

GOOD TEACHER EDUCATION IN AN ODL CONTEXT

Prof Elza Venter

Department Psychology of Education

UNISA

PO Box 392

Unisa 0003

Tel: +27827882769

E-mail: ventee1@unisa.ac.za

ABSTRACT

The strategies and approaches commonly used in traditional settings seemingly differ from those used in ODL. But is the role of lecturers in an ODL setting that different from traditional universities? The researcher asked the following questions concerning teacher education in higher education (HE) institutions: What is “good teacher education” in general and more specifically in an ODL context? The sub questions asked are: Is there a difference between “good teacher education in traditional and ODL institutions?” and “How can teacher education be improved in HE?” Literature was reviewed with reference to “good teacher education” in traditional higher education and that in an ODL context. A phenomenographic study was done with the responses to two open-ended questions that were e-mailed to staff members in the in the College of Education at the ODL institution where the researcher is tenured, namely “What is good teacher education?” and “What is good teacher education in ODL?” Since the researcher is part of the College of Education she made use of convenience sampling. In comparing literature to the empirical findings it shows that lecturers and literature come to the same conclusion about what good teacher education entails. Good teacher

education in higher education does not appear to differ much between ODL and traditional HE settings. Recommendations on how teacher education can be improved will be made.

KEY TERMS: Teacher Education; Good teacher education; Open Distance Learning (ODL); Distance education; E-learning

INTRODUCTION

“It takes at least two years to master the basics of classroom management and six to seven years to become a proficient teacher” (Wallis 2008). The problem in the USA is that many teachers give up before they get to be so called “good” teachers. Between a quarter and a third of new teachers quit within the first three years of teaching (Wallis 2008). According to Ball & Forzani (2009:497) the improvement of educational outcomes in the USA is a big challenge. It seems as if visions of collaborative work, integrated and problem based curricula, and innovative use of technology in student teacher education do not really come to realisation in the classroom.

In South Africa there also seems to be a problem with “good teaching” in the classroom which may be an indication of a problem in teacher education at higher education (HE) institutions. In South Africa research has been done in primary and secondary schools and the success rate of learners is alarming. If good teaching is part of their training, how is it that teachers cannot relate the principles of good teaching to practice?

Cheng, Chan, Tang and Cheng (2008:213-214) maintain that the preparation to engage in effective classroom practices is critical in teacher education. They believe that a constructivist approach should be taken where interaction between students or students and teachers would create the necessary knowledge and skills in a specific context. A student-centred approach emphasises self-motivation, self-reflection and learning as a reflective and interactive process with the teacher/lecturer as facilitator.

What is “good teacher education” in general and more specifically in an ODL context? Literature will be reviewed with reference to “good teacher education” in higher education and ODL contexts. The answers to two open-ended questions from lecturers at an ODL institution about what ‘good teacher education’ entails will be interrogated.

GOOD TEACHER EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Effective or good higher education teaching is a “contested concept” (Skelton 2004:452; Trigwell 2001:65-66) with “varying definitions” (Devlin and Samarawickrema 2010:112). Ramsden, Margetson, Martin and Clarke (1995:24; Trigwell 2001:66) describe good teachers more than a decade ago as *inter alia* teachers who are also good learners; they display enthusiasm for their field of study; they recognise the importance of context; they do not merely transmit knowledge, but are dynamic, reflective and evolving; they show respect for their students; they have clear goals and adapt their assessment methods to develop critical thinking skills and problem solving skills. Kreber (2002:9) clarifies excellence in teaching as lecturers teaching with a sound disciplinary knowledge; that can motivate their students, can convey concepts clearly and can help students with learning difficulties. Effective teaching in Higher Education (HE) is broadly defined by Devlin and Samarawickrema (2010:112) as “teaching that is oriented to and focused on students and their learning”.

Hoban (2007 in Beauchamp & Thomas 2009:186) sees good teacher education as a “multi-linked” conceptual framework including “conceptual, socio cultural, theory-practice and identity” aspects. Ball and Forzani (2009:503) explain a practice-focused curriculum in teacher education as a curriculum requiring specific content, in other words specific knowledge and skills that teachers need to learn to educate their learners in particular contexts.

Devlin and Samarawickrema (2010:119) see effective teaching as keeping up with technological changes. Lecturers must continually learn new skills like using technology in the best way possible. They must learn new ways of communication with students on campus, off campus or in blended environments employing “technologies and

pedagogies suited to the context and student cohort". Lecturers need to move with technological innovations to suit the needs of a new learner generation (Devlin and Samarawickrema 2010:121).

GOOD TEACHER EDUCATION IN ODL

The world needs more and better teachers, because in spite of various efforts to improve teacher education such as the implementation of ODL there will still be about 57 million children not in school in 2015, according to the UNESCO EFA global monitoring report (2010:54-55). Teacher education institutions should take note of this dilemma and try to change this dire situation by implementing new strategies to enhance and to speed up teacher education and training.

"The emergence of the digital technologies and their penetration into all levels of education ... has challenged higher education institutions to redefine their teaching and research practices and to redesign their organisational infrastructure" (Guri-Rosenbilt 2009:105). Using advanced ICTs in distance education solve some problems in the field such as providing interaction between teacher/lecturer and students, as well as between students; providing access to libraries and information resources; and updating study material on a regular basis (Guri-Rosenbilt 2009:106) but e-learning implies much more. E-learning is not meant exclusively for distance learning – it relates in general to the use electronic media for learning and teaching purpose, ranging from "... supplementary functions in conventional classrooms to full substitution of face-to-face meetings by online encounters" (Guri-Rosenbilt 2009:108). E-learning can, thus, be used in any HE institution, including ODL institutions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

A qualitative research design will be used for this study. In this case the researcher wants to extract viewpoints from lecturers about what they think good teacher education entails to understand the phenomenon better.

Research methodology

Phenomenography which will be used in this research is a recent research methodology, mostly used in education. The term was coined by Ference Marton in 1981. Phenomenography describes people's conceptions of a phenomenon (Svensson 1997:159; 160). This way of looking at teaching and learning could lead to conceptual changes to accommodate new and better ways of seeing the world.

Data collection

Two open-ended questions were e-mailed to selected staff members in the College of Education at an open distance institution namely "What is good teacher education?" and "What is good teacher education in ODL?" Since the researcher is part of the College of Education she made use of convenience and purposive sampling.

Data analysis

The responses to the open-ended questions were interrogated to identify and describe conceptions of different lecturers of good teacher education. Themes were identified taking into account variations and similarities in conceptions. The findings were discussed in narrative format.

Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations included in the research were to gain informed consent from lecturers to use the data from their responses in an anonymous way. The respondents were assured of confidentiality and voluntarily participation.

CONCLUSION

Loub, Rouse & Shorris (2007:7 in Liston, Borko & Whitcomb 2008:112) define a good teacher and good teaching as follows:

In the classroom of a good teacher, students are visible, engaged, attentive and participating ... In good teaching, students are responsible for their learning; they are accountable for their understanding ... Good teaching is passionate, and it induces an emotional response in students ... Good teaching starts with inducing habits of mind, but doesn't stop there. Good teaching engages practical thinking and problem-solving skills that can be applied in a variety of settings. And good teaching affects students' values, commitments, and identities".

Good teaching implies much more than achievement. It is a complex and holistic understanding of teachers' interactions with students and their influence on these human beings. The thorough preparation of student teachers for this complex task is very important for all teacher educators (Liston, Borko & Whitcomb 2008:112; 113).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ball DL & Forzani FM 2009. The work of teaching and the challenge for teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 60(5):497-511.

Beauchamp C & Thomas L 2009. Understanding teacher identity: an overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(2):175-189.

Cheng MMH Chan K Tang SYF & Cheng AYN 2008. Pre-service teacher education students' epistemological beliefs and their conceptions of teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(2):319-327.

Grossman P Hammerness K & McDonald M 2009. Redefining teaching, re-imagining teacher education. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 15(2):273-289.

Liston D Borko H & Whitcomb J (editorial) 2008. The educator's role in enhancing teacher quality. *Journal of Teacher Education* 59(2):111-116.

Marton F 1981. Phenomenography – describing conceptions of the world around us. *Instructional Science* 10:177-200.

Marton F & Pong WY 2005. On the unit of description in phenomenography. Higher Education Research & Development, 24(4):335-348.

Ramsden, P Margetson, D Martin, E& Clarke S 1995. Recognising and rewarding good teaching. Canberra:AGPS.

<http://online.anu.edu.au/caut/commproject/rrgt/Chapter2.html#2.6>

Schenckenberg D 2009. Understanding the real barriers to technology-enhanced innovation in higher education. Educationa; Research 51(4):411-424.

Skelton AM 2009. Points for debate – a ‘teaching excellence’ for the times we live in? Teaching in Higher Education, 14(1):107-112.

Svensson L. 1997.Theoretical Foundations of Phenomenography. Higher Education Research & Development, 16(2): 159-171

Tattersall C, Waterink W Hoppener P & Koper R 2006. A case study in the measurement of educational efficiency in open and distance learning. Distance Education, 27(3):391-404.

Trigwell K 2001. Judging university teaching. International Journal for Academic Development 6(1):65-73.

Trigwell K Prosser M & Ginnis 2005. Phenomenographic pedagogy and a revised *Approaches to teaching inventory*. Higher Education Research & Development 24(4):349-360.

Wallis C 2008. How to make great teachers. Time in partnership with CNN – 13 February 2008.

www.time.com/time/printout/0,88166,1713174,00.html (accessed 16 February 2012)