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DOCUMENT 8**Teacher Knowledge and the Design of Open and Distance-Learning Courses and Programs**

This document indicates five international trends that suggest teacher education should become more school and classroom focused.

In recent years there has been considerable debate about what constitutes teachers' professional knowledge. Much of this has focused on the context of pre-service courses, but increasingly attention is being given to in-service or continuing professional development. The form this takes can vary between linguistic and cultural communities but certain issues and trends now appear to have global resonance. Three are of particular significance to course designers.

The first is the importance afforded to practical activity. There is a movement to making 'teaching practice' or 'school experience' much more central to course structures. Traditionally in teacher education the practical component has existed independent of subject or even pedagogic parts of the course. Today many more courses plan for classroom activity to inform discussions around key pedagogic or subject-focused themes. For example, exploration of the theoretical issues around formative assessment may be derived from a series of activities that the teacher carries out in the classroom. The designers of qualification upgrading courses have a particularly opportunity to exploit the practicum. The trainees are, after all, in their classrooms most of the time and it would seem perverse not to exploit this opportunity.

The University of Fort Hare BEd program described in Document 9 provides a good example as to how this can be done.

A second and related trend is the move from course design as a series of inputs (credits in mathematics or the sociology of education, for example) to a focus on outcomes or competences. South Africa, for example, has reconceptualized teacher education (and the school and vocational curriculum) in this way. Inevitably, therefore, specified outcomes gives strong prominence to classroom performance. Once the outcomes are set out, the task for the course designer is to set out the sort of experience and knowledge that should be provided to achieve such outcomes. Formative assessment, which is important in teaching and learning for young people, becomes equally important at the level of teacher knowledge. Tracking

progress to achieve the outcomes might best be appreciated through a portfolio type of log than summative assessment.

A third trend, which again follows from the first two, is less reliant on examinations and more focused on ongoing assessment (including judgments about practical competence). Formal examinations can only assess a proportion of the competences to be a successful teacher and many argue that this should be reflected in the weight given to different types of assessment.

A fourth trend, particularly in teacher upgrading courses, is the move toward accrediting prior learning (APL). This allows teachers who have acquired considerable classroom knowledge and skills to enter programs at a point that recognizes these skills. Introducing an APL component has implications for course design and structure but it seems entirely appropriate if the associated moves toward more outcome-based assessment are to be effectively introduced. Many are now pointing out the wasteful use of resources and the impact on teacher motivation if all upgrading programs assume every teacher is a novice.

A final trend is to bring subject learning and pedagogy more closely together. In many teacher training courses subject knowledge has traditionally been taught separately. Pedagogy and teaching method courses have likewise been taught generically without reference to subject domains. Increasingly, however, research is pointing to the necessity of bringing the two together. How you teach science, whether at primary or secondary level, depends on an integrated understanding of the science and the most appropriate teaching and learning strategies that can be applied to the science. A teacher, therefore, needs to:

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- know about the subject
 - know about the subject as it exists in the curriculum being taught
 - know about the most effective pedagogic strategies associated with any area of the curriculum.
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In teacher education these three dimensions of teacher knowledge are found fused at the practical classroom level. This is a further reason why a strong focus on practical classroom activity most effectively provides a core to course and program design.

Source: written by Bob Moon for this publication.