

Part 2

Teacher Education

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Challenges and Opportunities of Professional Development in Teacher Education at a South African University in a Pre- and Post-Democratic Era

Abstract

The nature of teacher education in South Africa and institutions of higher learning, like the University of the Western Cape (UWC), is reflected by the country's history. The history of the Faculty of Education is intimately tied up with the anti-apartheid and social reconstructionist history of UWC and the apartheid policies of educational segregation. This paper therefore reviews the historical context of the history and manifestations of teacher education within the Faculty in a pre- and post-democratic South Africa. Challenges and opportunities for growth are knotted with the history of the University itself. Although the democratic dispensation had the ambition to produce well trained and professional teachers, the impact of the country's teacher education history has remained visible within institutions of higher learning such as UWC. Teacher education and development in South Africa harbours challenges due to the country's history, therefore time and resources would be required to adjust the educational sector to expected standards.

Keywords: teacher education, University of the Western Cape, South Africa, apartheid, challenges, opportunities, democracy

Introduction

The story of teacher education at UWC is entangled in what transpired around the country and in other historical black institutions of higher learning. Lewin, Samuel and Sayed (2003, p. 161) note that: "The history of the Faculty of Education is intimately tied up with the anti-apartheid and social reconstructionist history of UWC" and the apartheid policies of educational segregation.

Historical context of UWC

UWC was established in 1959 as the University College of the Western Cape, which was an integral part of the University of South Africa (Wolpe, 1995; Vos & Brits, 1987). This happened at a time when teacher education in South Africa was undergoing major forms of transformation in various universities and teacher

training colleges, including the clamour for autonomy, one UWC obtained 10 years after its inception (Behr, 1988).

At UWC two orientations to teacher education emerged between the 1970s and the 1980s, all shaped by the national agenda. A scientific-technical approach was adopted in the 1970s followed by a more practical and deliberate approach in the 1980s. The then leadership of the university adopted a declaration of nonracism and “a firm commitment to the development of the Third World communities in South Africa”, a route that was cemented when the institution gained total autonomy in 1983, through the UWC Act of 1983 (Wolpe, 1995). In the later part of the 1980s, UWC politicised its agenda, and aligned this with the mass democratic movement under the banner of “an intellectual home of the left” being described as consisting of “those persons, institutions and organisations seeking and working for a fundamental transformation of the settler-colonial dominated order which prevails in South Africa today” (Gerwel, 1987, p. 2).

UWC put in place an ‘open’ admissions policy to admit students irrespective of race, colour or creed in 1985 (Vos & Brits, 1987), in defiance of the 1984 constitution that forbid the admission of other races in a university designated for a particular race, and in the case of UWC, for people classified as “Coloureds” (Bunting, 2006). UWC, under these circumstances, aimed to build a distinctive character of the university.

Teacher training and development before 1990 in South Africa were influenced by the policies of the apartheid government coined in the Christian National Education (CNE) policy document of 1948. In the 1990s then emerged a critical-emancipatory ideological approach towards teacher education at UWC in response to South Africa’s new found democracy, which necessitated the need to build an education system that was contrary to the segregationist tendencies of apartheid.

Challenges of teacher education at UWC between the 1970s and the 1990s

Teacher education in South Africa prior to 1994 was embedded in the limited number of disciplines of Historically Black Universities (HBUs) namely humanities and arts subjects (Sayed, 2002). To ensure that universities complied with these expectations of government prerogatives, courses that were designed for them were by all means not aligned within the broader social, political and economic realities of the South African broader society at the time (Wolhuter, 2006). The government’s agenda was to train graduates with a mind-set that would orientate them to maintain the socio-political agenda of the apartheid government.

The technical approach at UWC in the 1970s was influenced by the then Fundamental Pedagogics (FP) and the Christian Nationalism of the apartheid regime (Byrnes, 1996). This was further cemented in the 1980s through the infiltration of the leadership and academic staff of all public higher institutions, including UWC with white Afrikaners who were trained at historically white Afrikaans-medium universities to ensure that the apartheid ideology was kept alive.

Teacher educators were faced by challenges and the demands imposed by existing teacher education policies to which the Faculty of Education in particular and UWC in general were bound to follow. Teacher education programme through its dominant FP and the resultant scientific approach was eminent. Within this

paradigm, Giroux (1988, p. 123) emphasises the negative implications of the approach by arguing that: "Underlying this orientation to teacher education is a metaphor of 'production', a view of teaching as an 'applied science' and a view of the teacher as primarily an 'executor' of the laws and principles of effective teaching". This kind of teacher training at UWC orientated student teachers to maintain and perpetuate the ideology of the apartheid government with little interrogation (Smith, 2006).

Black students grappled to cope in terms of studying independently at the University, due to the handicapped nature of the black schooling system (Behr, 1988). This negatively impacted on the quality of teachers trained at UWC, producing teachers that did not know their work well, hence sustaining a cycle of low quality education within the Black communities.

Training for both primary and secondary school teachers was made the sole mandate of colleges of education. UWC was only afforded the mandate to train secondary school teachers, in effect limiting the number of graduates that could be trained (Behr, 1988). In 1982 UWC offered a four year Diploma in Education to train teachers for secondary schools, and only a one year Higher Diploma in Education for postgraduates (Vos & Brits, 1987). In 1990 teacher education colleges were closed and education was incorporated into higher education following the institutionalisation of the 1996 Constitution. The constitution made tertiary education a national competence, and the Higher Education Act of 1997 made teacher education an integral part of the higher education system.

Funding provided by the government for students at UWC like other HBUs was far less compared to predominantly White universities (Behr, 1988), and this restricted the intake and training of student teachers who could not afford to pay school fees. Although the government financed the university in terms of buildings, equipment, salaries and maintenance, students were obliged to pay school fees (Vos & Brits, 2010), an aspect that restricted many student teachers from enrolling at UWC.

UWC's Faculty of Education focused on the traditional approach which was prevalent in similar institutions. Student teachers at UWC were also offered alternative, critical theoretical discourses focusing on critical discourses on education through Liberal and Marxist perspectives, often revolving around apartheid politics (Nkomo, 1990).

Teacher education should give student teachers a foundation and an opportunity to make original contributions to the development of pedagogical theory. This was not possible because the apartheid government was firmly in control of the curriculum, and therefore dictated what could or could not be taught to student teachers, in an endeavour to enforce its ideology of African subservice, particularly through FP (Welch, 2002; Adler & Reed, 2002). These circumstances made the teacher education programme at UWC and other HBUs so obscure to an extent that teachers could not take any rational decision or initiative based on their own analysis of the teaching and learning context (Welch, 2002).

Attempts were made in the late 1970s and early 1980s to address some of these concerns within the teacher education programmes, by improving the qualification of teachers, but still the quality of such qualifications remained a matter of distress,

due to the restrictive nature of the curriculum and the philosophies of the fundamental pedagogies that were in place (Welch, 2002).

Non-White universities experienced disruptions and unrests characterised by student boycotts. Students in non-White universities saw their campuses as the perfect ground to express their grievances against the government (Behr, 1988), and in the process experienced government oppressive measures against institutions including UWC (Wolpe, 1995).

The political realities of the 1990s aggravated and necessitated a total overhaul and transformation of teacher training programmes in institutions of higher learning, a move that intensified after 1994. However, this government overhaul programme rather resulted in a reduction of the number of student teachers that were being admitted. Surprisingly, this ideology was prompted by the growing numbers of unemployed teachers in the country and the government was determined to curb that trend in order to create a more stable and manageable system.

Opportunities for teacher professional development at UWC between 1970 and 1990

Although UWC struggled to cope with the influx of Black students due to the post 1985 open door policy, this path led to the University's rapid growth in terms of numbers, with a boost in the numbers of graduates from disadvantaged communities. These conditions combined fermented UWC's position in the late 1980s and early 1990s as an internationally acclaimed hotbed for intellectual and political resistance to the apartheid regime in South Africa (Lewin, Samuel & Sayed, 2003).

Another trajectory for growth within the teacher education programme at UWC stems from the university's critical opposition to the apartheid government's teacher education policy. The University conveniently forged ahead in union with the democratic government regarding its teacher education policy matters. This foundation was literally laid in the 1990s, following the incorporation of teacher education into higher education, as a result of the closure of colleges of education. Although this was meant to reduce the cost that was being accumulated as a result of the fragmentation of teacher education by the apartheid government, it gave institutions like UWC the opportunity to expand its teacher education portfolio (Adler, 2002).

Although UWC like any other public university in South Africa somewhat supported the basic ideology of the National Party government, the decision to change its position in the late 1980s and early 1990s provided an opportunity for growth (Bunting, 2006). Considering that UWC was specifically designated as a Coloured institution, the decision to open access to students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds gave the university an opportunity to grow intellectual and to amass ammunition to oppose the apartheid government.

In addition to being earmarked to train secondary school teachers alongside providing services in specialised youth guidance, remedial education, amongst others, UWC was also allowed to offer courses for in-service teachers on an ongoing basis. This in itself was prompted by the higher number of uncertified teachers in coloured schools. Samuel and Stephens (2000) are of the opinion that pre-service

teacher preparation programmes play a significant role in their ability to deconstruct, construct and reconstruct teacher identity.

There were opportunities for the higher education sector to contribute, "... in partnership with community and other organizations, to the development of counter discourses to Fundamental Pedagogics" (Nkomo, 1990, p. 89). UWC's ability to benefit from such opportunities was only possible based on the degree of resistance among alumni teachers. However, the fundamental challenge of progressive teacher organisations and other bodies was to counter the dominant discourse by challenging its presuppositions, and restoring the political from its position as forbidden speech, and overthrowing the divisive practice of depicting the teacher as the expert scientist (Nkomo, 1990).

In the late 1970s there was that grave need to expand the teacher training base due to the increasing number of unqualified teachers. Out of 94,575 teachers that were employed in 1984, only 22,732 possessed a matric certificate or a higher qualification (Vos & Brits, 1987, p. 114). This was one of the reasons why UWC cultivated the need to keep professional teachers abreast with new developments in their respective teaching subjects, by introducing an in-service training programme for professional teachers.

In the 1980s, due to pressure for reforms within the educational sector, the de Lange commission was put in place and tasked with reporting on the state of the country's education system. Although the government only made some minimal adjustments in response to the commission's findings, by accepting only the basic principles of equality of opportunities and of standards in education, it still created opportunities for growth for non-white institutions, including UWC (Hartshorne, 1985).

The path adopted by the teacher education programme in the 1990s and 2000s was geared towards strengthening the student teachers' ability to reflect on their own practices in order to change it, and to be able to examine the relationship between schooling and societal inequalities with the purpose of addressing inequalities through their teaching and other professional activities at school.

Teacher education in post-apartheid South Africa

From the 1990s effort was made to ensure that teacher education reform in terms of curriculum was based on sound research. Attempts were made to construct new qualifications and curriculum. Hence, the revision of the Norms and Standards of Teacher Education Policy document in the 1990s was meant to enable teacher education qualifications and programmes to be able to transform practice, as opposed to what was in existence before 1990 (Welch, 2002). The democratic government positioned its first mission to be that of restoring equity, equality and fairness in the educational system.

The establishment of the National Teacher Audit at the dawn of democracy was tasked with the responsibility to research, and analyse teacher demand, supply and utilisation nationally (Chisholm, 2009). The intention was to do away with the education structures of apartheid regime that were discriminatory. Although the government introduced the Tirisano plan in 2000 with the intention to develop the professional quality of teachers, this unfortunately focused on less intensive developmental aspects of teacher education.

Deacon (2010) notes that 23 universities were tasked to train teachers in the post-apartheid era, however their capacities were questionable, because few offered the full suite of educational programmes. Although provinces were required to use 1% of their budget for human resource development, including the training of teachers, it did not reflect in the budget allocation for teacher education (Deacon, 2010). As a result it impacted negatively on teacher education at UWC. Soudien (2010) notes that the democratic government's decision to regulate the teacher education programme throughout the country contributed to: the loss in the prestige formerly attached to the teacher profession and a reduction in the number of youths interested to become teachers.

The period before and immediately after democracy in 1994 saw numerous changes within the education core in South Africa in terms of policy development. The democratic government aware of the potential of education to address the country's inequalities (Mogliacci, Raanhuis & Howell, 2016; Schafer & Wilmot, 2012) embarked on a mission "to overhaul a highly segregated, dysfunctional and costly education system by building a foundation of quality and equality in South African schools" (Lajewski, 2015, p. 15).

Ideally, teacher education should allow student teachers to critically question existing knowledge structures and become agents of change contributing in a meaningfully way to knowledge construction.

Conclusion

Different political forces shape the views and approaches towards teacher practice at any institution of higher learning. Although the democratic dispensation had the ambition to produce well trained and professional teachers, the impact of the country's and UWC's teacher education history has remained visible with institutions of higher learning, particularly at UWC. Time and resources would be required to adjust the educational sector to expected standards.

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