

Case study: University of Fort Hare

B.Prim.ED

1. PROGRAMME OFFERED

The programme that forms the basis of this case study is a 4-year contact supported distance education programme leading to the award of a B. Prim Ed by the University of Fort Hare (UFH).

The programme has been developed and is offered by the Distance Education Project (DEP), which is based at the All Saints Campus of UFH in Bisho.

The B. Prim Ed programme comprises 8 semesters.

Each semester comprises two courses presented through eight *imithamo* (each *umthamo* is a separately printed booklet of approximately 40 pages) in ‘bite-size’ chunks of approximately 40 hours of notional learning time:

- **Core Education Studies:**
 - Learning About Learning (LAL)
 - Helping Learners Learn (HLL)
 - Schools as Learning Communities (SLC)
 - Learning in the world (LIW)
- **Core Learning areas:**
 - Literacy
 - Numeracy and Mathematics
 - Natural Sciences
 - Technology.

As noted above, each *umthamo* comprises a separate booklet, which represents 40 hours of notional learning time. Of this 40 hours, approximately 3 hours is spent in face-to-face discussion on three Saturday mornings and the other 37 hours is spent in individual self-study and classroom application built around a **key activity** (requiring at least 10 hours to complete.)

A typical Saturday morning contact session involves discussion of three *imithamo*:

- one being concluded (e.g. *Umthamo* 11, Natural Sciences – What’s happening here?)
- one being monitored (e.g. *Umthamo* 12, HLL – Creating a Learner-centred Environment)
- one being introduced. (e.g. *Umthamo* 13, MLMMS – problem-solving and investigating).

The *abakhwezeli* (UFH’s version of ‘tutors’) are not supposed to use these sessions to teach the content of the programme. Rather, they play the role of facilitating discussion on the issues arising, as well as the progress on and the implications of the issues explored in the printed material. The *abakhwezeli* have a key role to play in motivating the teacher-learners in their studies – that is in ‘keeping the fire burning’.

During the course of one year of study, teacher-learners therefore work through 16 separate *imithamo* and complete 16 classroom- or school-based key activities.

Eight key activities are subjected to self-assessment and peer assessment and are included in teacher-learners' portfolios; the other eight key activities are also handed in for assessment by the relevant *umkhwezeli* before being included in learners' portfolios.

Classroom-based key activities require evidence in the form of examples of learners' work (as opposed to just teacher-learners' work, for example) or evidence in the form of completed school policy documents and the documented process of development thereof. Thus the assessment strategy is very much evidence-based and requires self, peer and *umkhwezeli* review. At the end of each semester, teacher-learners are required to justify their portfolio to their peers and *umkhwezeli*. Section 3 contains more information about the assessment strategy.

In addition to the B. Prim Ed itself, a certificate course is offered which provides an access route into the programme for those who do not have the required prior learning and experience (5 years teaching experience). This course has two components: English for Teachers and Introduction to Tertiary Level. It is scheduled for revision.

2. PURPOSE AND TARGET LEARNERS

2.1 PROGRAMME PURPOSE

The focus of the UFHDEP B. Prim Ed is as follows:

- *providing award-bearing and accredited courses that are commensurate with South Africa's new curricular thrusts*
- *addressing the scarcity of teachers trained in maths, science and technology education, language teaching and its use across the curriculum, school management and early childhood development*
- *introducing and modelling the training of teachers in multi-grade teaching, a situation that faces many of our province's primary teachers but is mostly not addressed in their development*
- *enhancing the classroom performance of teachers through researching and propagating comparative best practices – generic and learning-area specific, determined both locally and internationally*
- *impacting whole school development through teacher learning activities and programmes.*

2.2 DESCRIPTION OF TARGET LEARNERS

The target learners are practising primary school teachers with at least five years teaching experience.

There were 974 registered teacher-learners at the end of the third intake in March 2000. The recent intake, in September 2000, took enrolment to 1284. The teacher-learners are mature students working with classes from Grade 0 to Grade 9. 90% of learners on the programme are female.

Teacher-learners with Grade 10 + PTC + 5 years experience are required to complete the certificate course before they can be granted 240 credits RPL for entry to the B. Prim. Ed programme.

Teacher-learners with Grade 12 + PTC or PTD + 5 years experience are assumed to have RPL equivalent to 240 credits and gain direct access to the degree programme. No distinction is made between PTC and PTD as entry qualifications for the degree programme.

3. ASSESSMENT

The development of the assessment strategy for the B. Prim. Ed programme was informed by the following imperatives:

- Avoiding the negative backwash from terminal examinations that characterised the traditional South African approach.
- The need to go beyond merely paying lip service to continuous assessment.
- The need for an assessment process that would support and build the learning process instead of just giving unexplained marks.
- The need for a monitoring, appraisal, and validation process that would be rigorous and accountable but also manageable and realistic.

The programme uses a continuous assessment process to build towards the development of an individual “professional quality index” (PQI).

The PQI is determined from a combination of performance in four key areas:

- **Participation** (listening, sharing, supporting and democratic group work).
At the end of each of the 60 hours of face-to-face sessions, teacher-learners have to assess themselves in terms of this criterion, and are also assessed by a peer and their *umkhwezeli*, using the following five-point scale:

Not adequate – doesn’t meet requirements	Adequate – just meets requirements	Good – meets requirements well	Very Good – more than meets requirements	Outstanding – goes beyond requirements – quality work
Weak	Okay	Good	Very Good	Excellent

The overall participation assessment is therefore derived from 60 separate assessments from the perspectives of self, peer and *umkhwezeli*.

- **Oral presentation** (sense, effectiveness of communication, clarity, contributions)

At the end of the first semester of the year, teacher-learners give an oral account of what they have learned during the year, using evidence of work that has happened in their classrooms, as well as the assignments they have completed. These oral presentations are assessed, using the above scale, by self, peers and *umkhwezeli*. At the end of the second semester, teacher-learners are required to “defend” their portfolio to a panel comprising peers, *umkhwezeli* and others e.g. academic co-ordinators as well as external moderators.

- **Eight written reflective reports/research assignments**

As noted previously, teacher-learners complete 16 practical classroom- or school-based assignments during the course of the year. Eight of these, indicated in the materials together with assessment criteria, are handed in for assessment by the relevant *umkhwezeli*, again using the five-point scale supported by formative feedback. (The other eight are included in the teacher-learner’s portfolio.) Alan Kenyon sees these assignments as a key part of the programme as they involve learners in classroom- and school-based research that ties in directly with the overall purpose of the programme, that is, to make a positive difference in classrooms and schools. He notes that it is a positive innovation for learners to be engaged in such research in an undergraduate programme.

- **Portfolio Presentation (evidence of professional growth and development)**

Teacher-learners’ portfolios include the work of full year. The teacher-learners are provided with a concertina file in which to file their accumulated work at the beginning of the programme. At the end of each semester, teacher-learners prepare a display of their work using their own selection from their concertina files. The display should provide evidence of:

- activities done
- what the teacher-learner has learned
- progress, as evidence of change
- process, as evidence of change.

Teacher-learners have to be ready to defend their display to a small group of their peers, as well as *umkhwezeli* and moderators, by being ready to answer questions such as:

- Why have you chosen this piece of work?
- What do you want us to look at/ notice in this piece of work?
- What have you learned from the experience of carrying out this activity?
- If you were to try this activity again, what would you do differently and why?

In addition to these four key components, the final PQI assessment for the year can be influenced for borderline cases by poor attendance (which affects the PQI negatively) and the teacher-learners’ journal, which can affect the PQI positively.

Viv Kenyon stresses the importance of journal writing in the programme as a whole. She believes that “the more the teacher-learners write, the better they get at expressing thoughts and ideas in writing”.

4. COURSE DESIGN PROCESS

When Nhlanganiso Dladla joined the programme as Director in 1997 some preliminary work had already been done by Basil Moore from Australia but there were questions about both the programme and delivery mechanisms for the proposed programme. For example, the original 'Australian' proposal would have required a R14m upfront investment in infrastructure and an initial workshop involved about 80 writers. However, UFH had funds to cover only Dladla's salary.

Dladla thus saw that it would be necessary to adopt a more incremental approach. It was necessary to develop a broad vision for the DEP based on the main needs identified in the National Teacher Audit and to begin with small numbers.

Development of the plan that eventually led to the DEP was assisted at this stage by Bob Moon of the OU-UK who was able to offer some time through the financial support of the OSF.

By the end of 1997, with additional support from the OU, core principles had been thrashed out. The approach would be built around:

- key activities
- applied learning
- issues
- own experience
- trying out ideas (i.e. an organic, experimenting process rather than simply doing what is traditionally done – “more of the same won't fix it”).

Development during the years 1997-8 was supported financially by Kagiso Trust and the OSF and in kind by the Australians and OU.

It was informed by a multi-group, action research development model, which led to an 'evolving' policy framework and the concept of 'core' courses: CESC and CLAC.

During 1998/9, a major emphasis was placed on developing a model for effective continuous assessment.

An ongoing challenge for the DEP has been in establishing and maintaining effective leadership, especially in the area of learner support. A perception that a particular part of the programme is not being well handled can prompt others to try to fill the gap. This can lead to overwork and tension. What is needed is a style of leadership which can find a balance between being democratic and being assertive and which can draw upon all the talents of the team.

The medium term vision is to bring the DEP into the mainstream of the university within a reformulated Faculty of Education. The DEP, alongside other Faculty projects, would have a Director who would coordinate the work of and receive reports from specific programme leaders.