assessment was at a superficial level and devoid of constructive feedback.

- Although learners sat in groups, the approach was teacher-centred with inadequate interaction among learners.

Inability to utilise technology

OBE requires teachers to have not only a sound theoretical background but also the skills to access the benefits of technology for enhancing learning in the digital era that we live in. I found this group of teachers technologically shy as they tended to resist interacting with technological tools. Unisa encourages its students to utilise technological resources. To this effect, every registered student is assigned a free e-mail service by the university called myLife. However, in the six years I was in charge of this course, there was not a single instance when a student registered for this module made use of this facility by either sending an e-mail or participating in on-line discussion forums on myUnisa. Most of them claimed not to have access to internet facilities, even in urban areas. One wonders how

these students could encourage learners to embrace technology to enrich learning. Consequently, the computers at the primary school referred to in the study (cf. Chapter 5:3.3.1.2) remained white elephants and learners were given a comprehension passage for a project. Training should help students confront their insecurities.

Influence of learning styles

Closely related to the above is the need for teacher educators to know their students. The knowledge is an important aspect of learner support in distance education as it helps educators to devise ways of making materials accessible. In this study, the students' mechanical approach to teaching was reflective of a training approach which did not take cognisance of their needs. Oosterheert et al. (2002) posit that the progress made or not made in taking up suggestions from the materials could also be due, among other factors, to individual learning styles. They identify two dimensions of learning. On the one hand are internally-oriented people who tend to learn by means of reflection. On the other hand are externally-oriented ones who depend on the support of others during their learning. The first style is associated with being enterprising and showing a willingness to take risks and has been linked to progressive ways of teaching. If a teacher is enterprising, s/he is more likely to try new ideas and allow learners the freedom to experiment with language and question new knowledge. The second is "the global learning style" (Carnwell, 2000: 1020). Unlike analytical learners, global learners thrive through modelling. They are more practical as opposed to being theory-oriented because they understand better when the concepts are demonstrated. Consequently, they would have problems in internalising study material and ideas from the workshops because in both cases there is no practical application of the suggested ideas. This probably explains the need for examples of assignment answers that some of the participants expressed in this study. As teacher educators, we should examine our fixed modes of transmission. If we really want to get our messages across, we need to present training material in a multifaceted way across a range of student learning styles.

Poor language proficiency

An important aspect that training should address is the poor language proficiency of most of these students which was a stumbling block to implementing sound pedagogical practices. This was evident in their professional practice, their understanding of the theoretical

underpinnings of OBE and, as already mentioned, their ability to engage critically with interview questions.

In terms of practice, the level of the participants' literacy skills was a major drawback. The pedagogical orientations of the OBE approach to teaching and learning that were discussed in detail in the literature review promote collaborative and cooperative learning, problem-solving and meaningful communication between learners and teachers and among learners themselves. All these require interaction which is not easy to initiate, develop and sustain in environments where English is a second or even a foreign language to both teachers and learners such as those in this study. As already noted, in the observed lessons there was little use of English for extended speaking turns, indicating a lack of confidence on the part of the student. This had a negative impact on learners' cognitive development because they were not given opportunities to experiment with language since participants were unwilling to take risks by promoting epistemological disturbance. Limited proficiency in a language hinders active communication, which may "result in a passive process of information-giving and rote learning which is linguistically easier to handle" (Donald et al., 2002: 220). Meskill (2009: 52) emphasises the crucial role of "the language that one teaches and the language that one uses to make learning happen", adding that "effective teachers are thereby of necessity good communicators. Indeed the good use of language for instruction is essentially instruction in second and foreign language education". Teachers should be good role-models.

The low language level also impacted on the students' understanding of the conceptual orientations of OBE. For instance, in the interviews most of the respondents complained about paperwork that left them with little time to do the actual teaching and lesson preparation. However, probing revealed that Student 5 (cf. Chapter 5: Table 6) completely misunderstood the meaning of paperwork: *"Learners' activities that are supposed to be done. That's on papers, learners use a lot of paper to do their activities. We also have to fill in support forms. Then you do the recording as well, on papers."* To her, paperwork meant making use of a lot of paper as opposed to the actual amount of work done. It is a simplistic understanding emanating from poor language grasp. Another example pertains to the OBE tenet of inclusivity. When Student 4 (cf. Chapter 5: Table 4) mentioned inclusivity as her idea of OBE, probing revealed she meant something different from catering for individual

differences: *"When doing comprehension, I read the story and want the learners to listen. When it goes down* (the text) *it wants learners to read that and later they can write something. For learners who are a little bit slow or the IQ is a little bit low, it caters for them with those different activities."* The teacher's understanding of the notion of inclusivity was synonymous with the integration of the four skills whereas what mattered was the level of difficulty and appropriateness of content. In fact, this response explained why the teacher followed the textbook instead of designing activities to reflect inclusivity. It was perhaps because of this confusion that the participant continued to treat all learners the same as they proceeded through the tasks, believing she was implementing the OBE tenet of inclusivity. This superficial and at times incomplete understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of this approach contributed to the lack of change in practice. The ability to skilfully "conceptualise, analyse, synthesise information requires good language ability because the capacity to use language is essential to execute critical thinking" (McPeck, 1990: 34).

In primary schools, teaching was characterised by frequent code-switching. Although resorting to the mother tongue to enhance understanding is pedagogically sound, this should be tempered with the knowledge that the target language is English. Because of the over-reliance on the mother tongue, the demerits outweighed the merits of this practice. At times I was left wondering whether the students' struggle to express themselves in English was not a result of extended mother-tongue use.

Finally, I observed an inability to engage critically with interview questions by some participants because they battled with expression. Most of the *why* questions were met with silence, shrugs or just smiles because respondents could not give coherent accounts of what their teaching purposes were. Some of their responses were naïve generalisations lacking insight as opposed to sophisticated theory-based critical evaluations of the issues at hand which are characteristic of more informed thinking about teaching. For example, when probed to explain in what way a particular assignment was relevant to their practice or to comment on the level of difficulty of the language used in the study guide, the standard responses were "*Everything is relevant because that is how they want us to teach*" (7) and "*The language is alright. It is good*" (5). Prompts to elicit elucidation of these value-laden statements drew shrugs or just smiles. During post-lesson discussions (which were rare

because the timetables were usually full) I would ask the teacher to comment on the success or failure of the lesson just taught. Most of the time, I got the standard answer, "*It was good*" and probing for justification produced uninformative responses such as nodding the head, smiles or blank faces as opposed to justification. It was therefore difficult to extract insightful responses from participants because they took everything at a very superficial level and were not used to critical reflection.

Local official documents acknowledge the problem of poor language proficiency. The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (2006: 6) states that "the majority of teachers have not yet been sufficiently equipped to meet the education needs of a growing democracy in a 21st century global environment". The greatest challenge identified was the limited conceptual knowledge of many teachers. This included among other things poor grasp of subject matter and related concepts during lessons resulting in low levels of learner achievement.

The benefits of good language skills are spelt out by Wang & Ma (2009: 251), whose research findings showed that

> students who were more competent in subject knowledge were found to be more confident to try learner-centred activities and also more competent to manage teaching, while those whose language proficiency was not as good were found to be more traditional and to lack confidence in managing teaching.

Although the current ACE English programme includes a module on language proficiency, the students' proficiency remains limited. Perhaps a more rigorous language course would achieve the desired end.

5.2   A LACK OF TEACHER AGENCY

Concern regarding the necessity of active teacher participation has been expressed by different scholars since the new approach came into effect. For instance, Harley and Parker (1999) emphasise the important role of the horizontal plane as distinct from the authority-controlled vertical one. In the same vein, De Clercq (2008) refers to active teacher involvement as professional accountability and contends that teachers are important partners in the process of educational change whose input should be sought and valued (cf. Chapter 3: 3.5). Van den Berg (2002) expresses the same notion, using the construct of teacher efficiency. He argues that teachers with high efficacy have been known to impose higher norms on themselves and an established locus of control and make use of

challenging methods such as group work. Those with low efficacy have been known to display avoidance behaviours and react defensively to innovation and lack motivation. Finally, Hill (2003) expresses the same notion differently when she stresses the need for teacher agency in effective implementation of educational change.

Agentic teachers are able to take ownership of educational reform. High efficiency "can facilitate the implementation of new teaching methods because it motivates teachers to acquire and develop new skills" (Van den Berg, 2002: 587). Flecknoe (2000: 453) observes that many innovations imposed on teachers from above never get implemented. He argues that "success of such ventures lies not in devising and implementing but in the supporting and reinforcing of the plan". As this study demonstrated, policy interventions tended to impose strictures that inhibited creativity. Support would help instil in students a sense of ownership of the OBE approach and the whole implementation process. An adequate level of agency is necessary for successful change because teachers must believe in their capacity to utilise new ideas and overcome barriers.

Two factors that I identified as contributing to a lack of teacher agency are the top-down approach by authorities and a lack of resourcefulness and creativity.

Effect of the top-down approach

Participants in this study felt marginalised on two fronts. First, policy-makers imposed decisions on matters of pedagogy. Second, teacher educators designed curricula from a deficit point of view, that is, without conducting a needs analysis. As a result, students were reduced to mere technicians who followed policy directions without giving any input. They were also passive consumers of a training curriculum that did not respond fully to their needs. As a result they felt alienated and demotivated. Cochran-Smith (2005) observes that teachers are caught in an outcomes-trap because they feel pressure from authorities to implement the reform but the deprived circumstances in which they work militate against meeting these demands. On one hand, teachers are blamed for the failure of OBE implementation — blaming their meagre skills and knowledge — while on the other hand, they are deemed the solution to the problem because of the perception that teacher quality will improve implementation.

As has been reported in the findings, there were constraints regarding what students may or may not do. These regulations from authorities often resulted in competing discourses that

confused students, leading to feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity which might give an outsider "a perception of incompetence" (Van den Berg, 2002: 597). For instance, in the schools I visited, not only instruction but testing, marking and recording were constrained by institutionalised time blocks for quality control as required by policy. This was restrictive and contrary to OBE practices because the whole learning process was consigned to particular times and learning that took place outside these parameters was not acknowledged. Students were therefore victims of competing paradigms. Expected to meet the demands of curriculum standards and implement liberal teaching technologies designed by experts, they were denied the freedom to depart from standardised norms and experiment in response to the specific demands of the work context. This tight control was not only a contradiction of the tenets of OBE, it was also disempowering. In Burns' (2005) research, teachers spoke of a loss of motivation emanating from imposed curriculum changes and a lack of being valued as individuals. Some controls were through the 'backwash' effect of examinations because schools which under-performed were red-circled. Van den Berg (2002: 595) observes that these externally-imposed decisions coupled with new expectations regarding good teaching "may elicit conflict resulting in decreased feelings of efficacy" as students struggle to straddle the divide.

Regarding the gap between theory and practice, I refer to Bernstein's (1996: 157) notion of 'vertical and horizontal discourses'. The former are institutional official and policy-regulated practices and rules while the latter are localised sets of practices that regulate pedagogy in schools and classrooms. It is important for teachers to be able to mediate the gap that the two create; professional development is one way of understanding and negotiating the dichotomy between school and university practices and systems. Research on implementation of educational changes shows that "the concerns of teachers clearly play a role in the implementation process" (Van den Berg, 2002: 593) yet teachers are undervalued as partners in the construction of valid educational knowledge (Vieira, 2009).

Policy-makers need to adopt a bottom-up strategy where the voices of teachers are heard and their concerns infused into the training programmes. Unless teachers are convinced of the benefits of reforms, they might sabotage them by refusing to change their practices. Thus, teacher educators and policy-makers can better utilise the opportunities available to them by "working in a more facilitative manner with the individual teacher" (Van den Berg,

2002: 579). The programme I propose in the next chapter is grounded in communities of practice to promote interaction between students, mentors, lecturers and policy-makers.

A lack of resourcefulness and creativity

In spite of the deprived circumstances described in this study, I also noticed the existence of a victim mentality in the teachers' attitude. Even where they could implement changes, as in the case of provision of resources, they maintained a dialogue of deprivation which distracted them from confronting issues creatively.

I observed that the classroom environments exuded an aura of deprivation because there were no English materials or learners' work on display, even in instances where teachers stayed in their classrooms. Under normal circumstances, this arrangement would have created ample opportunity to make the classroom a rich learning resource but perhaps that would be contrary to the dialogue of deprivation that I observed consistently throughout my interactions with these students. The fact that authentic materials such as newspapers were readily available was ignored because it was not in synch with the prevailing discourse of victimisation and as such would not make a cohesive story. Therefore, while acknowledging the disadvantaged contexts described in this study, I felt participants also used deprivation as an excuse for their unwillingness or inability to change.

I got the impression that these participants were too demotivated to go out of their way to make learning an inspiring experience for their learners. As Samuel (1998: 581) posits, renewal of the education system (which in a way, the Unisa methodology course attempts to do) "entails conversion at the lowest (and most important) level: the way the teachers think about addressing the specific realities within their own schools using the most theoretical/philosophical and practical/pragmatic resources at hand". I was not convinced that the pedagogical decisions made by these participants were connected to their inner sense of selves — students are supposed to question the new ideas. It would seem that these participants lacked the critical ability to look at themselves closely and reflect on how they might be contributing to the disabling situation. They tended to identify problems from outside. This victim mentality resulted in a lack of initiative in the way they facilitated learning.

On a different level, the procurement of materials and their actual adoption by the teacher are two different outcomes. Evidence of this was the fully furnished computer laboratory

that was not in use due to a lack of expertise by the teachers. In this instance, the resource was available but not being utilised to support learning. Teachers at the school were not proactive in seeking training and lacked the initiative and resourcefulness to make the available resources visible in their teaching, perhaps because doing so would be contrary to the prevailing discourse of deprivation that underlined their conversations and most probably their attitudes regarding implementing OBE.

Participants in the study were students who needed to interrogate their actions. Therefore, while they were justified to bemoan the absence of resources, they needed to understand that resources alone were not a panacea for improvement in education. The focus should not be on resources; rather, on what the teacher does with the available materials that results in change. Accordingly, much depends on the teacher's ability to exploit contextual factors. Even a resource like a chalkboard can be used in a new way, for example, through learner participation as opposed to the old way of showing answers.

Resourcefulness and creativity would have enabled students to adopt a proactive and positive approach to solving problems they experienced in their teaching contexts. Given that the contexts vary, the best solutions should emanate from within because outsiders' understanding of the complex dynamics at work in a particular learning environment would be limited.

The paradox

I found a paradox regarding some of the OBE-oriented texts that were in use. They were popular for their convenience because they covered the various aspects of teaching to the finest detail (outcomes and assessment standards for each activity, the activity, assessment grid and answers). While this was commendable, it underplayed the subjective role of the student in exercising professional judgements, thereby confirming an underlying negative assumption that teachers were incapable, hence the need for this level of scaffolding. It was also in contradiction of the OBE tenet of creativity and resourcefulness. This dependency syndrome, as the discussion revealed, characterised the participants' practice because they simply ploughed through the materials making no effort to adapt them to the prevailing situation. As one participant (1) remarked during tea break: "*Our job is to teach so let those who write these books provide everything for us.*" Training should empower students to take

ownership of the curriculum as this would enable them to move away from an over-reliance on the textbooks and start using other resources.

5.3   THE PARTICIPANTS' MINDSET

The manner in which the approach was introduced impacted negatively on the teachers' sense-making, creating an impression that they had to give up their existing schemata which were based on the traditional approach. This cognitive perspective explained why some teachers resisted policy initiatives.

Because of many years of practice, the participants were deeply entrenched in traditional practices which most believed were more effective than the new approach. As a result, they made unconvincing forays into the OBE terrain when officialdom compelled them to do so and retreated to their comfort zones once those requirements had been met. Regarding this behaviour pattern, Morrow (2007) explains that practices have histories and therefore learning and teaching cannot be divorced from the contexts in which they are embedded. For change to be realised, a positive attitude to the changes needs to replace the defeatism and resistance that underlined the responses from these participants, which attitude might account for the gap between their espoused and enacted practices. Contrary to Blignaut's (2007: 56) contention that "teachers are not passive consumers and external transmitters of knowledge but make their own judgements and give meaning to policy as the final brokers", I found these participants' approach devoid of introspection which would result in independent judgements. Samuel (1998: 579) posits that "many of these teachers have not been socialised into sufficiently confronting their own thinking about the teaching and learning of languages. As a result, their approach is routinised". I concur with this view; for instance, the theoretical constructs from which policy makers expect teachers to develop classroom practice are explicit but interviews revealed that students were not able to state explicitly the theoretical frameworks within which they worked although what they did was embedded in theory. A good example was the preference of whole-class activities over group work. The reason the students gave (that group work was time-consuming) had to do with operational constraints; it was devoid of sound pedagogical principles.

Teacher educators need to help students to deconstruct their practical work to expose the underlying theory because, regardless of context, the practice of teaching is based on theory. A teacher's theoretical orientations drive the daily choices s/he makes regarding the

act of teaching, the process and purpose of assessment and the nature of learning. These orientations act as mirrors through which teachers interpret their own teaching and may act as barriers to change. The majority of these students believed that what language learners needed to master most were language structures (tenses, sentence construction), indicating an emphasis on form as opposed to fluency (cf. Chapter 5: 3.2.7). This belief impacted on their reception of new constructs. For instance, Student 7 was a faithful disciple of the audio-lingual approach who spent most of the first term in Grade 10 (the beginning of the FET phase) teaching parts of speech as he believed these were the basis of language. In his opinion, once a learner got the grammar right, s/he would not have problems with the language. Given this view, efforts to change the pedagogical practices of students might be doomed to failure unless those conceptions were acknowledged, challenged and changed. This probably explained why this same student resisted the new approach such that he did not even read the whole study guide. His cognitive sense-making was rooted in the past and he seemed oblivious to the innovations that were taking place around him. Consequently, he continued to teach in conventional ways. His practice confirms Blignaut's (2007: 50) contention that

> if teachers do not feel a sense of identification with the policy, its goals may be undermined by practitioners who understand and accept neither its conceptual underpinning nor its curricular imperatives.

Because of the participants' belief in their established practices, at four of the schools visited, students also taught on Saturdays and during holidays because of their belief that they had to go through the whole textbook. They claimed there just was not enough time during the week. As one participant (6) put it: "*We spend the whole week doing one composition. I mean brainstorming, planning, writing a draft.*" They believed that covering all units in the textbook was more beneficial than using effective strategies to enhance learning as expected of learner-centred practices. This was a reflection of the students' belief in the traditional content-based approach. They had not embraced the communicative teaching practices advocated in the OBE approach, which emphasise the acquisition of skills. As Blignaut (2007: 56) asserts, "an emphasis on teachers' epistemological beliefs and contexts gives us an understanding of why practices that are viewed as less desirable by policymakers persist".

For educational change to be realised, students needed to replace their existing beliefs with those that drive the educational reform. This is because learning to teach is a continual process of adding new experiences to existing mental schemata, thereby refining, modifying, or even rejecting some of the previous teaching practices. As Morrow (2007: 29) posits, the "key agents in the success of any schooling system are the professional teachers who work in it … The commitment, competence and quality of the teachers in any schooling system are necessary ingredients for its success". Further afield, Shulman (2004: 160) observes: "But the teacher must remain the main key. The literature on effective schools is meaningless, debates over educational policy are moot, if the primary agents of instruction are incapable of performing their functions well."

Perhaps the place to start when introducing an educational reform is with changing the teachers' epistemological beliefs as a way of ensuring unhindered reception of new ideas. As Samuel (1998: 581) contends, "Reconstruction of the education system relies on transformation from within the system itself as teachers come to accept that they can effect change and address the specific realities of their working conditions." The old system of subject advisors who were the teachers' allies and provided much-needed training, monitoring and encouragement was a mechanism for providing support in this direction. Currently, Unisa makes use of tutors who play a vital role in scaffolding learning by conducting class discussions in the institution's various centres.

Attitude to educational reform

From the interviews it was evident that participants held negative beliefs and attitudes towards this prescribed teaching approach and these impacted on practice.

The different understandings of OBE as reflected in their responses (cf. Chapter 5: Table 4) were evident of the participants' zones of enactment (Spillane, 1999), meaning the spaces within which reform initiatives are encountered within the worlds of different teachers. Spillane contends that individual teachers notice and construe the reforms differently and sometimes this leads to the negative beliefs and attitudes towards the proposed changes. These negative attitudes can be attributed to numerous factors that include incompetence, ignorance and insufficient exposure to OBE which negatively affect practice.

Particularly worrying is the fact that in official documents, the old and new way of teaching are contrasted in a language of binaries: one is teacher-centred and the other learner-

centred; one is content-based and the other skills-based. Teachers such as these students who believed in the benefits of a traditional approach tended to resist the changes which took them from their comfort zone, especially when the approach challenged the status quo by breaking away from the traditional way which was the only method they had known and experienced. As Jansen (1999: 213) aptly observes, "teachers did not, indeed could not displace themselves". Cohen's (1990: 339) observation is instructive in this regard. He asserts that teachers should be portrayed as historical beings who "cannot simply shed their old ideas and practices… and slip on something new". McLaughlin (1987) concurs. Basing his argument on the analysis of several documents on policy implementation, he argues that for policy to be successfully implemented, the capacity and will of the people who are expected to implement that policy are critical factors.

Change should be about acknowledging what is good in the existing system and incorporating it into the new system. For an educational reform such as OBE to take root, policy-makers and trainers should take cognisance of the nature of the teachers' existing cognitive scripts, then decide how best to introduce new ideas to fit in with the old. For instance, good teachers have long taught according to lesson objectives. These students would feel less threatened if outcomes were introduced as a progression from what they already knew and did. This is because as they reach out to embrace or invent a new instruction, they do so with their old professional selves including all their ideas and practices.

In this study, evidence of this negativity was the discourse of discomfort with OBE and the participants' zones of enactment that remained rigidly traditional.

6.   SUMMARY

The reasons for introducing OBE were sound because it was necessary to put into place an education that was responsive to the demands of 21st century. This approach was deemed a suitable replacement of the apartheid education because it was embedded in democratic values of equal opportunity and high quality education. For its effective implementation, students needed to be highly competent in order to provide the kind of learning that challenges learners to develop and demonstrate higher-order cognitive skills.

From the detailed discussion in this chapter, it is evident that changing students' classroom practice is a mammoth task which requires the co-operation of all stakeholders: learners, parents, teacher educators, teachers, and policymakers who should work co-operatively towards the goal of providing quality education for all South African children. Significant change has taken place at a policy level but prerequisites for changing the apartheid approach to teaching and learning in the deprived contexts described in this study are yet to be put into place. Only then will we experience the change we desire and expect. The students' situation presents "a tale of rigid practices in and around messy realities against a backdrop of shifting sands of national changes in teacher education" Reddy (2009: 1161).

The most significant factors emanating from the discussion can be summarised as follows:

- simplistic interpretations and misinterpretations of the OBE construct;
- mechanical attitude to planning, teaching and assessment;
- the asynchrony between theory and practice;
- a feeling of insecurity with the OBE approach resulting in pedagogical control;
- lack of language to theorise their practice;
- dichotomy between policy requirements and practice.

Underlying these aspects of practice was a myriad of psychological factors, chief of which were the participants' attitudes, beliefs and knowledge base, all compromising learning and teaching. The situation was exacerbated by the deprived contexts within which the participants worked (the lack of resources, lack of support from parents, lack of a culture of learning) and which militated against the implementation of pro-OBE teaching practices. The disabling working environment could possibly be the reason for the students' lethargic approach to teaching. They felt disempowered.

Against this background, I attempt to answer the question posed at the beginning of this chapter. The participants' practices were, to a large extent, inconsistent with OBE. While these students gained some theoretical surface knowledge from the course materials, their practice remained largely unchanged. Due to the numerous factors already discussed, students were unable to internalise the OBE theory to make it an integral part of their mental repertoire.

Using the SOLO taxonomy[33] below, the students' level of understanding of OBE practice can be categorised as follows:

6.1 CONCEPTUAL SUMMARY

Table 23: Conceptual Summary

Conceptualisation of the OBE construct	This was at a very simplistic level and often lacking in most of the elements.	Unistructural level
Understanding through classroom practice	There was resistance in this regard and emphasis was on content as opposed to skills. Students' practice was largely teacher-dominated although their responses indicated otherwise.	Unistructural level
Lesson planning	This was a matter of routine with no sound pedagogical theory undergirding it. Some teachers did not plan at all.	Prestructural
Assessment	Comments were short and vague and where they were specific emphasised form at the expense of fluency. This indicated a lack of knowledge about the importance of constructive feedback. Their teaching showed little indication of sound formative assessment practices.	Unistructural
Critical evaluation of course	Gave some useful ideas.	Multistructural

7. MY REFLECTION

The stories in this study followed three different motifs. The first was that of tokenism: some of the participants were articulate regarding what OBE stood for but their classroom practice reflected merely a superficial attempt at implementation. These students struggled to find their footing and to recontextualise themselves within the continuous change; they needed time to work through their insecurities. The second was resistance: a student was so stuck in his way of doing things with conviction that s/he was impervious to new ideas.

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[33] Details of this taxonomy were given at the end of Chapter 4: Methodology.

Lastly, although not very pronounced, there was the motif of utter confusion: these students struggled with content knowledge, therefore they were out of their depth when trying to conceptualise this approach. A myriad of disabling factors that detracted from quality provision accounted for this state of disarray: students' epistemological beliefs, a lack of understanding of the new teaching approach, and the deprived learning and teaching contexts. While each student attempted to negotiate each of these factors in his/her own way, the resultant effect was the same; there was a disjuncture between their espoused and enacted practices.

8.   CONCLUSION

The focus of the study was on how teachers experienced their professional situations both cognitively and affectively in the context of OBE. In this chapter, the findings were interpreted and discussed.

Interpretation showed a marked correlation of data from lesson observation, analysis of documents and my own observation, yet this was consistently contradicted by data from interviews. Across the eight case studies drawn from different contexts, there were clearly converging findings with very few diverging patterns based on differentiated implementation contexts.

Analysis of findings indicated that these students were struggling to come to terms with the basic tenets of OBE practices. The conceptions that they had about teaching, learning and assessment seemed to be based on policies and practices that were no longer relevant. As a result, contrary to expected practices, classrooms still were textbook-based, test-oriented and teacher-centred.
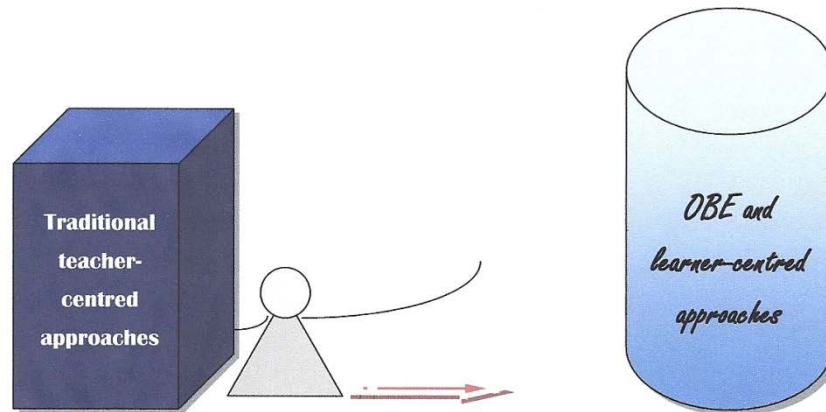
FIGURE 7: STUDENTS HAD MADE LITTLE PROGRESS TOWARDS OBE IMPLEMENTATION.

The picture that emerged was of students who worked in very complex and demanding conditions and were constantly under pressure brought to bear through a turbulent policy environment and expectations from authorities. At classroom level, they were overwhelmed with the demands of the new approach and in particular the heavy administration load. Added to this were the often unstated prerequisites for successful OBE implementation such as small classes in well-resourced schools, supportive parents and an enabling home background. The conditions in schools in which this study was conducted were far removed from this ideal. Given this situation, the students' behaviour was perhaps a way of coping with the huge challenges that were so multifaceted that there were no easy solutions. Having experienced the lived realities of these practitioners, I empathised with them as they tried to implement complex and sometimes contradictory policies under extremely difficult conditions. Their plight is succinctly expressed by Shulman (2004: 151):

> Teaching is impossible. If we simply add together all that is expected of a typical teacher and take note of the circumstances in which those activities are to be carried out, the sum makes greater demands than any individual can possibly fulfil.

Improving teaching depends on equipping the teaching force with skills to conduct their classroom practices with insight in the unique situation of each teacher. Blaming OBE for the ills that persist in the education system is not the solution. Rather, the onus is on all stakeholders to confront the challenges honestly. Changing practice is a long-term process, not an event, but it is not unfeasible. For it to take effect, policy-makers need a change in mindset and an acknowledgement of the crucial role of the teacher in the entire process. Properly planned and executed, a methodology course such as ACEEN2-6 can go a long way

towards equipping teachers with the necessary competences to effectively implement educational reform in the language classroom.

This was a small study considering the small number of participants. It cannot claim to be representative of all students registered for the module ACEEN26. However, the findings extend beyond the specificity of the ACEEN2-6 course to wider challenges in the educational field in post-apartheid South Africa. This is because the data gathered is on the teaching practices of a group of teachers in the face of curriculum change. Moreover, the findings resonate with those from other similar studies across the globe, which report a gap between policy initiatives regarding curriculum reform and the classroom realities.

The results of this analysis have important implications for in-service programmes. The information gathered is valuable chiefly because it is the voice of the students who are consumers of the courseware and as such, findings provide some insights into areas where improvements should be made. This input will be used for student support and more importantly, it will be wedded into the envisaged revision of the ACE English programme as a way of responding to the second research question: *How can the course be improved?* The holistic restructuring of the ACE English curriculum is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7: AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE

1.   INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the re-conceptualised training programme for ACE English. As a step forward from Chapter 6, the chapter begins with a summary of the training needs of the research participants. The intention is to base the new programme on the research evidence. This is followed by a section on different models of professional development, leading to a justification of the use of the transformative model. In the next section, the defining elements of the new programme are described in detail. The chapter ends with a presentation of the curriculum for the proposed ACE English programme as a way of responding to the second part of the research question: *how can the course be improved?*

2.   STUDENT NEEDS IDENTIFIED IN THIS STUDY

Succinctly put, the findings reveal that the course and whatever training these students had received had insignificant impact on practice: there were major disparities between policy expectations and what the participants actually did in the classroom. Examination results were reasonably good and interview responses generally positive, but the acquired knowledge did not seem to carry over into practice. The numerous and diverse problems have been comprehensively discussed in previous chapters. This section spells out the training needs revealed by the identified problems, in accord with current educational discourse which recommends a bottom-up approach to continuing professional teacher development. It is a response to the growing research evidence indicating that teachers benefit most if a programme is based on their needs (Al-Mutawa and Al Furiah, 2005). In other words, teacher education programmes should not be solely determined by institutions of training. These have been found to be "idealistic, detached from school realities and unconcerned with the public's priorities for schools" (Rhodes and Bellamy, 1999: 17), as a result of which their programmes could be considered irrelevant.

The current trend signifies a move away from the 'banking' view to training (Lewin and Stewart, 2003) where teacher trainees are expected to acquire subject knowledge and standard methods of teaching which can be applied uniformly in schools. It is now recommended that a programme should accommodate input from the consumers of the courseware. By so doing, the proposed programme acknowledges the uniqueness of context

and the need to allow the students' voices to be heard in the design so that they would feel a sense of ownership in the programme development process.

The envisaged programme seeks to address the following needs identified in the study:

Preparation: Enhancement of students' skills in lesson planning, their choice, sequencing and grading of texts, and their design of teaching aids and of a variety of formative assessment strategies.

Content pedagogy: Knowledge of the principles of learning and teaching as well as the new teaching approaches and strategies. Students also need to know how to adapt their practice through innovation and improvisation to meet specific classroom contexts.

Theories: Familiarity with relevant theories that govern current language teaching and learning practices. This will enable students to rationalise their choice of strategies.

Facilitation: Because this is INSET, all the participants are practising teachers. However, they need opportunities to implement and experiment with the new knowledge gained during in-service training under the supervision of lecturers or mentors. The skills to facilitate learning by using learner-centred activities; to address the needs of diverse learners and large classes and to relate activities to explicitly-stated outcomes are vital in this regard.

Assessment: Knowledge and skills to implement a variety of assessment strategies as well as a sound understanding of the importance of constructive feedback and how to give it.

Reflection: The ability to reflect for, in and on practice is crucial to effective teaching because it results in a change of practice. Students need training in reflective skills to enable them to identify areas of weakness and how to rectify them in a logical fashion.

Technology: As the findings showed, this group of students is technologically shy. They need training in how to manipulate technology to enhance learning and teaching.

Value congruence: A change of practice is evidence of a change in beliefs. Students need to be convinced of the value of educational reforms such as OBE otherwise they will resist. This means that apart from acquiring skills, students need to acquire the appropriate values, attitudes and dispositions related to each of the identified needs.

Language proficiency: All participants were second or even third language speakers of English. As such, they need to continue to improve on their language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Proficiency in English gives them the confidence to facilitate learning.

3.   FROM MODULE TO PROGRAMME

This thesis is grounded in a study that spotlights one module only. Given the varied nature of the teachers' identified needs however, one module alone is inadequate for effecting a change in practice — the ultimate goal of the proposed alternative route. Consequently, the changes proposed have had a ripple effect on the entire programme which will have to be restructured and new modules developed. The rest of this chapter focuses on the restructuring and development of the new programme, beginning with a choice of model.

4.   MODELS OF CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)

Kennedy (2005: 236-247) presents nine models of CPD which can be categorised into three, namely transmission-based, transition-based and transformation-based models.

Transmission-based models are as follows:

- The training model;
- The award bearing model;
- The deficit model;
- The cascade model.

Next, Kennedy (2005) identifies three *transition-based models* which are:

- The standards-based model;
- The coaching/mentoring model;
- The community of practice model.

The list ends with two *transformation-based* models, namely:

- The action research model;
- The transformative model.

Despite these neat categories, the models are not mutually exclusive. For instance, the training model shares affinities with other models — the standards-based, the award-bearing, the deficit and the cascade models; they all emphasise the acquisition of skills. However, the emphasis varies according to the intended outcome. For instance, while the training model emphasises the role of an expert in equipping the teacher trainee with classroom skills, the standards-based model expects trainees to demonstrate only those skills specified in a nationally agreed standard. The emphasis is on evidence-based,

demonstrable practice. In the award-bearing programme, trainees are expected to complete specific programmes of study for validation or accreditation by external bodies such as universities, while training based on the deficit model focuses on the weaknesses identified in the trainee. In the cascade model, teachers who have been trained are expected to disseminate the knowledge to colleagues. All these models share common ground in that they adopt a technicist approach to training which is skills-focused and views trainees as passive recipients of skills. They fall in the realm of fundamental pedagogics[34] because of their emphasis on compliance, replication of ideas as well as unquestioning reliance on directives from authorities. Given these characteristics, the standards-based model should logically belong to the first category.

Transitional-based models, with the exception of the standards-based, acknowledge the trainee's role in the learning process, albeit in a limited fashion. For instance, the coaching model emphasises a one-to-one relationship between a mentor and mentee that is designed to support professional development, while the communities of practice model involves participation of many in a learning community. Both these models view training as a scaffolding process where the learner is helped by a more able and experienced person or persons to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. What differs is the nature of the interpersonal relationship, which can either be hierarchical or collegial. In the case of the former, mentee participation is controlled in that the mentor or knowledgeable members in the community might dominate, resulting in little sharing and a lack of autonomy. When this happens, the model leans heavily on transmission. If training is defined by collegiality and collaboration between and among participants where participants share ideas, discuss possibilities and divergent views are accommodated, the model supports the transformative view of learning. Thus, the quality of interpersonal relationships determines the view of learning (transmission or transformational) these models adopt. This instability gives them their transitional ethos.

Finally, although they also accommodate training, transformative models (the action research- and transformative models) are the antithesis of transmission-based models. They view teacher learning as growth from dependency to autonomy, a process that is

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[34] This concept is defined in chapter 2 of this thesis.

characterised by internalisation of concepts leading to construction of new knowledge at an individual level and its application in different situations. Accordingly, they place emphasis on maintaining a strong link between theory and practice. As its name suggests, the action research model is research-based professional development. It focuses on enquiry and collaboration among many people involved in sharing and creating knowledge with the aim of improving practice. The transformative model is eclectic. It draws heavily from all other models with an emphasis on transforming practice. According to Kennedy (2005: 24), its central characteristic "is the combination of practices and conditions that support the transformative agenda". The focus is on effecting educational change through recognition of all factors that promote change: training, focusing on individual needs, beliefs and feelings, active participation through collaborative enquiry, and the promotion of teacher enquiry. From the preceding discussion it is evident that while each model's priorities are different, together the nine models represent a progression from dependency to increasing autonomy of teachers.

4.1   JUSTIFICATION OF THE TRANSFORMATIVE MODEL

Since the revised programme is intended to effect a change in practice as its central outcome, the transformative model is the most appropriate. This is because its key attributes are compatible with the vision of the kind of teacher needed in order to operate effectively in the 21st century. It is a teacher who is able to handle the changing and challenging multilingual contexts that typify South African classrooms today; a teacher who actively contributes to the transformation of education as opposed to being a passive consumer of educational initiatives. Accordingly, the purpose of teacher education should not be to transfer knowledge but to create a learning climate that is conducive to discovery and problem-solving that leads to the construction of knowledge. These factors define the transformative model. A programme designed along the lines of this model would help teachers not to adopt a scriptural approach[35] to an educational innovation such as OBE, let alone any educational paradigm, because they will be able to reflect on and question ideas and the methods they use. This awareness would enable them to negotiate some of the systemic, institutional and personal challenges they face. Transformation is not an event but

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[35] In this approach, learners do not engage with or question ideas; they accept what they are told.

a process. In this regard, the model is consonant with Du Plessis' (2009: 260) journey metaphor which "encourages engagement in the form of discovery, critical thinking, and co-operation". The emphasis is both on the cumulative events that typify learning experiences as well as on the final result. In the context of the envisaged programme, these processes take place mainly in communities of practice.

5. COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Recent literature on continuing professional development programmes worldwide is fraught with numerous competing discourses and debates on how best to train teachers to enable them to meet the demands of 21st century classrooms. Despite the controversy, there is consensus that communities of practice, in their various forms, are pivotal to the success of in-service teacher training.[36] This is because of their effectiveness in influencing change in teachers' practices to reflect educational reform. The programme conceptualised in this chapter is a product of these different voices that have influenced my thinking.

Communities of practice manifest themselves in different forms. Some scholars refer to them as 'professional development schools' or 'centres of pedagogy' (Goodlad, 1994; Hallinan and Khmelkov, 2001; Whitcomb et al., 2009), others call them 'communities of enquiry' (Hill, 2000; Sargent and Hannum, 2009), while some educationists prefer the term 'professional learning communities' (Lieberman and Mace 2008). In South Africa, the concept of communities of practice is fairly new. It manifests itself in the 'learning clusters' (Jita and Ndlalane, 2009) that have been set up for teachers at district level.

Despite the various forms, the actual differences are fine-grained and more reflective of priorities than of actual practice. Professional development schools or centres of pedagogy reflect a partnership between teacher education providers and schools that serve as settings for clinical internships to enable students to learn the craft of teaching, whereas communities of enquiry emphasise teacher development grounded in critical enquiry into practice. This is usually through the promotion of collaborative action research between

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[36] See, for instance, Harland and Kinder, 1997; Ball and Cohen, 1999; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Wenger, 2000; Flecknoe, 2000; Hill, 2000; Good and Weaver, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Erben, 2006; Blingnaut, 2007; Walsh & Jacobs, 2007; Lieberman and Mace 2008; Waghid, 2009; Vieira, 2009; Jita and Ndlalane, 2009; Whitcomb et al., 2009; Sargent and Hannum, 2009.

teachers and academics. Professional learning communities focus on training in which whole communities of schools are involved, not just a few members who have registered for a training programme such as the ACE. This happens in cases where in-service training is nation-wide and not voluntary. Finally, in South Africa the establishment of teacher clusters marks an experimental approach to teacher development. In their study, Jita and Ndlalane (2009: 64) observe that cluster meetings "promoted a feeling of empowerment among teachers as they interacted and shared their own individual experiences to create a collective understanding" leading to a change in practice. In contrast to this view, findings from interviews in this study revealed that cluster meetings focused more on quality control as opposed to training and sharing of pedagogy. They were watchdogs of policy-makers rather than pedagogy-orientated sites.

5.1   WHAT ARE COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE?

Vieira (2009: 269) describes communities of practice as "university-school networks that function as learning communities where (inter)personal development is linked to the definition of common goals, allowing for diversity in a supportive environment". She asserts the value of such communities "for developing professional knowledge that is teaching/teacher development-based, context-sensitive and fluid". Wenger (2000) concurs. He views communities of practice as places where teachers share knowledge regarding their conceptions and classroom practice with the aim of forging a common understanding on certain aspects of education. The guiding principle is that instead of adopting a top-down approach, INSET should assist students to explore their existing views on practice and provide them with opportunities for constructing their own meaning. The emphasis is on "acquisition of, apart from knowledge and skills, attitudes and dispositions to cope with the requirements of the workplace" (Van der Linden and Mendonca, 2006: 39). Through their focus on interaction, co-operation and openness, communities of practice offer enabling environments for the realisation of this holistic vision of professional growth.

5.2   COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AS SITES FOR DIALOGIC COLLABORATION

Communities of practice are characterised by dialogue and collaboration. In this regard, they help to transcend the divide between school and university by creating "porous boundaries" between the two learning sites (Mitchell et al., 2010: 491). This in turn is important for cross-pollination of ideas in professional development.

From a socio-constructivist point of view, Jiménez Raya (2009) explains that learning to teach is a complex developmental process that is facilitated in the social practices associated with teaching, such as being taught how to teach and given the chance to practice, discussion with peers and reflection. Success of these processes rests on focused collaboration which is the hallmark of communities of practice. For instance, students have been known to benefit from participating in "think-tank forums" (Good and Weaver, 2003: 441) where they interact, collaborate, share experiences and act on their learning (John and Gravani, 2005). Communities of practice enable the formation of these collaborative partnerships as sites where knowledge is exchanged, transferred and generated across contexts. To this end, "co-operation between schools and teacher education institutions as joint stakeholders in the transformation of the education system becomes crucial" (Samuel, 1998: 581). The emphasis is on engaging "teachers in collaborative inquiry as a means for spurring professional growth and meaningful shifts in practice" (Erben, 2006: 455).

Collaborative professional development is important particularly in distance education because it engages students who would otherwise be isolated due to a lack of contact. In this regard, communities of practice narrow "the transactional gap" (More, 1990: 12) by creating opportunities for students, lecturers and mentors to come together regularly to discuss and solve problems and critically reflect on their teaching. According to Samuel (1998), collaborative activities promote successful renewal in teachers' practices and this should be the ultimate goal of an INSET programme.

A key element that defines all communities of practice is dialogue. During interaction, students "reconstruct and deconstruct meanings which shape the practices they are engaged with in particular ways" (Waghid, 2009: 1128). In other words, the interactions disrupt experience, leading to new understandings. In addition, group talk enables students to appreciate one another's working conditions as they share their experiences, ask for potential solutions to classroom challenges and share innovative strategies that worked in different situations. This mental exposure to a variety of teaching contexts is necessary to help students cope with the multifaceted nature of South Africa's learning contexts.

The ACE English students need intensive dialogic support because they have been in the system since the days of apartheid and underwent training that emphasised compliance. Because of the time they have spent in the field, these students bring to the course their

prior beliefs based on traditional teaching and learning experiences, yet they are expected to accommodate the changes introduced by the new approach. For such students, communities of practice are an indispensable scaffolding mechanism. They offer numerous instances of dialogue in the form of group, peer and mentor discussions that create supportive environments for learning. When students engage in dialogue to solve problems, the interaction enables them to connect their new knowledge born out of consideration of other people's opinions with their previous knowledge. This view resonates with Gordon's (2008: 324) assertion that "genuine learning occurs when students are actively engaged in the process of discussing ideas, interpreting meaning and constructing knowledge", because as they interact, students' mental processes "develop from knowing to understanding then to personalising new concepts" (Wang and Ma, 2009: 249). The last stage is when a change in practice can take place. As Yost et al. (2000: 43) put it, teacher education programmes "must consider shifting their emphasis from transmission of information to transformation of student thinking through dialogue". Lieberman and Mace (2008: 227) concur. They contend that teachers learn best when they are members of a learning community and therefore urge that "teachers' professional development be refocused on the building of learning communities".

5.3   UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL NETWORKS

As a starting point, Unisa should set up communities of practice in the form of university-school networks that act as sites for collaboration between students, lecturers, mentors and teachers on matters pertaining to in-service training. The guiding idea is that if student teachers are to learn about practice in practice, the work of universities and schools must be integrated and mutually reinforcing (Ball and Cohen 1999). Research findings (Pretorius, 2004; Erben, 2006) show that the university-school networks that I recommend in the proposed programme can be a powerful means of constructing and reconstructing educational knowledge and practice. They are effective particularly in enhancing pedagogy, which is what these teachers need. Properly set up, university-school networks can provide realistic settings for clinical internships for in-service teachers. In addition, the identified schools would offer a secure haven where teachers, students and lecturers meet to exchange ideas. These schools have been successful in the West (Pretorius, 2004: 62) and SA can emulate the example not only for teacher training as such, but also for enhancing research on teaching and learning as well as maintaining "a strong partnership between

higher education institutions and schools" on various matters relating to improving the quality of education. The alternative route I propose challenges teacher education to venture further from the university (Unisa) and engage more closely with schools in a mutual transformation agenda. The guiding principle is that Unisa and each school should become a professional community within which members come together to discuss and implement ideas relating to practice.

Although professional development schools are practically suited for Unisa, this thesis will use the term "communities of practice". It is all-embracing because it encapsulates the variety of activities taking place in the different forms of communities. The idea is to develop an eclectic programme capable of accommodating the variables that are characteristic of South African schools.

6. DEFINING ELEMENTS OF THE PROGRAMME

Research on educational innovations and reform proposals in the area of professional development world-wide indicates that communities of practice in their various forms have the following attributes for success: the integration of theory and pedagogical content knowledge, the emphasis on practical application of knowledge, the use of a multiplicity of assessment practices, the development of teacher agency, and critical reflection skills[37]. These common features which constitute the defining elements of the proposed programme are discussed in detail in the next section.

6.1 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE FOSTER THE ACQUISITION AND INTEGRATION OF THEORY AND PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE.

Theory and pedagogical content knowledge are pivotal to successful facilitation of learning. Not only do the two types of knowledge equip students to interpret curriculum demands more accurately; combined, they promote a change in their teaching strategies according to need as opposed to adopting the scriptural and textbook-bound approach that I witnessed during lesson observation. According to Welch (2002), a sound theoretical base would enable teachers to rationalise their teaching approaches and the effect they have on learners while knowledge of pedagogy enables one to gain a sound understanding of the

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[37] See for instance Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Wenger, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Erben, 2006; Blingnaut, 2007; Waghid, 2009; Vieira, 2009; Whitcomb et al., 2009.

craft of teaching which is crucial to the successful facilitation of learning in the widest sense. This includes planning, using new methodologies and using a variety of methods to assess whether outcomes have been met. Thus, teacher training should enable students to master both types of knowledge with emphasis on their symbiotic relationship.

Communities of practice are vital settings for fostering this integration because they allow joint construction of pedagogical content knowledge and theory through interaction (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999). During workshops conducted at the various sites, students, in their groups, can construct pedagogical strategies based on identified outcomes, implement them, assess results and revise instruction accordingly. In addition, they can participate in the discussion of theories, methods of teaching and assignments, as well as analyse instruments that regulate teaching and learning processes such as syllabuses, lesson plans, textbooks and visual aids with reference to principles of pedagogy. This process allows students to negotiate meaning among theories, pedagogy and classroom practice. Assignments should encourage examples from within the school communities where students work. The aim is to concretise the abstract concepts. For instance, since current approaches emphasise group work, training needs to move beyond exposing students to theory regarding this strategy to helping them see how they can actually organise learners into groups, set up the tasks, monitor group discussion and assess learning formatively. Since students are geographically scattered, technological tools such as video conferencing or video broadcasting could be utilised for this purpose.

In their learning communities, students should also be encouraged to collaborate in making new resources. This activity enables them to realise that they can facilitate learning in a diversity of learning environments using whatever resources are available. In this way, "enquiry about contexts of teaching and learning improves teachers' awareness of situational constraints and dilemmas and helps them understand and cope with the problematic nature of professional situations" (Smith and Vieira, 2009: 218). The aim is to reorient students (and learners) towards acknowledging the environment as a rich learning resource, albeit rural, poor or less developed. Collaboration of this nature is vital and desirable in resource-constrained environments such as those in this study where, as the findings indicate, students are demoralised by a lack of resources. Confronting and attempting to deal with the problem in communities of practice would address the problem

of teacher fatalism about their constraints and a consequent desertion of responsibility for enacting changes.

The discussion forums should also include sessions on the use of technology. Within the context of distance education, technology offers numerous opportunities and potential for enhancing language learning by promoting greater student to student and student to lecturer participation which reduces the distance (Warschauer and Kern, 2000) and so expands communication boundaries. Effectively utilised in the classroom, technology permits instruction to be customised to the preferences of a learning situation and learner characteristics to enable learners to achieve the intended outcomes. In addition, access and use of technology exposes students to vast information resources on demand, thereby enabling them to develop as critical thinkers who analyse, evaluate and explore possibilities. Consequently, exposure to the internet should enable students to become conscious of the limitations of textbook-bound lessons and help them overcome their current inhibitions regarding the use of this tool. Instead of shunning technology as the findings show, students should exploit it to the benefit of their learners.

Finally, the dialogical nature of communities of practice allows room for interrogating their current practices and experimenting with new ones because as students internalise new pedagogical content knowledge, they gain confidence to experiment with new ideas. Regarding this study for instance, students could brainstorm the place of memorisation in teaching and learning, and the importance of problem-solving activities, or they could learn how to run an effective discussion of a literary text. During discussion under the guidance of a mentor or lecturer, students could be encouraged to interrogate these practices against relevant theories to enhance their understanding of the theory-pedagogy interface. Because of the support from peers, lecturers and mentors, these students would feel secure as they are afforded an opportunity to express their doubts and fears about the old and the new. In turn, the favourable learning environment provided by the learning community would enable them to develop "value congruence" (Harland and Kinder 1997: 73), a change of attitude, as they come to appreciate the value of the proposed change(s).

Discussions therefore foster the negotiation of three kinds of knowledge: practitioner knowledge from experience, public knowledge from research and theory, and new knowledge from collaborative efforts during group meetings. Throughout, the focus in this

transformative model should be on joint enquiry about teaching as a means of shifting practice (Erben, 2006: 468). These processes would help make the theory-practice relationship more apparent to students such as the ones cited in this study.

6.2 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE ENABLE STUDENTS TO LEARN FROM PRACTICE AND FOR PRACTICE.

Teaching practice is one of the avenues available to teacher educators to assess the level of competence of students. The Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) policy focuses on practice by requiring that teacher education programmes centre on competences required in the workplace. More importantly, it stipulates that teaching practice "should be regarded as a mode of delivery through which all different roles of educators should be assessed" (Fraser et al., 2005: 248). The emphasis is on applied integrated competence. Unfortunately, this is not the norm with in-service training in spite of the stipulation that the "demonstrated ability to integrate theory with practice in teaching must be assessed within all educator qualifications" (DoE, 2000: 13). The assumption is that students are already in the field.

Because of the reason given above, the teaching practice component is absent in the current programme. However, research findings showed that in spite of their experience, these students need practice in facilitating learning. A study undertaken by Lai (2010: 459) revealed that "in-service teachers generally identified themselves as learners and new comers to the profession and that they cherished the opportunities to learn from fellow teachers, university appointed mentors and university teachers". This is confirmed by Al-Mutawa and Al-Furaih (2005), who cite several research studies indicating the importance of emphasising classroom practice in INSET. The fact that the study participants were full-time teachers should not have made teaching practice unnecessary. Their needs might have differed from those of pre-service and beginning teachers, but the need to extend and deepen subject matter knowledge for teaching, gain a new repertoire of skills to design activities, facilitate learning and assessment using new methodologies, and acquaint themselves with recent technologies for teaching, remained. In fact, they needed more intensive practice-focused programmes because they already possessed set beliefs about what teaching entailed. They therefore needed to "unlearn" the old habits and replace them with desired ones. Because the students were already in the field, they could learn and

apply the new concepts and strategies simultaneously. Lewin and Stuart (2003: 700) emphasise that if students are to internalise the new approaches, the "theoretical and practical elements of the curriculum should be intertwined and presented in dialogic relationship rather than discrete elements".

Communities of practice in the form of university-school networks offer indispensable opportunities for students to learn from and for practice. They help to depict "practice in ways that make it accessible to teachers" (Kazemi and Hubbard 2008: 430); training is ingrained in the on-going activities within communities. The aim is to assist students to review their classroom practice in the light of educational reform, and to maintain a synergy between curriculum as it is taught and the actual demands, conditions and problems of everyday practice. Activities include team teaching, micro-teaching by individual students, demonstration lessons by lecturers and peer assessment and discussion. Through dialogic collaboration in communities of practice, students learn to address "the vexatious relationship" between theory and practice (John and Gravani, 2005: 105).

Micro-teaching has the advantage that it fosters realistic experimentation with new didactic forms, allowing the students to learn in practice and gain confidence in expanding their classroom repertoire. This is because it offers students the opportunity to teach and observe good teaching under authentic situations in placement schools. According to Erben (2006: 468), "when professional development is situated in practice, teachers actively construct approaches to teaching". Teaching practice itself should be a sustained and recursive process where students present lessons under the guidance of a lecturer, analyse their own and others' teaching in an intentional and systematic way and use the results to improve on future performance. Thus, a well-integrated teaching practice component in the programme should include elements such as observation, assessment, structured feedback as well as opportunities to retry and improve. For instance, during group discussions, samples of teaching captured on videos can be dissected and analysed systematically and improved upon. Videos are an effective tool because they offer the opportunity for fine-grained analysis of teaching episodes, thereby helping to make teachers' pedagogical reasoning transparent. This activity enables the participants to engage in interactions about elements that make up the flow of teaching and gives lecturers the opportunity to

participate in "pedagogical conversations with their students" (Mueller and Skamp, 2003: 429).

Ideally, through communities of practice students should be exposed to a diversity of school contexts. This enables them to understand the complications and demands of a teacher's work from different perspectives and to "disrupt their established ideas" about schools (Amin and Ramrathan, 2009: 73). In turn, it displaces currently-held conceptions leading to reframing memory as students' perspectives of possibilities for teaching effectively in various schools are expanded. For instance, the participants in this study seemed to believe that teaching was only effective in resource-rich environments. However, a lack of resources need not be a hindrance to a creative teacher. In fact, while context enables or disables effectiveness, it is actually what the teacher does with the resources that matters.

Communities of practice offer students opportunities to confront disabling contextual factors in their working contexts. Given that the problems are what define reality in disadvantaged environments and are not about to go away in spite of official rhetoric, I suggest that teachers should learn to continually negotiate around them as best they can. Through discussion and scaffolding on site, students learn to maximise learning opportunities in these deprived contexts instead of being overwhelmed and giving up. In other words, communities of practice should expose students to "disciplined improvisation" (Kazemi and Hubbard, 2008: 439). For instance, students can create tableaux of the negative and positive factors that affect learning in their working environments and share these. This could be in the form of variables that affect teaching and learning such as excessive bureaucracy, disabling educational policies and syllabuses, limited resources and large classes. The aim is to address these concerns under the guidance of a lecturer or mentor and find spaces to manoeuvre in order to relieve the frustration and hopelessness that characterise teaching in some contexts today. Communities of practice offer public forums for students to share, discuss, critique, and get the support that is not available in their schools. In this way, students are encouraged to boldly experiment best practices.

Finally, Cochran-Smith (2005: 301) observes that collaboration and interaction through communities of practice help to narrow the divisions among the various facets contending for spaces in teacher education, namely, educational policy, educational practice and school contexts. Through discussion sessions enhanced by models of good work, lecturers help

students to solve or successfully negotiate the contradictions. In this regard, communities of practice become instruments for "close-coupling" (Cochran-Smith, 2005: 301) of the classroom, discussion forum and education departments, thereby making the theory, practice and policy interface apparent. To maximise the benefits of micro-teaching, lecturers need the help of mentors.

6.2.1 Mentoring

Because support in teaching practice should be on-going even in the students' working sites, Unisa will have to employ the services of mentors to do the on-site coaching. Mentors can be senior teachers or Unisa tutors who have been adequately trained in the new approaches. According to the Commonwealth of Learning, learner support is an important element of any distance education programme. At Unisa, this comes in numerous dimensions (accessing reading and course material, submission of assignments, examination dates and venues, tutorial sessions in various regions), all of which are meant to facilitate systematic support. However, much needs to be done in the way of scaffolding learning itself because this "has to be effective to support effective learning" (WGDEOL, 2002: 84). The group argues that distance learners who study without provision of adequate support from their institutions are unlikely to be successful. Unisa's large drop-out rate is evidence of this unfortunate reality.

Mentoring facilitates the students' professional growth. According to Mohono-Mahlatsi and van Tonder (2006: 387), it "reduces professional isolation, provides support and feedback with regards to performance, and gives confidence to mentees". For students to learn effectively from practice, they need constant classroom visits where their performance is observed first hand. During these visits, the mentor provides explicit coaching which involves a pre-class conference to discuss the lesson plan followed by the actual observation and ending with a post-class conference. The intention is to enhance the student's craft knowledge (Jiménez Raya, 2009) and help the mentee become an independent and confident teacher. Alternatively, a mentor and mentee can teach together as a form of scaffolding. Through sustained dialogue during the entire programme, mentors act as co-enquirers to promote critical reflection on teaching and learning. The emphasis is on professional collaboration as mentors help mentees apply theory to their school contexts.

Communities of practice are best suited to foster "knowledge for, knowledge in and knowledge of practice" (John and Gravani, 2005: 125).

6.3 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE FOSTER THE USE OF A MULTIPLICITY OF ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES.

Darling-Hammond (2006) identifies two categories of evidence needed in assessing the quality of teacher training: evidence about the professional performance of students and evidence about performance in the classroom during student teaching. The former is related to theory and pedagogy and includes such aspects as performance in assignments, examination and projects requiring analyses of teaching and learning, while the latter is the skill in implementing the new knowledge. Together, these two categories encompass the skills, knowledge and values that a teacher needs to perform daily tasks.

Currently, there are two forms of assessment for each ACE module as described in Chapter 2, namely a compulsory assignment and the final examination. Given the identified student needs, these are inadequate mechanisms, hence the proposal for multiple assessment strategies as an essential feature of the new programme. The aim is to gain as full a picture as possible of a student's ability to teach effectively.

Teacher training grounded in communities of practice provides room for implementing multifaceted assessment practices. These communities promote interactive learning, so assessment becomes a joint effort of lecturers, mentors, student teachers and even heads of department whose relationship should be considered as a learning partnership. Areas of assessment would include performance in test scores such as assignments and examinations, lesson observations and analysis of the students' practical work through journal keeping.

Ideally, assignments should require students to link theory with practice and to demonstrate application of the new ideas in the classroom. As a way of empowering them, students should be actively involved in the assessment process. For example, students can assess themselves or, in their communities of practice, each other's assignments, provided they are given sufficient guidance in the form of a comprehensive memorandum or an example of good work. They can then discuss the marked work in their discussion forums as this helps them to interrogate their own thoughts, seek clarification regarding grey areas and gain understanding. Throughout, lecturers should scaffold learning through modelling of

good work, challenging and encouraging a diversity of opinions. Emphasis should not be on the final result only but also on the process.

The proposed programme includes a teaching practice component because the focus is on improved teacher competence in the classroom. Consequently, lesson observation becomes a key assessment strategy. Although students would be visited at their sites of learning, most of the assessment and evaluation should take place at university schools where these students can come to give classes under the supervision of lecturers. Such assessment should be formative. It cannot be obtained in a once-off performance because it will require a "diverse range of evidence that is collected over time, in authentic contexts and from which it can be inferred that the trainee educator has the ability to adapt practice to changing circumstances" (Fraser et al., 2005: 252). Tillema (2009: 157) advocates communities of practice "in the form of triads or joint appraisals" because each assessor looks at a teaching event from a different perspective. For instance, the lecturer might look at a lesson presentation from the point of view of how it meets course standards, the mentor might be concerned with how the learning experience benefits learners and the student is more concerned with coping with the demands of the teaching and learning situation. Each of these aspects is a necessary component of a student's professional growth. Lesson observation therefore should not be haphazard but systematic; the observer must identify key moments (an instructional episode) in the student's presentation that confirm that the intended outcome has or has not been achieved. In addition, assessment should be seen as a learning curve so that when a group discusses a lesson presentation, emphasis should be on constructive feedback to enable the student to learn from the process.

Lastly, there should be evidence from the reflective journal which represents a student's planning as well as instructional and assessment abilities (Darling-Hammond, 2006). This should be assessed at designated points during the training. Journals are important assessment mechanisms as they enable supervisors to gain "an insight into student teachers' professional growth" (Ezati et al., 2010: 33). According to Collier (1999), reflective journals extend and clarify student teachers' thoughts and concerns, allowing supervisors to support them in their development. Furthermore, keeping a reflective journal ensures that

student teachers set aside time for daily reflection which in turn gives them a sense of direction.

Finally, through interaction and sharing in communities of practice, students get to know how they are assessed and why. In this way, they are empowered to take control of their learning, and empowerment is a necessary ingredient for change.

6.4 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE FOSTER TEACHER AGENCY.

One of the crucial determinants for successful change of practice has been identified as teacher agency (Osman and Kirk, 2001; Hill, 2003; Jiménez Raya, 2007). This notion refers to students' belief in as well as their capacity to tackle change and overcome barriers. It involves students interacting with their attitudes, values and beliefs about practice and being able to make personal judgements resulting in developing confidence to think for themselves. This in turn empowers them to take responsibility for decisions they make in their practice which is the essence of teacher agency.

Current trends in education emphasise the need for agentic teachers. This quality is pivotal to successful facilitation of learning because teachers can confront challenges with confidence. In this study, the students' behaviour reflected a lack of agency because not only did they not interrogate policy but they failed to manipulate the available teaching and learning resources for the benefit of their learners. Instead, they maintained a victim mentality (cf. Chapter 6: 5.2). They should be empowered by being given opportunities during training "to make associations between their own personal meanings, their work and the acquisition of new methods of teaching" (Van den Berg, 2002: 590).

Communities of practice are ideally situated for fostering teacher agency because they offer sites "where student teachers as learners themselves have opportunities for critical thinking, for group and individual processing and articulation" (Osman and Kirk, 2001: 176). Since the impetus for change originates within the personal aspect of professional learning, the sharing of views, doubts and problems about teaching and learning helps students to re-evaluate their currently held beliefs and attitudes about the expected shift in practice. This leads to a reconstruction of their knowledge. Through continuous dialogues, students get to understand what is feasible or not in school contexts. Furthermore, the interaction helps them maintain a positive attitude which is an important ingredient for effecting change. Put succinctly, teachers "must be allowed to take charge" (Hill, 2003: 100). To this end,

communities of practice should promote a learning environment characterised by dissent and challenge where students are allowed to question and analyse their beliefs in the light of new knowledge. This fosters teacher agency as teachers learn to confront uncertainty and ambiguity in supportive environments.

Communities of practice provide contexts for grounding professional development in teachers' meanings and this in turn promotes teacher agency. Al-Mutawa and Al-Furaih (2005) cite several research studies which emphasise the need to design training programmes that are based on the input of trainees. Through communities of practice, lecturers can elicit the teachers' views about the programme and use the input to create a knowledge base for improvement. It is important for students such as those in this study to have a say in the way they are trained because they have experienced the profession. They should therefore be allowed to tell their stories. As this study has done, there should be greater contact with students to obtain a deeper insight into their needs and challenges and how the programme needs to adapt to meet them. According to Blignaut (2007: 57), communities of practice promote this sharing by creating "spaces for teachers to form professional relationships and this helps in creating understanding especially among teachers operating from different epistemological assumptions about not only the nature of knowledge but also how it should be transmitted". Burns (2005: 355) concurs. He argues for training that accommodates teachers' beliefs, values and attitudes resulting from their professional history and identity, as well as the context in which they work because "it is from these that teachers' thinking and actions result, and through these that lasting changes will be brought about where it matters – the classroom".

The basis of the proposed training programme is that teachers must be actively involved as a way of grooming effective and agentic teachers. Lack of agency might result in lethargy or resistance to new ideas as was evident with the participants in this study. This often happens when outsiders push for reforms without seeking the teachers' voices. As Jiménez Raya (2007: 33) avers, "unless teachers retain a sense of agency about why and how they might teach in a different way, any appeal for innovation in modern language teaching will almost certainly ring hollow". Programmes such as the current ACE English are "designed according to the centre-to-periphery model" (John and Gravani, 2005: 106) where teachers

are marginalised from the process. Perhaps a lack of teacher agency is one of the reasons why OBE implementation has remained very superficial.

6.5 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE FOSTER THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL REFLECTIVE SKILLS.

Recent INSET studies show that teachers are more likely to be successful professionally when they are afforded the opportunity not only to develop new skills but also to participate in thoughtful reflective discussion with the assistance of more knowledgeable peers who provide support (Fullan, 2000; Erben, 2006). In line with this trend, language teacher development is moving away from viewing teachers as receivers of "how to" methods for their profession towards teachers as thinkers, decision-makers and problem-posers. These skills are developed through reflective dialogue. The intention is to generate a community of reflective practitioners who critique teaching methods and continuously strive to improve their practice. Fraser et al. (2005: 236) contend that "without the ability to reflect on and learn from experiences, teachers will not be aware of limitations of their foundational competence and they will be unable to improve on their practical competence". Critical reflection therefore is a mode of critical enquiry. It is a form of interaction that is richer and deeper than the normal dialogue because, apart from sharing ideas with others, it also emphasises introspection, a very personal process that requires the student to analyse his/her practice deliberately and honestly and then use the information to inform instructional practices. Some of the advantages of equipping teachers with well-developed critical reflective skills in the classroom are discussed below.

Firstly, in order to produce critical thinkers who can operate effectively in the 21st century, teachers themselves need to be reflective thinkers. This way, they are able to design instructional strategies that help their learners develop criticality in a focused way. As a starting point, teachers have to be trained to develop critical reflective skills, which is what the proposed programme intends to do.

Secondly, critical reflection fosters the generation of meaning which is pivotal in narrowing the theory-practice dichotomy. According to Day (1997: 44), an important aim of adult education is "to address the dialogical relationship between theories (why we do what we do) and practices (what we do and how we do it)". This understanding, which occurs through critical reflection, enables the teacher to theorise classroom practices. This is

because connecting theory with practice enables students to develop a rationale for action and gives them the "ability to engage in dynamic professional relationships" (Erben, 2006: 471).

Finally, because the epistemology of reflection "stresses multiple viewpoints" (Yost et al., 2000: 41), critical reflection exposes students to examining their own classroom practices with a view to determining what works, discarding what does not work and most importantly, being able to justify those actions (Zeichner and Liston, 1996; Gimenez, 1999; Hiebert et al., 2007). This is achieved through reflective and systematic analysis of teaching episodes under the guidance of a lecturer or mentor. Teaching is so complex that it needs some parsing in order to understand it, hence the need for a focused and outcome-oriented approach to micro-teaching as described in the previous section. Through reflective analysis of case studies or chunks of lessons, students can observe the experience of others and make links with their own classroom experiences in order to make informed decisions about practice. It is this "continual and systematic analysis of teaching" (Hiebert et al., 2007: 49) that constitutes the core of practice. Reflection also helps students understand how the various resources can be better used to support learning and in this way sharpens "professional vision" (Kazemi and Hubbard, 2008: 437). As Harley and Parker (2006: 875) contend, "good teaching and promotion of scholarship depend on debate, critique and even conflict" to effect change. Mueller and Skamp (2003: 429) concur and posit that "opportunities of articulating learning episodes and of problematising these experiences collectively provide common ground for reflective practices". Because the contexts in which teachers operate are typified by uncertainty and on-going change, teachers need to be reflective change agents.

According to Van den Berg (2002: 603), "teachers learn most in the context of reflection and collaboration" aimed at stimulating critical pedagogic conversations. Communities of practice provide a platform for reflective dialogue which is ideal for fostering critical reflection. In these communities, enquiry flourishes through the exchange of ideas leading to the building of professional knowledge (Mitchell et al., 2010).

Reflective dialogue is an essential mechanism for effecting conceptual change. It is a type of interaction characterised by careful listening to others' point of view, open-mindedness, and questioning for clarification, a process that induces "disequilibrium and cognitive conflict"

(Yost et al., 2000: 42). The "cognitive disequilibrium" (Hill, 2000:51) leads to an analysis of old ways and an awareness that the ideas currently held are inadequate. If old ways are not analysed, "they remain unchanged, existing patterns continue" (Van Aswegen and Dreyer, 2004: 295). In other words, failure to critically reflect on practice and question underlying beliefs leads to an inability to engage with the new understandings which, in turn, might be rejected. In addition, engaging in reflective dialogue fosters risk-taking as students are encouraged to identify and express the assumptions they bring to teaching and to be aware of the existing habits that restrict them. In this way, reflection acts as a stabilising force during the process of change, leading to empowerment as students are able "to reflect upon their own lives and teaching situations; to speak out in their own ways about deficiencies that must be addressed" (Paola, 2001: 270). By engaging in this mental process, students construct new meaning as they relinquish the familiar and comfortable (Rogoff, 2001). This way, reflective dialogue increases students' awareness, comprehension and ability to deal with complexities and uncertainties that characterise the learning and teaching situation.

While it is the responsibility of the lecturer to prepare and equip teachers for the demands of the classroom, the professional reality in schools is so varied that each teacher has to contend with a unique situation in the classroom; s/he needs to be able to handle the complex dynamics of classroom activities. In other words, there is a need for professional development programmes that are "congruent with the current context of uncertainty and rapid change" (John and Gravani, 2005: 123). Engaging in continuous reflective dialogue enables students to continually adjust to the shifting sands that typify today's educational arena.

Teacher training programmes should therefore aim to instil in students reflexive competences that enable them to examine what they achieve, identify what professional development they need to improve their pedagogical delivery, learn new practices as well as reflect on the effect of their teaching. The aim is to develop "reflective practitioners who will recognise the value in regularly critiquing their pedagogical practices" (Yost et al, 2000: 41).

One of the instruments that effectively foster critical reflection is journal writing (Ezati, et al., 2010). Journaling not only activates reflection, it also enables trainees to track their

instructional practices. It entails documenting experiences and thoughts which students later share and analyse during group sessions. The aim is to have a portfolio that systematically documents the artefacts and learning processes that emerged during the training. In this way, journaling promotes reflection both in and outside the classroom. Among the skills to be developed are self-reflection, practitioner enquiry and critical reading. Scholars (Loughran, 2002; Ezati et al., 2010) observe that reflective journals promote introspection into practices, thereby linking them to theories learnt. In this way, they give students the opportunity to engage in metacognitive thinking. This happens because students are provided with opportunities "to think critically about what is done around them, what they are doing about it and why" (Kazemi and Hubbard, 2008: 430). This is important because teacher learning involves developing both knowledge and ways of knowing. In the proposed programme, journaling occurs throughout the two years as a way of interweaving reflection into the curriculum.

In brief, what is proposed is a transformative model that is embedded in communities of practice. Based on the preceding discussion, the design features are as follows:

- Construction of knowledge on the part of students through dialogue;
- Situation of learning in practice so that the pedagogical skills are addressed by university-based teacher educators as well as field experiences;
- Development of competences needed to teach as reflected in applied competence;
- Use of multiple assessment strategies;
- Provision of opportunities for students to link theory with practice through micro-teaching and observation of good practice;
- Development of teacher agency;
- Fostering of critical reflection on both theory and practice.

The guiding principle of this constructivist model is that learning is a holistic process which is socially mediated and context-bound. It is a holistic model that encompasses the latest in teacher education research, takes into account the uniqueness of the South African context and draws from the weaknesses identified in this study. In addition, the design features respond to the need for more rigorous teacher education for this group of teachers in order to effect the desired change. This vision of the programme design is consonant with that of Ball and Cohen (1999), who contend that if teachers are to learn about practice in practice,

there needs to be a symbiotic relationship between universities and schools. To this end, the programme suggested below is teacher development-based, context-sensitive and fluid.

7. PROGRAMME THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current programme is very positivist in design as indicated by the following features: study guide centred, content-based, under-utilisation of media, a surface coat of contemporary views of learning, and a lack of practical application of theory. In contrast, the proposed programme reflects a constructivist view of learning because it is grounded in communities of practice which are in turn defined by dialogue and interaction. The conceptual framework is rooted in a view of teachers as reflective and critical language practitioners who are confident to adapt their teaching to suit the different contexts in which they practise. In this respect, learning becomes a social activity involving participants' construction of knowledge in collaboration with others. In other words, it is an active, constructive and continual process which involves "experimentation, … discovering what can be done with things … [and] reflection" (Kivinen and Ristela, 2003: 373).

The programme considers students' experiences, with an emphasis on both stories and theories. Because teaching situations are unique, so are the students' experiences. In this respect, training becomes a collaborative engagement during which students are encouraged to use their stories to share information with lecturers, mentors and other students with a view to achieving understanding that leads to change. These processes give the programme a socio-constructivist ethos. In its report on teacher training programmes offered by Unisa, SAIDE criticises the institution for among other things, text-heavy study guides "with little learner support and little development of communities of learning among the target audience" (2006: 22). The training programme that is conceptualised in the next section seeks to address these issues.

8. PROGRAMME OUTCOMES

The outcomes of the re-conceptualised programme are to enable students to

- demonstrate in-depth subject matter knowledge;
- demonstrate a coherent and critical understanding of the principles and theories of teaching and learning and the ability to make sound theoretical judgements;

- demonstrate aspects of an efficient educator in terms of planning, implementing and assessing learning;

- use technology to enhance learning;

- teach effectively in a variety of learning contexts;

- assess learners through the use of multiple assessment strategies;

- demonstrate flexibility in thinking and ability to adapt to curriculum change;

- show insight into disabling contextual factors and into the possible processes to solve the problems;

- engage in critical reflective practice for the benefit of learners.

These outcomes are responsive to the design features of the programme which in turn reflect the identified student needs. The aim is to produce a teacher who does not only possess the required knowledge and skills but is also able to continually learn to address the problems of practice s/he encounters in order to meet the unpredictable learning needs of learners; a teacher who can adapt to change. This is in harmony with the transformational vision of the model.

9. COMPONENTS OF THE RECONCEPTUALISED ENGLISH PROGRAMME

This section presents the programme outline by listing the modules that will comprise the qualification. Under each module is a brief description that is meant to provide a link with the student needs identified at the beginning of the chapter. In structure, the programme is intended to develop the students' foundational, practical and reflective competence so as to effect a change in practice.

Two modules will revise and combine material from the existing modules on language proficiency and teaching literature. There are five new modules:

9.1 PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

This module focuses on content knowledge of pedagogy and will replace the current module, ACEEN2-6. It focuses on the course "hardware" (Yan, 2005: 472): planning, teaching methodologies and assessment. Unlike the current module, the new module will be context-sensitive and accommodate tasks and activities which enable teachers to work substantively with a learner-centred curriculum in a variety of contexts. The aim is to provide a

professional knowledge base relating to pedagogy as well as a firm grasp of how to teach English effectively to a diverse community of learners. In this regard, the emphasis is on pedagogic approaches that are currently advocated, such as the communicative approach and related strategies such as learner-centredness, project work and continuous assessment. The content should be reinforced by the practical module on teaching practice.

9.2 CONTEMPORARY LEARNING THEORIES ON LANGUAGE TEACHING

Although the theoretical constructs from which policy-makers expect teachers to develop classroom practice are explicit, the interviews revealed that students were not necessarily able to describe explicitly the theoretical frameworks within which they worked, even though what they did, for instance their emphasis on grammar, was embedded in theory. The module introduces students to a selection of theories and practices developed by some prominent scholars and teachers of English Education. It is grounded in the importance of understanding theory as a basis for effective teaching and aimed at helping students theorise their own practices. During the course, students are exposed to diverse and even conflicting views so as to sharpen their critical skills. The aim is to cultivate an understanding of teaching and learning in relation to current educational theories such as constructivism. In addition, the dialogical relationship between teacher educators and students should help the latter to deconstruct their practical work to expose the underlying theory.

9.3 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

The focus is on facilitating the acquisition of new knowledge and skills required to manipulate disabling contextual factors to enhance learning. Topics include teaching large classes, sourcing resources in deprived environments, working with parents and addressing special needs among students. Accordingly, the content should be based on students' working environments and extensive use should be made of case studies, illustrations and analogies.

9.4 TECHNOLOGY

The module responds to the need to exploit the potential of information and communication technologies in distance education. It provides explicit instruction on how to use technology to enhance learning and teaching, as well as improve communication and learning within communities of practice. Students should demonstrate in practical terms all the theory they learn in this course. This is in line with Unisa's vision because from March

2012, all course materials will be designed for e-learning and information technology will be integrated into the Unisa study package.

Currently, Unisa offers numerous channels that enable both lecturers and students to utilise technology. These include e-mails, sms, video conferencing and satellite broadcasts. As a way of leading by example, the module should exploit all these technological avenues. When students experience them, they gain the confidence to use these resources for the enhancement of teaching and learning in their schools.

9.5 TEACHING PRACTICE

This is a practical module that is facilitated mainly through engagement in communities of practice, that is, schools near Unisa and various Unisa centres across South Africa. The focus is on the practical tasks that occupy a teacher's day, namely planning, facilitating and assessing learning. It is designed to provide students with opportunities to engage with concepts related to reflective practice in the form of a journal. The module is designed to implement concepts covered in the modules on pedagogy and theories of language learning. On-going activities include micro-teaching, analysis of lessons presented, modelling of good practice by lecturers, tutors and students, knowledge construction through reflection on practice as well as critical thinking about prior beliefs and experiences. The module is intended to help students rework their classroom practice and in turn classroom practice should help them make sense of engagement in professional development.

Although Unisa is a distance education institution, all students registered for ACE reside in South Africa, which makes it possible to hold micro-teaching sessions at designated intervals during the two-year duration of the programme. This mentored school-based practice should be a requirement of the course and arrangements will have to be made with schools to release students for designated periods of two weeks each year for this purpose.

In its 2006 report on teacher education programmes offered by Unisa, SAIDE criticised the institution's mode of teacher training for not having a school-based component, observing that there is no attempt by the institution to use the school as a site for explicit training. The reconceptualised ACE English programme aims to rectify this weakness.

9.6 CURRENT MODULES

Currently, the ACE English qualification is made up of five modules.[38] In the proposed programme, module ACEEN1-5, which deals with language proficiency, is retained intact. The modules ACEEN2-8, and ACEEN5-A which focus on literature, are collapsed into one literature module. The module ACEEN4-9, which deals with English Language Studies, is incorporated into the language proficiency module.

10.   A SUMMARY OF THE TWO PROGRAMMES

Table 24: The two programmes

	Current programme	**Reconceptualised programme**
1	ACEEN1-5: A proficiency module on writing and reading comprehension.	A proficiency module on writing and reading comprehension and grammar.
2	ACEEN2-6: Subject didactics module on the teaching of English in second and third language contexts.	Module on literature: to provide students with a knowledge base for teaching literature and to develop in students an appreciation for and enjoyment of the subject.
3	ACEEN3-8: Literature module to develop in students an appreciation for and enjoyment of literature.	Module on theories of language learning and teaching: to expose students to relevant language learning and teaching theories.
4	ACEEN4-9: module on English Language Studies.	Module on pedagogy: to equip students with pedagogical knowledge they need to facilitate and assess learning effectively.
5	ACEEN5-A: module on poetry and drama experience.	Module on contextual factors: to provide students with a platform to interrogate contextual factors with a view of improving learning and teaching.
6		Module on technology: to arm students with knowledge and skills on how to use technology to enhance communication, teaching and learning.
7		Module on teaching practice: to provide the much-needed practice in implementing the suggested approaches and to develop critical reflective skills.

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[38] Each of these modules is described in detail in Chapter 2

The modules proposed embrace the key issues that in-service training should address: subject knowledge, pedagogy, assessment and reflection. In addition, they also address the gaps identified in the research namely, the lack of

- a theoretical knowledge base,
- reflective skills,
- computer and technological skills and
- skills to cope with contextual factors.

Conceptually, the modules respond to the purpose of this qualification, which is to effect a change in practice. Because it is a transformative model, the basis of all activities is enquiry and change. This is because "enquiry about contexts of teaching and learning improves teachers' awareness of situational constraints and dilemmas and helps them understand and cope with the problematic nature of professional situations" (Smith and Vieira, 2009: 218). This way, teachers will be able to make informed decisions about what and how to adapt to a situation to enhance learning.

Together, the modules facilitate the acquisition of the three types of knowledge, namely: *knowledge of practice*, what students acquire through coursework; *knowledge in practice*, which is what they gain through micro-teaching; and *knowledge for practice*, a combination of both types of knowledge which is gained through reflection. The language proficiency and teaching practice modules run for the entire duration of the programme. Students can spread the remaining modules across the two years.

FIGURE 8: THE RECONCEPTUALISED ACE ENGLISH PROGRAMME

The programme is based on the socio-constructivist framework and embedded in communities of practice consisting of lecturers, students, mentors, teachers, heads of departments in schools and learners. In the centre of the circle is the aim, which is to effect a change in practice. As the discussion in the preceding sections has shown, programmes meant to bring about change should involve intensive learning and interaction to enable students to mediate between old and new ideas. The different modules and skills they promote should be reflected as working in collaboration towards that goal.

The programme is designed logically in that it makes provision for *situated learning* when students depend on lecturers to give input and *situated cognition* when students learn from real life by practising and interrogating practices and theories. The two are reinforced by case-based instruction during which students learn by actually practising. It is therefore a

rigorous programme designed to chart reflective and iterative classroom practices aimed at more informed teacher practices in the classroom.

I concede that this programme is not a panacea for all ills because, whether or not individuals in professional development programmes become more effective teachers also depends on their personality, on what motivates them, and on what they perceive as important for them to learn. The design is neither perfect nor final, nor is it guaranteed to produce excellent teachers. I am aware that there will always be a gap between reality and the ideal that this programme represents. Therefore, like all programmes, it will have to be assessed and adjusted and examined for alignment with regulatory frameworks.

11.   CONCLUSION

The answer to the question of what it takes to change teachers' classroom practice has occupied minds of academics for decades. For this reason, the search for effective training programmes is an on-going process. This proposed programme is one such initiative.

The heading of this chapter, *An Alternative Route*, reflects my stance that instead of continuing to focus on reforming the curriculum and pouring resources into dysfunctional schools, we should concentrate on the lowest denominator in the system — the teacher. In this regard, I am advocating a multipronged approach to teacher professional development. It is an approach that takes into account, apart from the usual competences, the symbiotic relationship between theory and practice, teaching contexts, the ability to exploit technology, and above all, the teachers' attitudes, values and beliefs. I contend this can be achieved if the programme is embedded in communities of practice because they are instruction-focused, sustainable and continuous. Most importantly, they provide opportunities for students to learn from one another and from lecturers and mentors, and engage all participants in thinking about what they do and why. The continual dialogue involving interrogation of practices is crucial in maximising the effectiveness of the programme's impact.

As I write this thesis, the ACE English programme as described in Chapter 2 continues to run unchanged, thereby creating a gap that this programme is intended to fill. Given the unpredictability of educational practice, the proposal is likely to invite controversy, particularly on its feasibility within the context of Unisa as a distance education institution.

In this regard, the conclusion to this thesis in the next chapter marks the beginning of a process to make this programme a reality. This is my dream, the dream that sparked the study.

I am aware that this is an ambitious programme. However, continued neglect of teacher training exacts a high price, often in the form of the difference between design and execution of a curriculum and the accompanying negative impact on learning. It is a cost that South Africa can ill-afford to *continue* to pay.

CHAPTER 8: LOOKING BACK: A REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION

What is the study about?

The research highlights students' understanding of OBE through a systematic assessment of the effect of a training course on professional performance. In doing so, it tells two intertwined stories. One is a quest to understand student teachers' classroom practice in relation to the OBE methodology and the other is a process evaluation of a subject didactics English course. The unit of analysis is a group of student teachers registered for a methodology course, *Teaching English: General Principles,* offered by the Department of English Studies, Unisa.

The purpose was dualistic in nature. Firstly, it was to determine the impact of the ACEEN2-6 course on the students' professional practice and secondly, to conceptualise a training programme that responds to the identified needs.

The study was, in a way, an evaluation of the impact and relevance of the materials. The findings were used as a basis for reconceptualising the entire ACE English programme.

To achieve these aims, I structured the study around the following two overarching questions which guided the data collection process:

> *What is the impact of the ACEEN2-6 module on the professional practice of student teachers? What aspects need to be improved?*

Why did you embark on the study?

It was driven by my need to establish whether the materials that I design for this course had any effect on the students' classroom practices. I wanted to understand how the eight teachers made sense of OBE, given their own epistemologies within the unique contexts in which they worked. My desire to find out emanated from school visits I made in 2006 to observe and assess teaching practice. During the lesson observations, I became aware of the gap between my expectations as lecturer in charge of the course and the realities in the classrooms. What struck me most were the challenging teaching contexts that the students had to contend with. This kindled in me a desire to find out what impact, if at all, the course materials I designed had on classroom practice. Poppleton's (1999: 233) statement that "when schools fail, the causes are often seen to lie in the quality of the teaching provided which, in turn, is seen to reflect on the quality of training that teachers receive and finally, the quality of those who provide the training" was decisive. In my role as lecturer for the

modules dealing with English teaching methodology, I felt compelled and found myself well-placed to investigate issues relating to pedagogy regarding this group of students.

What was your research plan?

I followed a qualitative data collection and analysis approach using a triangulation of three instruments — the in-depth interview which was the main source of data, lesson observation and examination of records. I found this paradigm most appropriate because my intention was to generate meaning by interpreting the students' practices, views and opinions. To obtain as full a picture as possible, each visit lasted five days during which I was able not only to observe and interview the student but also absorb the prevailing school atmosphere as I interacted with learners and other teachers. This prolonged contact with each of the eight students in the sample resulted in thick descriptions that are the hallmark of qualitative research. In addition, I kept a reflective journal to document my feelings, frustrations and highlights during the study.

The findings culminated in a list of training needs that formed the basis for responding to the second aim of the study, namely the design of a new programme.

Are you satisfied with the research instruments?

Yes, to a large extent I am. The use of a tape recorder for recording in-depth interviews enabled me to repeatedly sift through the information during data analysis. Because interviews were lengthy — lasting an hour — they generated very rich data in spite of the poor language proficiency that characterized most of the interactions. However, my inability to speak any of the local languages was a drawback because in some instances, it limited the depth of probing.

Regarding lesson observation, I concede that videotaping the teaching episodes would have resulted in more in-depth and objective analyses. Unfortunately, a lack of funding for the research made this option impossible. In addition, although I observed a minimum of eight and a maximum of ten lessons by each student, in some instances this did not result in richness of data as some students merely repeated the same lesson in different classes of the same grade. As I pointed out in the findings, most of the lessons were mechanical in nature and lacking in creativity. Usually, some preparation went into the first lessons but as the week progressed the students let go of their guard and behaved normally. I found the lethargic approach that characterised the bulk of the lessons very disturbing.

Analysis of student records presented no challenges. However, some of the records were scant in information, reflecting a rudimentary understanding of lesson planning and marking.

Most of the aforementioned weaknesses were offset by triangulation. This process has the advantage that each instrument elicits information of a different type and thus it enabled me to examine the phenomenon from different angles.

Because of the dynamic nature of teaching, the data speak only to what teachers did and said during my visits. Whether they continued to teach in the same manner or improve on it is subject to further research.

What were the limitations of this study?

Well, given the fact that I needed to do the research during a specific period, it was not possible to involve more than eight participants. I concede that a bigger sample would perhaps have generated a wider spectrum of views. I also could not make the study longitudinal because of the fluid nature of operational structures in schools. Many of these students taught other subjects and languages apart from English and in some instances a student registered for this course did not even teach the subject but something else, such as Life Orientation. In one instance, I could not interview a student during my visit and when I went back to do the interview at the end of the third term, I found she was teaching Sepedi only; her English classes had been assigned to another teacher. At times I found these shifting sands frustrating. Finally, representation of school types in this study is not reflective of reality because seven out of the eight research participants are from urban environments. In reality, a substantial number of students in this course teach in rural schools. Due to a lack of funding for this study, it was not possible to reach them.

In this thesis you focus on OBE. Don't you think this is outdated in the South African context?

Many people have asked me that question. Let me set the record straight. Yes, OBE no longer exists, at least in name, yet I believe every educational system is based on identified outcomes. Despite this change by the Department of Education, I am convinced that the guiding principles of OBE that I deal with extensively in the literature review chapter remain cornerstones of sound educational practice. I doubt whether any progressive educationist would disagree with my stance. In addition, the programme I suggest transcends educational reforms; regardless of the educational paradigm South Africa adopts after OBE,

the need for a teacher who is able to work creatively and critically, who can adapt to change, manage diversity and who is competent in the different aspects of instructional practice remains.

I quite like your focus on the impact of training on the students' practice. Have you any idea of how the learners these students teach perform in the matric examinations?

The question raises a whole new debate about what teacher training is supposed to achieve and what the teacher's role actually is. Should we train for examinations? This is a highly contested topic and I doubt whether there will ever be consensus among the different stakeholders on this issue because concepts such as quality training and good teaching are relative. Here is what I think: although the aim of teacher training is to improve teacher quality and hence the quality of learning, I am yet to be convinced of the **direct** relationship between learner performance in examinations and the courses we offer. Training should produce capable teachers but whether that includes being able to teach for examinations is another matter. I am embarrassed to admit that as a teacher educator, I have a hazy idea of the outcomes for the matric English FAL examinations. In any case, as the research findings show, not all students registered for this course teach in the FET phase. Perhaps this is where communities of practice come in. Increased dialogue among different stakeholders which in this case would include personnel from Umalusi would help bridge this gap and make the efforts of all concerned coherent. At present we seem to be dancing to different tunes.

For obvious reasons, teacher quality continues to be judged on test scores. Good teachers are perceived to be the ones who produce the best results but whether their ability to do so is a direct result of their training is subject to research. Unfortunately, this expectation encourages teachers to drill for the examination as opposed to adopting learner-centred practices. This is a drawback because teaching for results pulls teachers away from taking care of diverse interests, capabilities and learning trajectories within a learning situation. Comments by students in this study such as "*In Grade 12 we don't play, we teach for exams*" seem to indicate a disjuncture between the didactics course Unisa offers and examination requirements. This is further confirmed by the ironic fact that one of the students, whose teaching approach was teacher-centred and very audio-lingually based, produced very good matric results.

The position of having to deal with the paradox of teaching to produce good results and education for life places teachers in a dilemma. In the findings, I refer to a very insightful comment by a student who was clearly not excited about using group work as advocated in the new approach. His reason was that in the examinations, learners work individually and would be disadvantaged if they were used to co-operative learning. Contradictions such as these frustrate teachers and hamper the adoption of new practices. I think it is the responsibility of lecturers and education officials to assist teachers in negotiating such competing discourses in education.

Teachers' power essentially lies at the level of implementation. In a situation where curriculum developers emphasise assessment, the outcomes resulting from the teachers' reflection have no space. What is best is a middle way where critical reflection and acceptance of external direction find common ground.

You seem convinced that the programme you propose should lead to a change in practice. How do you justify this?
Well, mainly because the programme draws on research-based evidence of the students' needs as well as the contextual constraints affecting them. This chimes with current educational discourse that encourages teacher educators to "design programmes that are integrated into the teachers' daily work" (Kazemi & Hubbard, 2008: 432) and discourages programme design based on 'utopianism' (Mohammed 2006: 384).

In addition, the programme is encased within communities of practice in response to current trends worldwide that locate professional development in schools. The intention is to foster co-operation and collaboration among different stakeholders such as students, lecturers, teachers, mentors, education officials and learners. Underlying this design is my belief that teacher preparation that includes a strong subject and pedagogical base, partnership with professional development schools and emphasis on linking theory and practice should enable students to effect a change in pedagogy. The continual dialogue among these parties is aimed at closing the gap between university curricula, policy and school contexts in terms of content as well as methods of instruction. This gives the programme its interactive and fluid nature in contrast to the straight-jacketed design of the current one. The ultimate aim is to demonstrate innovative teacher education practices.

What I advocate in this programme is a multipronged approach to teacher professional development in response to the different professional development needs of our students and the obligation to move them from where they are to where they have to be. The study is therefore a way of directing my gaze inwards to theorise my own practices. It is my attempt to chart reflective and iterative curriculum development practices which should lead to more informed teacher practices in the classroom. My vision is of a teacher whose conception of the formal elements of teaching is non-context bound, who is confident and capable of managing the knowledge needed to teach effectively in classroom environments that are so diverse that they require constant adaptation of teaching. It is a humanistic approach to teacher development.

How feasible is this programme given the student numbers? Do they justify the physical networks that you propose?

I concede that currently the numbers are low but this is not about registration figures. It is about providing quality training, given that each teacher influences the lives of thousands of learners during his/her working life. *This* is where the numbers apply.

In terms of feasibility, my contention is this: since research findings have indicated that the current training does not have much impact on practice, there has to be an alternative, and this is what I set out to propose. I am aware of scepticism that surrounds proposals to improve programmes because most of them do not materialise. As Shulman (2004:18) asserts, "if the goal of educational research is significant improvement in the functioning of educational programmes, I know of little evidence that researchers have made discernible strides in that direction". Mine is a doable plan that should confound critics. Unfortunately, it is not within my power to work out the logistics. That responsibility rests on the upper echelons of Unisa.

I am aware that teacher training programmes and curricula come and go and are adapted from time to time in response to the ever-changing needs of society. In this respect, the programme I propose is not cast in stone but should continue to be constantly evaluated, verified and refined as teacher educators continue to strive to establish the "relationships among aspects of preparation, teacher learning, teaching practice and student learning that the field is wrestling with" (Darling-Hammond, 2006: 133). The training itself should be an

on-going cycle of theory, practice and reflection involving the students' continual engagement with pedagogical issues in order to improve the quality of teaching.

On-going cycle? What do you mean?

What I am advocating is continuing professional development in the widest sense. It should be a lifelong process. In other words, CPD should be an on-going process as opposed to an event. My view is consonant with that of Du Plessis (2009: 258), who argues for training that is "process-centric", that is, indicative of learning that is journey-based as each teacher continues to critically reflect, review and discover new classroom practices throughout his/her working life. Consequently, defining a knowledge base for teaching as this programme attempts to do should not be an end in itself leading to "closed worlds of meaning" (Harrington, 1994: 90). Rather, it should open doors to possibilities.

As Mohammed (2006) observes, too often in-service programmes are too short to yield benefits. Given that change is a long-term process, teacher educators need to work out ways to continue to support teachers after training. This view is consistent with research evidence (Darling-Hammond and Sykes, 1999; Vieira, 2009) which points to the fact that professional development produces the best results when, among other things, it is long-term, school-based, collaborative and inquiry-oriented. The proposed programme meets all but the first requirement. Although it is more intense and interactive than the current one, in-service students need an even longer engagement with new concepts in order to effect a change in practice. Ideally, the training should be "evolutionary" (Henze et al., 2009: 195), that is, over time students should remain engaged in new methods of teaching while they are being encouraged to generate novel educational interpretations as an on-going epistemological practice. Given this view, I posit that there should be no divide between pre-service and in-service training; it should be a seamless transition.

My contention is that if we are to groom a talented and committed teaching force to take South Africa beyond 2015,[39] there is a need for robust and lasting teacher development and training that produces an empowered teaching force that can be trained, among other things, to withstand the test of time.

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[39] The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) report (2002) states that unless we get more and better teachers, we will not reach the target of making quality education for all by 2015.

Your question reminds me of a newspaper article that I read recently (Khosa, 2010). The writer, an educationist himself, observes that much effort is invested in complaining about the ills in the education system. He points out that "even educationists have more to say about what is wrong than about what can be done to correct the situation." Perhaps he is right and this is a gap that this thesis tries to fill. As a teacher educator I can only propose. My pronouncement is unequivocal: **Guys, i**t**'s not working and here is plan B!**

Since your students are dispersed geographically, why do you propose physical networks when virtual networks are obviously more cost effective?

With time, virtual networks will definitely replace physical networks. It will be a gradual process because our current students are technologically challenged. A case in point is the fully furnished computer lab at one of the schools I visited. It was not being used because none of the teachers was computer literate. Perhaps because of their age, the majority of the current students have not taken up technology beyond the mobile form. For instance, Unisa has gone out of its way to enhance communication by giving each student an e-mail address. However, these particular students still prefer to write letters and hardly any of them interact with MyUnisa.[40]

On a different level, technological tools such as video conferencing are effective in demonstrating teaching practices but they do not address the contextual issues. I believe teacher educators need to reach out to the students where they are and assist them to mediate whatever disabling factors they have to contend with. In the study, students complained that part of the reason the few workshops they have attended did not help much was the artificial nature of the demonstrations that were not reflective of the students' working contexts. One solution is for students to brainstorm solutions through communities of practice and another involves practical support by lecturers and mentors during school visits. School visits should involve more than assessing a student's performance. They should be scaffolding sessions during which the lecturer or mentor assists the student to mediate between current and expected practices and the classroom reality. In a report on teacher training programmes offered by Unisa (SAIDE, 2006), the absence of communities of learning was identified as one of the disabling factors.

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[40] This is an on-line learning environment for lecturers and students at Unisa.

What is the contribution of this study?

Although this was a small-scale study, it adds to the thriving and extensive research arena of teacher development in several ways.

Firstly, it contributes to the creation of the ever-growing knowledge base for teacher training; in particular, designs for CPD. This revitalises teacher education. More specifically, it adds to the pool of country-specific studies using qualitative techniques that can inform policy, thereby promoting the development of a profession better suited to the demands of the 21st century. In terms of curriculum development, the evidence-based conclusions will inform curriculum development for teacher education in the distance mode.

At a global level, the research will contribute to knowledge about continuing professional development, thereby encouraging debate regarding pedagogy in the wider field of teacher development.

In addition, the study is significant in that the programme responds to the need to make training programmes relevant by accommodating the voices of the consumers of the courseware in material design. In the distance mode, this is an important learner support mechanism because the lecturer can learn a lot about her students through detailed study of a selected few.

Finally, although small-scale, the study serves as a detailed foundation for the investigation of other similar cases. This is because, while this study focuses on the OBE approach, the findings have far-reaching implications in so far as they relate to problems associated with the introduction of any educational reform. In this regard, while the results of the study are not representative of the entire population and therefore cannot be generalised, they are transferable and may be extended to other similar contexts.

What areas for further research do you recommend?

Based on the findings of the research, I propose the following initiatives as a way forward:

- Given appropriate funding, this research should be conducted on a large scale in response to the need for sustained research on teacher education programmes and their impact on quality educational practice. This is in response to the need for more research that continues to provide a chain of evidence on what student teachers actually learn in the distance mode, how they use what they learn in classrooms and how much their learners actually learn. The study should be longitudinal, involving

learners, teachers and lecturers, and should focus on different types of schools that characterise the South African educational landscape. This research has just worked on a small but vital slice of this educational pie.

- Research must serve pedagogy if our goal is to promote educational change. Consequently, there is a need for more research that focuses on actual experiences in schools, particularly the methodological skills that teachers badly need. This can be achieved through close partnership between schools and researchers in the form of communities of practice that are described in the previous chapter.

- A major challenge that students face is the contradiction that exists between official rhetoric and the reality in the classroom. There is therefore a need for research on how teachers negotiate the conflicting discourses that typify policy, training and teaching.

- Given the vital role played by communities of practice in CPD, there is a need for more research on developing effective partnerships with schools.

- Finally, it is imperative that Unisa continues to conduct research-based evaluations on the effectiveness of the programmes it offers to ensure relevance and quality of study materials.

Would you like to share some issues that have preoccupied your mind during the four years you have been engaged in this study?
Yes, and they are quite a few.

To begin with, I am aware of the controversy that defines the teacher education field because the demands from different stakeholders are contradictory and multiple, making it difficult to attribute what a teacher knows or does to the influence of a training programme. I therefore acknowledge that variables other than those mentioned could have influenced some of the findings of the research because of the existence of salient factors that influence practice. For instance, the annual protracted strikes indicate a high level of dissatisfaction with salaries, a factor that could demotivate teachers. Despite this, there seems to be consensus regarding the findings of this study (see literature review) because the problems identified continue to plague the South African educational scene.

Closely related to the above is the fluidity of the educational arena. Empirical research that undergirds teacher practice cannot be conclusive because of the dynamic nature of working

environments. For this reason, it is not easy to answer research questions because teaching is a complex practice often filled with tension and whose circumstances cannot be replicated. For instance, a lesson can never be repeated *exactly* because the teacher has to respond to the demands of the prevailing situation. It is this complex, unique and fluid nature of teaching that makes it difficult to adopt a timeless body of truth regarding teaching and teacher education. Ultimately, improvement of practice is a continual process of adjusting and readjusting to the constantly changing demands of our classrooms, taking what is good from the old and blending it with the new. It is a product of ongoing research and teacher education programme design because education itself is in a state of flux in response to the dynamic nature of society. As Cochran-Smith (2000: 165) contends, "teaching and teacher education are unavoidably political enterprises and are in that sense value-laden and socially constructed. Over time, they both influence and are influenced by histories, economies, and cultures of the societies in which they exist". This study is part of an on-going process to interrogate the prevailing body of knowledge to advance the transformation agenda.

During my fieldwork, I also became aware of the need for a shared vision. Teaching takes place in schools. These predetermined contexts provide conditions that either promote or militate against learning. Some of the intervening contextual variables, for instance a lack of support of the new approach by other teachers, are difficult to measure but are obstacles to the smooth acquisition of new skills by these students. For new ideas to take root and thrive, there is a need for a shared vision in schools as opposed to individual teacher efforts that can be easily sabotaged. The school context must provide an environment that is conducive to experimenting with ideas that a teacher acquires through CPD. This is because improvements in practices of teaching depend not only on efforts of individual teachers but also on the support of the contexts within which teachers work, contexts which should encourage and support professional development. Ideally, what is needed is whole-school development involving the retraining of all teachers because it is through their combined effort that change is mediated. Communities of practice are ideal sites for retraining when they take a whole-school approach where everybody is involved. However, they can only thrive if there is support in terms of the provision of time and space in the busy teachers' lives.

On an even wider level, implementation of educational reform is not a result of the students' conceptual shift alone, nor does it rest on providers such as Unisa. Rather, it depends on successful partnerships among the primary stakeholders who are involved in the education of the young. Each one of them (learners, parents, teachers, lecturers and policy makers) should take responsibility and together, they should share a common vision.

Successful implementation of any programme hinges on the provision of supportive mechanisms by providers. In the case of this study, Unisa should ensure that in their efforts to supervise teaching practice, mentors and lecturers are unhindered by systemic constraints. This problem is alluded to in a report by SAIDE (2006) on the quality of teacher training programmes offered by Unisa. Among other things, the researchers criticise Unisa for a lack of shared understanding of, and commitment to, the intended outcome of producing teachers who are able to perform successfully in the classroom. The authors attribute this to loose co-ordination among the various participants in the Unisa community resulting in academics feeling disempowered, a situation they contend impacts on the quality of support students are given. A common vision would result in students benefiting from the "collective expertise in the community as a whole" (23).

An issue that I feel institutions should resolve is that of conflicting research interests. The need for more funding and recognition of research in teaching and teacher education cannot be overemphasised. However, efforts are thwarted by a conflict of priorities resulting in research being driven by different interests, of which improvement of teaching is the least. For instance, more weight is given to an academic's research output as opposed to tuition matters. At Unisa this is evident in the institution's insistence on research publications in accredited journals as the sole basis of promotion. As a result, tuition matters play second fiddle as they are considered less prestigious. Coupled with this is the continued promotion by universities of research for income-generation (funding) as opposed to research that responds and contributes to alleviating the problems facing mankind. Until such time that institutions of higher learning get the balance right by giving due recognition to research that is *real* and *relevant* as opposed to the number of papers churned out, opportunities for longitudinal research in such fields as education will continue to be lost.

Finally, I wish to emphasise the need to hear the students' voices. While there is a place for objectivity, teaching and learning by their very nature are highly personal and complex experiences. Ultimately, teacher learning cannot be guaranteed as it depends on the individual's capacity to accommodate and absorb the new knowledge and make it part of his/her micro-generic growth. In this respect, I concur with Vieira (2009: 269) that change will not be realised in our classrooms unless it becomes the teachers' dream. In other words, "unless teachers also play a leading role in the construction of knowledge base for the promotion of learner autonomy, opportunities for transforming school pedagogy will be surely missed". Teachers cannot be mere passengers on a policy-driven education train. Accordingly, teacher educators need to acknowledge and appreciate that each teacher has potential to make a positive contribution to education and society as a whole. One way of doing this is to encourage teachers to conduct action research as a way of continually interrogating their practices, learn from them and provide solutions to classroom challenges. Introspection followed by action should lead to a change in practice. My belief is that whatever teacher training model Unisa chooses, it must accommodate input from teachers. Curriculum planners should show genuine commitment to critical thinking and not limit the agency of teachers by separating the conceptualisation, design and assessment of the curriculum from its execution and administration. Teachers should be partners in curriculum development, which, according to Hill (2003:103), is still "centralised in the bureaucracy" while administration is in the hands of teachers. As McLaughlin (1987: 174) observes, "change ultimately is a problem of the smallest unit", in this case the teacher. This implies that working with the actual curriculum that teachers deliver to their learners requires teacher educators to work at classroom level with the teachers. In this study, I attempted to do this by going out into the field to engage with teachers in their work environment. In our quest for excellence in teaching and learning, we dare not leave the teacher behind.

The importance of student-lecturer dialogue is clearly articulated by Mueller and Skamp (2003: 430):

> Clearly there are compelling reasons to hear the voices of teachers who are participants in these programmes. What are the needs and how are these needs addressed in teacher education programmes? As teacher educators listen to the voices of students they teach, opportunities emerge for pedagogical conversations that involve reflecting

on teaching and learning together. Consequently, these opportunities inspire teacher educators to refine and adapt their teaching practices.

Any final thoughts on this project?

I think I have had my say for now. Because of the dynamic nature of teaching and learning, nothing can be said to be final, therefore I will continue to ponder these issues in search of solutions. Preparing educators for the rigours of teaching in South African schools is a challenging task for every teacher training institution. This study is part of my process of engagement with this issue. It is a way of illuminating my teaching practices through practical research that simultaneously informs the field of education. As a teacher educator, I continue on my quest to provide high-quality learning experiences for my students with a view to improving their effectiveness and in this way the quality of learning in the classroom.

I see my role as to be ceaselessly looking for creative and meaningful ways to build on teachers' understanding and practice of English teaching methodology. As Hess (2009: 451) observes, "teacher educators must continually strive to re-imagine the tapestry of teaching, schooling and preparation so as to reinvigorate teaching and learning". This study is one such attempt in that direction. I enjoyed working on it.

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APPENDICES

A   PERMISSION LETTERS

UMnyango WezeMfundo
Department of Education

Lefaphe la Thuto
Departement van Onderwys

Date:	26 March 2007
Name of Researcher:	Makina Blandina
Address of Researcher:	341 Swadini
	Glenwood Road
	Fairie Glen
Telephone Number:	0123616333
Fax Number:	0123651067
Research Topic:	An investigation into the impact on the teaching practice of student teachers of two English methodology courses offered by UNISA's Department of English Studies: A qualitative case study
Number and type of schools:	1 Primary, 4 Secondary and 2 ABET Schools
District/s/HO	Johannesburg East & West and Gauteng North and Tshwane North

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

Permission has been granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met, and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted:

1. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
2. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.*
3. *A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*

4. A letter / document that outlines the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.

5. The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.

6. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Senior Manager (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.

7. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year.

8. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.

9. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.

10. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.

11. The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.

12. On completion of the study the researcher must supply the Senior Manager: Strategic Policy Development, Management & Research Coordination with one Hard Cover bound and one Ring bound copy of the final, approved research report. The researcher would also provide the said manager with an electronic copy of the research abstract/summary and/or annotation.

13. The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.

14. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Senior Manager concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

ACTING CHIEF DIRECTOR: OFSTED

The contents of this letter has been read and understood by the researcher.	
Signature of Researcher:	Brakina
Date:	03 April 2007

UNISA
university
of south africa

Department of English Studies
PO Box 392
UNISA
0003

10 April 2007

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This serves to testify that the bearer of this letter, Mrs Blandina Makina, is a lecturer in the Department of English Studies at UNISA. She is in charge of the following Subject Didactics modules. ACEEN26 for the Advanced Certificate in Education and SDENG3J for the Bachelor of Education and the Post-Graduate Certificate in Education.

Thank you.

PROFESSOR Z G T MOTSA
COD: DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

B BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Below is a composite table showing the biographical data of the participants and dates of visits.

School type	Educator qualifications	Years of teaching experience	Tertiary Institution	Grades taught	Dates of visits
1 FET (Township) Female	Secondary Education Teachers Diploma (SEC) M + 2	19	Hebron College	11	May 28 to 1 June
2 FET (Township) Male	Secondary Education Teachers Diploma (SEC) M + 2	15	Tabanchu College	8 and 9	June 4 to June 9 No classes on June 8)
3 Combined (Township) Female	Senior Primary Teachers Diploma	22	Tivumbeni College	10	June 11 to 14 July 28
4 Primary Township Female	M + 2 Senior Primary Teachers' Diploma M + 2	25	Khulusana College	4	August 20 to 24 October 9 12 (interview)
5	Primary teachers'	16	Thlabani College	4	August 27 to 31

Primary (Informal settlement) Female	diploma (PTD) M + 2				
6 Combined (Informal settlement) Female	Secondary teachers' Diploma M + 2	32 years	Botswana Training Institute	11 and 12	September 3 to 8 No classes on September 7 October 16 (interview)
7 FET (Rural) Male	Bachelor of Arts (BA) M +3	10 years	Vista University	10, 11 and 12	July 23 to 27
8 Combined (Township) Female	Secondary teachers' Diploma (STD) M + 2	14 years	Transvaal College of Education	10 and 12	September 10 to 14 (Unisa interview)

C ACEEN2-6 STATISTICAL INFORMATION 2006-2010

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DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION AND STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

HEMIS Course Counts, ACEEN26, 2006 - 2010 (Prov)

Age Groups	CC	%	CC	%	CC	%	CC	%	CC	%
<25			2	1.9%	2	0.7%	1	0.4%	1	0.3%
25 - 30	10	11.0%	5	4.8%	18	6.5%	6	2.2%	19	5.0%
31 - 40	48	52.7%	61	58.7%	141	51.3%	137	51.3%	161	42.7%
41 - 50	31	34.1%	27	26.0%	91	33.1%	100	37.5%	164	43.5%
50+	2	2.2%	9	8.7%	23	8.4%	23	8.6%	32	8.5%
Total	**91**	**100.0%**	**104**	**100.0%**	**275**	**100.0%**	**267**	**100.0%**	**377**	**100.0%**

	Year									
	2006		2007		2008		2009		2010 (Prov)	
Magisterial district (Home Postal Code)	CC	%	CC	%	CC	%	CC	%	CC	%
ALBERTON	3	3.3%	1	1.0%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	4	1.1%
ALFRED									1	0.3%
BA-PHALABORWA									1	0.3%
BARBERTON							3	1.1%	1	0.3%
BELA-BELA							1	0.4%		
BELLVILLE			1	1.0%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%		
BENONI					1	0.4%			1	0.3%
BETHAL							1	0.4%	1	0.3%
BIZANA					2	0.7%	3	1.1%		
BLOEMFONTEIN			1	1.0%	2	0.7%				
BOKSBURG	1	1.1%			3	1.1%			2	0.5%
BOLOBEDU	1	1.1%					2	0.7%	5	1.3%
BOSHOF							1	0.4%		
BOTSHABELO					3	1.1%	1	0.4%	1	0.3%
BRAKPAN									3	0.8%
BRITS					2	0.7%	1	0.4%	1	0.3%
BRONKHORSTSPRUIT			1	1.0%			1	0.4%		
BUTTERWORTH			1	1.0%	2	0.7%	2	0.7%	2	0.5%
CAMPERDOWN	2	2.2%	1	1.0%	2	0.7%	1	0.4%	1	0.3%
CAPE TOWN									1	0.3%
CERES					1	0.4%				
COFIMVABA									1	0.3%
COLIGNY									1	0.3%

DELAREYVILLE	1	1.1%			1	0.4%			3	0.8%
DUNDEE			1	1.0%			3	1.1%	2	0.5%
DURBAN	8	8.8%	4	3.8%	6	2.2%	8	3.0%	6	1.6%
DZANANI			1	1.0%	2	0.7%	5	1.9%	4	1.1%
EAST LONDON					6	2.2%	1	0.4%	1	0.3%
EERSTEHOEK					2	0.7%			3	0.8%
ENGCOBO							1	0.4%		
ERMELO							1	0.4%		
ESHOWE	1	1.1%	2	1.9%	3	1.1%	3	1.1%	1	0.3%
ESTCOURT	1	1.1%	1	1.0%	2	0.7%			1	0.3%
EXCELSIOR									1	0.3%
FLAGSTAFF					1	0.4%	1	0.4%		
FOURIESBURG									1	0.3%
GARANKUWA	1	1.1%	1	1.0%	3	1.1%	2	0.7%	1	0.3%
GERMISTON					1	0.4%			2	0.5%
GIYANI			2	1.9%	6	2.2%	13	4.9%	26	6.9%
GLENCOE			1	1.0%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%		
GOODWOOD			1	1.0%	1	0.4%	2	0.7%		
GROBLERSDAL	1	1.1%			1	0.4%	1	0.4%	2	0.5%
HARRISMITH							1	0.4%	1	0.3%
HEIDELBERG (Gauteng)									1	0.3%
HIGHVELD RIDGE					1	0.4%			3	0.8%
HLABISA					3	1.1%			2	0.5%
HLANGANANI	2	2.2%	2	1.9%			3	1.1%	4	1.1%
IDUTYWA							1	0.4%	1	0.3%
IMPENDLE	2	2.2%					1	0.4%		
INANDA					4	1.5%	1	0.4%	5	1.3%
INGWAVUMA	2	2.2%			2	0.7%	2	0.7%	1	0.3%
IXOPO	1	1.1%	2	1.9%	2	0.7%				
JOHANNESBURG			2	1.9%	5	1.8%	5	1.9%	13	3.4%
KEMPTON PARK			1	1.0%	4	1.5%	2	0.7%	5	1.3%
KIMBERLEY					1	0.4%	4	1.5%	1	0.3%
KIRKWOOD	1	1.1%								
KLIPRIVER			1	1.0%	3	1.1%	2	0.7%	9	2.4%
KRANSKOP					2	0.7%	1	0.4%		
KROONSTAD									1	0.3%
KRUGERSDORP					2	0.7%			1	0.3%
KUDUMANE							2	0.7%		
KUILS RIVER	1	1.1%			1	0.4%				
KURUMAN							1	0.4%		
LADY FRERE							1	0.4%	1	0.3%
LADYBRAND					1	0.4%	1	0.4%		
LEPHALALE					1	0.4%	2	0.7%	4	1.1%
LETABA	2	2.2%	2	1.9%	4	1.5%	7	2.6%	11	2.9%
LIBODE	2	2.2%	3	2.9%	1	0.4%			1	0.3%

LIONS RIVER	1	1.1%							2	0.5%
LOWER TUGELA					1	0.4%			1	0.3%
LOWER UMFOLOZI			1	1.0%	1	0.4%	7	2.6%	4	1.1%
LULEKANI					1	0.4%				
LUSIKISIKI	1	1.1%	4	3.8%	2	0.7%	1	0.4%		
LYDENBURG					1	0.4%	5	1.9%	3	0.8%
MACLEAR	1	1.1%								
MADIKWE					4	1.5%	2	0.7%	4	1.1%
MAHLABATINI			1	1.0%	3	1.1%	1	0.4%	2	0.5%
MALAMULELE					1	0.4%	2	0.7%	6	1.6%
MANKWE							1	0.4%	1	0.3%
MAPULANENG	1	1.1%			1	0.4%	1	0.4%	4	1.1%
MDUTJANA			1	1.0%			2	0.7%		
MHALA					5	1.8%				
MIDDELBURG (Mphumalanga)							1	0.4%	1	0.3%
MITCHELLS PLAIN					2	0.7%			2	0.5%
MKOBOLA									1	0.3%
MMABATHO			1	1.0%	1	0.4%				
MOKERONG	2	2.2%			5	1.8%	4	1.5%	6	1.6%
MOKOPANE	3	3.3%	3	2.9%	3	1.1%	3	1.1%	4	1.1%
MOOIRIVER									1	0.3%
MOUNT CURRIE	2	2.2%	3	2.9%	2	0.7%	1	0.4%	3	0.8%
MOUTSE			1	1.0%			1	0.4%		
MQANDULI	1	1.1%			2	0.7%				
MSINGA									3	0.8%
MT FLETCHER							1	0.4%	1	0.3%
MT FRERE			1	1.0%	2	0.7%			1	0.3%
MTONJANENI									1	0.3%
MTUNZINI	1	1.1%					2	0.7%		
MUSINA					2	0.7%	2	0.7%	1	0.3%
MUTALE					1	0.4%	4	1.5%	3	0.8%
NAMAKGALE	1	1.1%							1	0.3%
NAPHUNO					6	2.2%	4	1.5%	4	1.1%
NDWEDWE	1	1.1%					1	0.4%		
NEBO	1	1.1%					6	2.2%	9	2.4%
NELSPRUIT					1	0.4%			1	0.3%
NEW HANOVER			2	1.9%						
NEWCASTLE			2	1.9%	6	2.2%	11	4.1%	7	1.9%
NIGEL			1	1.0%	3	1.1%				
NKANDLA			1	1.0%						
NKOMAZI	1	1.1%	1	1.0%			1	0.4%	1	0.3%
NONGOMA									1	0.3%
NQUTU	1	1.1%			2	0.7%	1	0.4%	3	0.8%
NSIKAZI					3	1.1%	2	0.7%	2	0.5%
ODENDAALSRUS							1	0.4%		

Location										
PELGRIMSRUS					1	0.4%				
PIET RETIEF	1	1.1%			1	0.4%	4	1.5%	2	0.5%
PIETERMARITZBURG	2	2.2%			6	2.2%	4	1.5%	4	1.1%
PIETERSBURG	3	3.3%	1	1.0%	11	4.0%	11	4.1%	15	4.0%
PINETOWN			4	3.8%	2	0.7%				
POLELA					1	0.4%	1	0.4%		
PORT ELIZABETH									1	0.3%
PORT SHEPSTONE			1	1.0%			3	1.1%	3	0.8%
PORT ST JOHNS									1	0.3%
POTCHEFSTROOM					1	0.4%			1	0.3%
PRETORIA	2	2.2%	1	1.0%	7	2.5%	3	1.1%	7	1.9%
QUEENSTOWN			1	1.0%			1	0.4%		
QUMBU					2	0.7%	3	1.1%		
RANDBURG	1	1.1%	1	1.0%	1	0.4%				
RANDFONTEIN	1	1.1%			1	0.4%				
RICHMOND (KZN)	1	1.1%	1	1.0%			1	0.4%		
RITAVI					2	0.7%	5	1.9%	4	1.1%
ROODEPOORT			1	1.0%	2	0.7%	2	0.7%	2	0.5%
ROUXVILLE					1	0.4%				
SEKGOSESE									2	0.5%
SEKHUKHUNELAND					3	1.1%			3	0.8%
SENWABARWANA	1	1.1%	3	2.9%	5	1.8%	2	0.7%	4	1.1%
SESHEGO	1	1.1%	2	1.9%	3	1.1%	5	1.9%	8	2.1%
SIMDLANGENTSHA									1	0.3%
SOSHANGUWE	1	1.1%					2	0.7%	5	1.3%
SOUTPANSBERG			2	1.9%	1	0.4%	4	1.5%	7	1.9%
SPRINGS							1	0.4%		
STANDERTON									1	0.3%
STERKSPRUIT					1	0.4%				
STUTTERHEIM							1	0.4%		
TEMBA			1	1.0%	1	0.4%			3	0.8%
THABA NCHU					2	0.7%			1	0.3%
THABAMOOPO	1	1.1%	5	4.8%	8	2.9%	6	2.2%	5	1.3%
THABAZIMBI									1	0.3%
THOHOYANDOU	2	2.2%	2	1.9%	9	3.3%	8	3.0%	9	2.4%
TSOLO									1	0.3%
TSOMO					1	0.4%	1	0.4%		
UBOMBO	1	1.1%			2	0.7%				
UITENHAGE									1	0.3%
UMBUMBULU							1	0.4%	1	0.3%
UMLAZI	3	3.3%	4	3.8%	6	2.2%	4	1.5%	8	2.1%
UMTATA	3	3.3%	4	3.8%	5	1.8%	4	1.5%	4	1.1%
UMVOTI	1	1.1%			1	0.4%	3	1.1%	2	0.5%
UMZIMKULU	1	1.1%			1	0.4%				
UMZINTO	1	1.1%	3	2.9%	1	0.4%	2	0.7%	1	0.3%
UNDERBERG	1	1.1%								

UTRECHT					1	0.4%			1	0.3%
VANDERBIJLPARK	2	2.2%			2	0.7%			2	0.5%
VENTERSDORP					1	0.4%				
VEREENIGING							1	0.4%	3	0.8%
VOLKSRUST							2	0.7%	1	0.3%
VREDEFORT			1	1.0%						
VRYBURG									1	0.3%
VRYHEID					1	0.4%				
VUWANI			2	1.9%	3	1.1%	1	0.4%	4	1.1%
WELKOM			2	1.9%						
WELLINGTON							2	0.7%		
WEPENER					1	0.4%				
WESTONARIA					1	0.4%				
WITBANK					1	0.4%	1	0.4%	2	0.5%
WITRIVIER	2	2.2%			4	1.5%	2	0.7%	2	0.5%
WITSIESHOEK							2	0.7%		
WONDERBOOM	1	1.1%	3	2.9%	10	3.6%	5	1.9%	12	3.2%
WORCESTER					1	0.4%				
WYNBERG					1	0.4%				
ZWELITSHA							1	0.4%		
	7	7.7%	3	2.9%	5	1.8%	2	0.7%	11	2.9%
Grand Total	**91**	**100.0%**	**104**	**100.0%**	**275**	**100.0%**	**267**	**100.0%**	**377**	**100.0%**

Note:

1. Date of extraction: 15 March 2011

2. The 2010 (Prov) figures are based on HEMIS 1st submission and subject to verification*

D   RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

D1   INTERVIEW GUIDE

(To be conducted during the observation weeks and responses audio-recorded.)

Professional background

Tell me about your life as a teacher: for how long have you been teaching?

What subjects and grades have you taught?

When and where did you initially train to teach?

Why are you doing this course?

You and the NCS

What is your understanding of OBE and the National Curriculum Statement?

How does this differ from the old way of teaching?

What is your understanding of groupwork?

What is your understanding of assessment in the OBE approach?

How often do you plan?

What do you see as your role in the classroom?

How many workshops on NCS implementation have you attended? How have they helped you?

Do you find the new curriculum easy to implement? If not what are the difficult areas?

What opportunities do you have for team teaching (discussion of concepts, skills and problems, students' needs and assessment)?

Do you reflect on your practice? How does reflection help you?

About the teaching context

Has your school embraced the new curriculum? If yes, how? If not, why not?

What problems does the school have in implementing the NCS?

Who decides what you teach? How are the decisions made? Do you have a choice of the textbooks you use? If not, would you like to have this choice?

What other responsibilities do you have?

About the module

To what extent is the content of the module relevant to your teaching?

In what ways does the content help you understand the OBE approach? (refer to instructional methods, assessment)

How much of the content covered in the module have you put into practice?

Is the language used in the module accessible? Justify.

Are there any aspects of OBE theory that you are unable to put into practice? If so, why?

Does the module meet your expectations? If yes, in what ways? If not, why not?

In what ways has your teaching practice changed as a result of interacting with this module? What other teaching aspects would you want the module to contain?

D2   LESSON OBSERVATION

LESSON OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT

A total of five lessons per student were analysed under the following descriptors:

Not achieved   (**NA)**

Under achieved   (**UA**)

Partially achieved   (**PA**)

Achieved   (**A**)

Lesson Observation Protocol

Name of School:

Name of Student:

Date:

Class:

Number of Learners:

Lesson Duration:

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

Chalkboard	Desk and chair for each learner	Duster and chalk	Electricity	Door and windows	Visible learning and teaching aids	Enough room for movement	General state of classroom
Comments							

CATEGORY ONE: INTRODUCTION

Descriptors:	1 NA	2 UA	3 PA	4 A
Lesson outcomes clearly stated.				
There is a defined introduction to the lesson.				
Comments 				

CATEGORY TWO: FACILITATION SKILLS

Descriptors:	1 NA	2 UA	3 PA	4 A
There is a clear teaching point that is linked to the stated outcome(s).				
Activities are sequenced logically with whole class activities preceding individual work.				
Focus is on skills as opposed to content.				
Student is creative and enthusiastic.				
Ideas are presented logically from the known to the unknown.				
Activities promote participation and interaction.				
Student gives clear examples to illustrate concepts.				
Questioning elicits development of higher order skills.				
Student guides the learning process showing sensitivity to learner diversity.				
Student uses authentic texts from various sources.				

	1	2	3	4
Student gives meaningful group or pair work.				
Activities are at an appropriate level of difficulty.				
Student's subject knowledge is sound.				
Student makes adequate use of time available.				
Comments				

CATEGORY THREE: ASSESSMENT

Descriptors	1 NA	2 UA	3 PA	4 A
Student makes use of self, peer and/or group assessment.				
There is evidence of formative assessment practices.				
Assessment is integrated into activities.				
Assessment criteria are clearly indicated.				
Assessment criteria are communicated to learners.				
Comments				

CATEGORY FOUR: CONCLUSION

Descriptors:	1 NA	2 UA	3 PA	4 A
Student sums up lesson with reference to the teaching point.				
Student gives homework that relates to the stated outcome(s).				
Comments				
Guidelines to augment the observation instrument: • Do the learners find the activities interesting? • Do the learners have enough time to complete the activities? • What is the social climate of the classroom? • Are additional materials such as visual aids used meaningfully • How is the student's language proficiency? • Does the overall practice reflect an understanding of OBE? • Does the overall practice reflect understanding of how children learn? • Is there any evidence of take-up from the module?				

Criteria that ground the discussion in Chapter 6.

A   Student articulates outcomes at the onset of the learning experience.

B   Student's subject knowledge is sound.

C   There is evidence of purposeful use of group/pair work.

D   Questioning elicits the development of higher order skills.

E   The focus is on language skills.

F   Student makes use of formative assessment practices.

G   Student guides the learning process showing sensitivity to learner diversity.

ANALYSIS RESULTS per student

Criteria V	Student >> 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
A	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
B	PA	UA	PA	PA	UA	PA	PA	PA
C	UA	UA	UA	UA	UA	UA	UA	PA
D	PA	UA	UA	UA	UA	UA	PA	UA
E	PA	UA	PA	UA	NA	NA	UA	UA
F	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
G	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	UA	NA

D3 ANALYSIS OF DOCUMENTS

CRITERIA FOR ANALYSING DOCUMENTS

Criteria	NA	UA	PA	A
The lesson plan Analysis was based on the following criteria: • Lesson outcomes and assessment standards are explicitly articulated. • Tasks are logically graded according to the level of difficulty. • Activities and assessment practices are closely aligned. • The teacher caters for learner-centredness in the design of tasks. • The teaching point is clearly presented. • Concepts are presented in a logical progression from the simple to the complex. • The teacher accommodates diversity in the learners' abilities. • The plan makes provision of a variety of assessment methods.				
The language textbook Analysis was based on the following criteria: • The content is relevant; it reflects the age, interests and background of the learners. • The content exposes learners to both familiar and unfamiliar contexts. • The topics covered relate to real life. • The activities focus on the four language skills. • The language skills are integrated. • The activities promote collaborative and co-operative learning. • Grammatical items are presented in context. • Materials are authentic.				
Marking and assessment Analysis was based on the following criteria: • Outcomes and assessment standards are made explicit. • Feedback is constructive in that it is informative, affirming				

and helpful. • Learners play an active role in the assessment of their performance. • The marking and assessment of learners' work reflects a balanced approach to assessment in that it is transparent and fair.				
Comments				

E   CODING CERTIFICATE

CLIENT/STUDENT: Blandina Makina

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT:

Dr. Jeanette Maritz and Retha Visagie have co-coded the following qualitative data:

13 Individual interviews

For the study:

"**An investigation into the effect on student teachers' PRACTICE, of a methodology course offered by Unisa's Department of English Studies: a qualitative case study.**"

We declare that we have reached consensus on the major themes of the data during a consensus discussion. The client/student has been provided with a report.

Dr. Jeanette Maritz (D.Cur; M.Cur; B.Cur (Ed.et.Adm); Advanced Research Methodology

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Retha Visagie (M.Cur; B.Cur (Hons); BACur); Advanced Research Methodology

rgvisagie@mweb.co.za

F   **THREE EXAMPLES OF LESSON PLANS**

LESSON PLAN.

CLASS.   GRADE 9. SECOND LANGUAGE
DURATION   ONE THIRTY FIVE MINUTES PERIOD.
TOPIC   HOW TO WRITE A BUSINESS LETTER.

Outcomes   By the end of the lesson learners
                will be expected to write a business
                letter

ACTIVITY   Recap on last lesson of informal letter
(EDUCATOR.)   Ask learners based on that lesson.
                Explain what business letters are for
                Give another meaning of business letter.

ACTIVITY.
(LEARNER.)   Learners should have a look at a
                format of a business letter

ACTIVITY
(EDUCATOR.)   Go through the format with learners

ASSESSMENT   Learners should write a business letter
                or application letter to apply for a job
                of a nearby restaurant.

WEEK 5&8
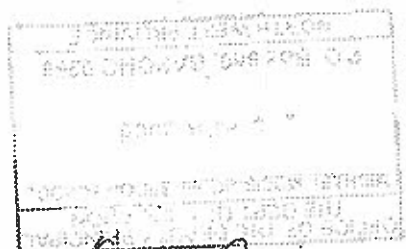
Lesson Plan

Teacher: G.E. Maurice   Learning Area: First Additional Language
Duration: 2½ Hours   Context: _____
Date: 5-8 Jan Feb 2008
4-29

Critical Outcomes:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Developmental Outcomes:

1	2	3	4	5

Learning Outcome(s):

LO2 THE LEARNER IS ABLE TO READ AND VIEW

Assessment Standard(s):

AS3.4.2 a b c d

Skills:	Knowledge:	Values:	Attitudes:

Assessment

Method:	Tools:	Forms/Techniques
Individual Educator	Maru Crosscurrent	

Integration:

LO1 THE LEARNER IS ABLE TO LISTEN AND Spec

Resources:

Maru Cross Current

Activity:

Individual - Reading
Asking Question
Give Answers.
Discussion.

Teaching Strategy/Methodology:

Reading
Explaining
Question and Answer Method

Special Needs (Barriers of learning).	Expanded Opportunities:	Reflection/Refinement/ Follow up

LESSON: Writing an advertisement and letter of application.

LESSON PLAN

School: DZWABONI   **Date:** 14-01-2010   **Grade:** 9   **Subject:** EAL

INTEGRATION: Life Orientation "LOS"

Period No.	LO	AS	Sub–Skills	Learning & Teaching Activities	Resources	Method s/ Strategi es	Assessment Skill acquired	Teacher Reflection	Enrichment
3		1 2 3							
4									

TEACHER ACTIVITIES — Learners ...

LEARNER ACTIVITIES — ...

RESOURCES: Learner's book, Chalkboard

METHODS: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing

TOOLS: Rubric, Forms

EXPANDED OPPORTUNITIES — The learners to read job advertisements in a news-paper and complete them ...