

https://dspace.org/

# Supporting student teachers through their first attempts at teaching: Possibilities and limitations afforded by school-based and campus based models of support.

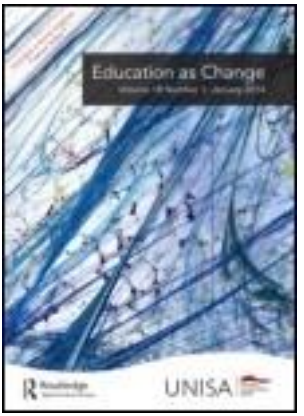
**Rusznyak, L.; Moosa, M.**

**2014**

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/31873

Rusznyak, L., & Moosa. M. (2014). Supporting student teachers through their first attempts at teaching: Possibilities and limitations afforded by school-based and campus based models of support. Education as Change, 18(Suppl. 1), 91-105.

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/




Education as Change
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/redc20

# Supporting student teachers through their first attempts at teaching: Possibilities and limitations afforded by schoolbased and campus-based models of support

Lee Rusznyak[ab] & Moeniera Moosa[ab]
[a] University of the Witwatersrand
[b] University of the Witwatersrand
Published online: 18 Mar 2014.

**To cite this article:** Lee Rusznyak & Moeniera Moosa (2014) Supporting student teachers through their first attempts at teaching: Possibilities and limitations afforded by schoolbased and campus-based models of support, Education as Change, 18:sup1, S91-S105, DOI: 10.1080/16823206.2013.877354

**To link to this article:** http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/16823206.2013.877354

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and

should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sublicensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at http:// www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions

Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

Education As Change, Volume 18, No. S1, 2014, pp. S91–S105

# Supporting student teachers through their first attempts at teaching: Possibilities and limitations afforded by school-based and campus-based models of support

Lee Rusznyak
University of the Witwatersrand
Moeniera Moosa
University of the Witwatersrand

Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

## Abstract

Student teachers' first attempt at teaching a lesson is a crucial step in their professional development. This paper compares the potential pedagogical learning opportunities and limitations afforded by school-based and campus-based support programmes that are designed to support student teachers in their early attempts at teaching. We use a qualitative analysis of interviews with university lecturers and a quantitative analysis of written feedback provided to student teachers within each of these models. The analysis of our data shows that during the school-based model, students receive retrospective feedback on many diverse issues relating to their lesson, particularly their management of learners. In contrast, the campus-based model offers student teachers an explicit opportunity to work collaboratively on the management of the content knowledge for their first lesson. The campus-based model, despite its numerous limitations, offers possibilities for developing students' understanding of teaching as a complex cognitive practice from their early attempts at teaching.

Keywords: student teacher, lesson planning, lesson delivery, teaching practicum, teacher educator, initial teacher education

## Introduction

At some point during their initial teacher education, student teachers teach a lesson to a class of learners for the first time.[1] In order to promote students' professional development, it is not desirable for students' first experience of teaching a lesson to be one in which they feel overwhelmed by the complexities of teaching, nor is it desirable that it provides them with a false sense of confidence from a seemingly 'successful' lesson that is conceptually and pedagogically weak (Joram & Gabriele 1998). This step in their professional development provides teacher educators with a unique opportunity, when students are particularly receptive to guidance, to explicitly guide them through the complexities of teaching. This study was prompted by a concern that many student teachers in South Africa may be receiving inadequate support in what we consider to be a crucial step as they start engaging in classroom teaching.

A recent review of teacher education programmes in South Africa found that many institutions experience a 'lack of human resources to enable academic staff to visit students on teaching practice with sufficient frequency and duration', which results in 'generally inadequate professional supervision' of student teachers

during their teaching practicum (Council of Higher Education 2010:94). Where limited staffing capacity exists, the supervision of senior students who are nearing graduation is often

ISSN: Print 1682-3206, Online 1947-9417
© 2014 The University of Johannesburg
DOI:10.1080/16823206.2013.877354

Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

prioritised over the provision of support for students who are teaching lessons for the first time. Junior student teachers are thus often exclusively reliant on a school-based supervising teacher for support and guidance. Supervising teachers who are able to 'demonstrate how to organise productive learning activities and respond to both predictable and unexpected problems that arise in the classrooms' would arguably provide adequate support for student teachers (LePage, Darling-Hammond & Akar 2005:353). However, within the South African context, the 'history of authoritarianism, inspections and hierarchy in schools' has in many instances 'actively discouraged [teachers] from engaging in any form of dialogue about why they were doing what they were doing, what the alternatives might be in their teaching' (Robinson 2000:214). This concern is exacerbated by recent studies (National Education Evaluation and Development Unit [NEEDU] 2012; Spaull 2011) within the South African context that have revealed that a widespread concern 'is a lack of [pedagogical and subject] knowledge on the part of teachers' (NEEDU 2012:30). These factors have 'severe implications for the depth of inquiry offered by [supervising] teachers to student teachers' during sessions of teaching practicum (Robinson 2000:216). It is untenable that student teachers are placed for practicum sessions in schools without rigorous attention to the knowledge and pedagogical reasoning that underpins their lessons. As long as this cannot be assured within the context of South African classrooms, student teachers need intentionally directed university support, especially during their early practicum experiences.

This paper considers the potential pedagogical learning opportunities and limitations afforded by two models that intend to provide student teachers with support as they begin planning and delivering lessons to learners.[2] In the first model (henceforth, school-based model), lecturers travel to students' school placements and observe two of their initial lessons. The second model (henceforth, the campusbased model) requires that students on the cusp of teaching a lesson for the first time return from their practicum to participate in a two-day support programme held on campus. We present a quantitative analysis of lesson observation reports written by lecturers for two cohorts of student teachers. One cohort undertook their first attempts at teaching within a school-based model, whereas the other cohort participated in a campus-based support programme. To obtain a more textured understanding of trends from the quantitative analysis, we draw on interviews with six lecturers who have supervised student teachers within both models. The main claim of this paper is that the affordances offered by these two models of support for students through their first experiences of teaching enable teacher educators to open up or close down different possibilities for students' pedagogical learning.

## Review of the literature and conceptual framework

In 1987, Shulman observed that few studies on what constitutes effective teaching gave 'careful attention not only to the management of [learners] in classrooms, but also to the management of ideas within classroom discourse' (p. 84, emphasis added). Since then, the international 'learning to teach' literature has engaged much more substantially with what it takes to enable student teachers to manage ideas effectively in teaching conceptually strong lessons (for example, Ball, Thames & Phelps 2008; Darling-Hammond 2006; Grossman 1990; Loughran, Mulhall & Berry 2008).

While we acknowledge that both the management of ideas and the management of learners are required for effective teaching, we are concerned that with inadequate attention to the substantive concerns about mediating subject content knowledge in conceptually appropriate ways, student teachers may quickly learn to manage learners effectively, without necessarily having understood the complexity of managing ideas in the lessons they teach. Managing knowledge and enabling learning appears deceivingly straightforward and student teachers often assume that they will teach effectively once they learn the skills of managing a class of learners (Joram & Gabriele 1998). The tendency for many student teachers to assume that teaching merely involves the acquisition and application of routine procedures has been termed the 'problem of complexity' (Hammerness et al. 2005:375).

Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

## Complexities with managing ideas and managing learners

Part of the complexity associated with lesson preparation is that student teachers have to learn to draw simultaneously on different knowledge bases of teaching, for example content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, learner knowledge and pedagogical knowledge (Grossman 1990; Shulman 1987). Student teachers need to learn to organise the knowledge by distinguishing between the core ideas of a concept, important things to know and peripheral details (Wiggins & McTighe 2005). By the time they graduate, they need to be able to manage ideas at different levels and within different time frames: each lesson needs to be internally coherent and there needs to be conceptual progression between successive lessons that together cover a curriculum over the course of a year (Lampert 2001).

In addition to the complexities related to planning, there are complexities that arise during lesson delivery. Kennedy (2004:30) identifies common concerns that arise during class time as those that involve making knowledge understandable (content coverage and the use of methods that enhance learner understanding), pacing of learners through the knowledge (maintaining lesson momentum and promoting student participation) and creating safe environments for learning. Teachers make 'momentby-moment tradeoffs' as they weigh up conflicting priorities depending on their professional judgement of what constitutes 'the most prominent concern' at a particular time.

## Pedagogies that reveal the complexities of practice to students

While many student teachers assume that enabling learning is straightforward, the ability to plan coherent lessons that both meet the demands of the content and are responsive to the needs of learners is 'not something that most people know how to do intuitively or that they learn from unguided classroom experience' (Darling-Hammond et al. 2005:176). Grossman et al. (2009) identify three educational pedagogies that they argue are invaluable for introducing students to the complexities of professional practices that seek human improvement (such as teaching). The first of these pedagogies involves the analysis of representations of practice which are used to make particular features of the practice visible to novices, although they hide others (e.g., the study and analysis of narrative accounts of classroom dilemmas; live or video observations of practitioners; samples of learner work and so on). Secondly, students learn about complexity in practice by working with decompositions of that practice. Decompositions of practice enable novices to focus their attention on constituent parts of a practice and work intensively with fewer components at a time before amalgamating them into a coherent whole. Thirdly, by using approximations of practice, novices are provided with opportunities to engage with aspects of the practice within situations of various degrees of authenticity and complexity (Grossman 2011; Grossman et al. 2009).

Grossman's framework provides us with a way of analysing how each of the two models of support for students' first teaching practicum offers lecturers opportunities to work with students using representations of practice, the extent to which the models enable a decomposition of teaching practice and the possibilities they offer for providing student support within contexts of varying authenticity and complexity.

## Context of the study

Student teachers registered for a four-year Bachelor of Education course in our institution are assigned to primary schools around Johannesburg for their first teaching practicum session. Until recently, students taught their first lesson within a school-based model of support. Our institution now requires students to participate in a campus-based support programme before they teach their first lesson to learners. The arrangements for the school-based and campus-based models are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of arrangements in the school-based and campus-based models of support for student teachers

Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

| | School-based model of support | Campus-based model of support |
|---|---|---|
| First teaching practicum session (3 weeks in April/May) | - 3 days of observation<br>- Prepare and teach 1–2 lessons per day thereafter<br>- 2 lecturer observations<br>- Continuous supervising teacher observations | - 3-week observation assignment, and assistant to teacher<br>- One day on campus mid-week to discuss observations and lecturers check draft assignment |
| Second teaching practicum session (3 weeks in August/ September) | - 3 days of observation<br>- Prepare and teach 1–2 lessons per day thereafter<br>- 2 lecturer observations<br>- Continuous supervising teacher observations | - First four days: attend school, obtain a lesson topic, read up on topic and prepare lesson with guidance from supervising teacher<br>- Day 1 of campus-based support programme (Friday of first week): student teachers present rationale for lesson design for peer and university lecturer feedback<br>- Weekend: students work to strengthen lesson based on feedback received<br>- Day 2 of campus-based support programme (Monday of second week): students rehearse prepared lesson for peer and lecturer feedback<br>- Tuesday onwards: return to school and teach lesson prepared at campus-based support programme |

## The school-based model

Students in our institutions were prepared to teach their first lesson with school-based support by attending lectures on generic aspects of teaching such as the use of classroom management routines and the use of learning support materials, and practising their writing on a chalkboard. They were shown how to complete a lesson plan in the required university format. In the weeks preceding their first practicum session, they prepared a given lesson topic and they taught parts of it to a group of peers in a simulated lesson.[3] During their first practicum, students observed lessons for three days, after which they were expected to teach one or two lessons per day. During the practicum, two lessons were formally observed by a lecturer who visited them at the school on at least two occasions.

## The campus-based model

Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

The campus-based model was introduced with two aims: to provide students with formative feedback on the conceptual structure of an authentic lesson that will assist them in strengthening that lesson so that their first experience of teaching is more likely to be successful, and to enable student teachers to rehearse their planned lesson so they are more confident when they teach it to a class of learners. A campus-based support model (scheduled during students' second teaching practicum session) supports students to prepare and rehearse their first lesson to be taught at school. In university coursework, students are introduced to teaching as a complex practice that draws on different knowledge bases and requires pedagogical reasoning and action (Shulman 1987). In tutorial classes, students work with classroom artefacts (such as lesson plans, textbook extracts and classroom transcripts), analysing how knowledge has been organised for learning.

During their first practicum session, students are not permitted to teach, but an observation assignment draws their attention to how teachers enable knowledge acquisition. By their second practicum session, students have completed several modules of a school content subject and its associated pedagogies and are required to teach a fully prepared lesson to primary school learners for the first time. Having spent the first four days of the practicum observing, they return to campus bringing a lesson topic obtained from a supervising teacher, around which they should have read extensively. On the Friday, they present a rationale for their lesson design for peer and lecturer feedback (Rusznyak & Walton 2011) as shown in Appendix A. Over the weekend, they are encouraged to rework the lesson in light of the feedback received. On Monday, students rehearse their lesson for further feedback. Some peers act as learners participating in the lesson, while others make notes for feedback in response to prompts (see Appendix B). They then return to their allocated school where they reteach their rehearsed lesson to an assigned class of learners, ideally for supervising teacher observation and feedback.

## Methodology

This paper is written in the tradition of practical inquiry, where we seek to understand the impact of an aspect of our practices within the field of teacher education through research (Richardson 2005; Venkat & Osman 2012). As teacher educators who seek to contribute to a scholarship of teaching, we are interested in 'helping prospective teachers begin the life-long process of learning to teach' and 'taking our own professional work as a research site and learning by investigating our own practice ... in ways that are critical [and] rigorous' (Cochran-Smith 2005:220). Practice-based inquiry can be regarded as a form of action research in which practitioner-researchers review their current practices, identify an aspect for improvement, investigate alternative way of doing things, implement changes, reflect on the effects of these changes and modify in light of the evaluation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007; McNiff 2008). We acknowledge that much of the practice-based inquiry research has been criticised for merely producing local knowledge that has little broader value beyond the specificities of the contexts in which it is generated. We seek to address these concerns in the research design of our study. Firstly, we maintain that supporting student teachers through their first attempts at lesson planning in ways that include explicit attention to both their conceptualisation and performance is not merely a local concern. By being explicit about the different ways in which the practicum for student teachers in our institution has been structured, we hope to present a case of practice-based research that is both rigorous and replicable. While the cumulative knowledge contribution of many small-scale studies may be difficult to assess (Sleeter 2001), there have been calls for South African teacher educators to undertake research that 'focuses more introspectively on understanding the experiences and understandings of pre-service teachers in order to provide insights into the effectiveness and impact of specific teacher education programmes' (Green 2012:v). In response to this call, we hope to contribute towards discussions about how teacher education in South Africa can be strengthened through a research-led approach (Osman 2010; Venkat & Osman 2012).

This study analyses lesson observation reports written by lecturers for two cohorts of student teachers who undertook their first attempts at teaching within one of the models under consideration. The first set of

Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

lesson observation reports was written in 2006 for 66 student teachers by 38 lecturers when student teachers' initial attempts at teaching took place in a school-based model. The second set of reports was written over two days during the 2012 campus-based support programme. A total of 448 student teachers participated in the campus-based support programme and 311 gave their consent for their work to be analysed in this study. There were 45 lecturers who were assigned to the programme as part of their teaching practicum supervision load, each working with a group of 10–12 first-year student teachers over the two-day programme. All gave consent for their reports to be used in this study.

We read through the written reports and identified comments that gave guidance to student teachers about improving their teaching. The categories used for the quantitative analysis were those that emerged inductively from the data analysis. We discounted categories where less than 15% of students received guidance in both sets of reports.

Our second dataset comes from a set of responses to questions asked of six lecturers who were purposefully selected because they had experience observing students teaching for the first time in school-based settings, and had worked with students in the campus-based support programme. The questions probed what they had found more or less visible in the school-based observations compared to the campus-based observations, and how this had opened up or closed down opportunities for them to provide support to student teachers during their first attempts at teaching. We probed their perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of arrangements when student teachers were required to undertake their first teaching practicum in a school-based lesson with lesson observations by a lecturer, and with the campus-based support programme. Some (Sibongile, Claudia) chose to participate in an interview that was audio-recorded and transcribed, whereas others chose to respond to the same set of questions in writing (Emma, Steve, Betty and Lesley).

By asking for individual responses, we were able to ensure that each participant's views were considered equally, and there was not a dominant voice, as sometimes occurs in focus group interviews. We remain mindful that as organisers of the teaching practicum in our institution, there may have been pressure on the participants to produce answers that were collegial, rather than honest. In order to increase the reliability of our findings, we considered data useable where the same point had been raised by at least three of the six lecturer participants.

Table 2 shows which of the lecturer participants in our study contributed to our analysis under the various categories of findings we present. We make liberal use of quotes obtained from lecturer responses to our questions is order to ensure that we present their views in their own words as far as possible.

## Findings

While the school- and campus-based models have similar aims, the analysis of our data suggests that they offer support in very different ways. This section will present the quantitative analysis of two sets of lesson observation reports, and the perceptions of lecturers who supervised student teachers within both models of support during students' first attempts at teaching. We organise the analysis in two parts. Firstly, we consider how aspects of student teaching are more or less visible to lecturers in the schoolbased and campus-based models of support. In this section, we draw on data from the lecturer responses and the written feedback reports. Thereafter, we consider the extent to which each model opens up or closes down possibilities for student teacher development beyond what is observable. In this section, we rely exclusively on the qualitative analysis of the responses from lecturers. We then briefly consider other limitations associated with each model.

Table 2: The lecturer participants in our study who contributed to our analysis under the various categories of findings we present

| | What is more or less visible about student teaching in each model? | | | | Provision of student support Other significant limitation | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Managing ideas | Managing learners and managing classrooms | Adapting lessons to the learning needs of learners | Coherent lesson conceptualisation | Environments for discussion & collaboration | Monitoring of student teacher learning | Student cooperation during campus-based model | Time constraints during school-based model |
| Emma | x | x | x | x | x | | x | x |
| Sibongile | x | x | x | x | | x | | |
| Claudia | x | x | x | x | x | | | x |
| Betty | x | | | | x | x | x | |
| Steve | x | x | | | x | | | |
| Lesley | x | x | | x | x | x | x | x |

Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

### *1. Aspects of practice that are more or less visible*

In comparing the guidance provided to student teachers in the school-based observations compared with the guidance provided during the campus-based programme, we notice patterns that suggest some crucial differences (see Table 3) in what university lecturers found most visible in each of the models.

The table suggests that while the school-based model and the campus-based model both intended to provide support to student teachers during their first attempts at teaching, they open up or close down different possibilities for the kinds of feedback that lecturers provide. This in turn implicitly or explicitly conveys to students different criteria about what constitutes effective teaching. The themes emerging from the analysis of our data are the provision of opportunities for students to focus on the management of ideas in a lesson; understanding the relationship between knowledge, planning and effective teaching; the creation of an environment in which discussion about their teaching practice is normalised; the development of a critical lens on practice; and responsiveness to feedback. Each of these will be considered below, after which the logistical implications and the limitations associated with the campus-based support programme will be analysed.

(i) Opportunities for drawing students' attention to the management of ideas

In school-based lesson observations, students engage in more authentic aspects of lesson delivery. Students' planning is not often made visible to others (although available for perusal if requested). Students' grasp of the content knowledge becomes evident to an observer as the lesson unfolds. From Table 3, we see that 33% of the lesson observation reports analysed gave student teachers feedback about their understanding and organisation of knowledge. Lecturers interviewed indicated that providing feedback to students about their understanding and organisation of knowledge is possible to some

Table 3: Analysis of lesson observation reports written for student teachers during their first attempt at lesson planning and delivery, showing the percentage of student teachers who were provided with guidance about this aspect of their teaching

| | School-based model | Campus-based model |
|---|---|---|
| Understanding, organising and explaining content knowledge | 33 | 71 |
| Formulating outcomes (2006) / Articulating purpose (2012) | 30 | 17 |
| Use of teaching/learning resource materials | 22 | 16 |
| Appropriate examples | 19 | 25 |
| Teaching strategies | 17 | 21 |
| Interaction with learners during the lesson | 42 | 13 |
| Monitoring of learner understanding | 35 | 5 |
| Class management and routines | 59 | 17 |
| Coherence and sequencing of lesson steps | 16 | 14 |
| Consideration of learner needs and level | 19 | 32 |

Note: Quantitative data for the school-based model has been taken from Rusznyak (2008).

extent in school-based observations, but as Claudia notes, 'we also have to talk about class management, discipline and how [the students] are getting on with supervising teachers'. Because of the complexity of teaching, sometimes the urgent matters are prioritised, leaving deeper epistemological matters for later intervention.

An 'overwhelming benefit' of the first day of the campus-based support programme is the 'exclusive focus on the lesson content and how to organise and present it, using appropriate examples and explanations' (Emma). Whereas 33% of reports written in response to a school-based lesson observation gave guidance to students about their understanding and organisation of content knowledge, 71% of reports written during the campus-based programme did so. The presentation of a rationale for one's lesson design is not a normal part of the day-to-day work that teachers do. As an approximation of practice, this activity is far removed from the authenticity of classroom reality. The dedicated focus on the lesson's content knowledge, its organisation and its transformation into a teachable form on the first day of the campus-based support programme offers opportunities for a decomposition of practice in which students' attention is drawn explicitly to the often invisible cognitive work required for coherent lesson conceptualisation that forms conditions of possibility for effective practice.

Part of managing ideas during a lesson is how teachers manage learner understanding and misunderstanding during the lesson. The quantitative analysis shows that 35% from the school-based model included guidance to students on monitoring learners' understanding of content knowledge. In contrast, only 5% of reports written during the campus-based model referred to this aspect of teaching. Dealing with learners' errors is difficult to see on the campus-based programme because 'students usually provide each other with correct answers, so we don't see much of how students are able to work with learners' errors' (Sibongile). The campus-based programme therefore reduces possibilities for lecturers to provide guidance on this aspect of students' developing teaching practice.



Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

(ii) Managing learners, managing classrooms to manage learners

Being observed and assessed in a classroom for the first time can be a daunting prospect for students. According to Betty, 'many students feel devastated when they find that teaching a lesson is not as easy as they thought it would be. Once a class has seen their lesson fail, they struggle to rebuild their authority and rapport with the class, and regain credibility in the eyes of their supervising teacher'. This often results in an inclination for students to use teaching strategies that are 'safe', 'fun for learners' and 'easy to manage', regardless of their pedagogical appropriateness or the quality of learning opportunities they present. Emma, for example, recalls a lesson she observed in which a student made cardboard spiders with her class of Grade 2 learners. Learners were expected to design a spider that had only a head and an abdomen, with legs coming out of the abdomen. 'The student was devastated that I took issue with errors [in her knowledge of the body structure of a spider], because the learners had so clearly "enjoyed" the activity'. The tendency for students to conflate enjoyable activities with learning tasks, and focus on class management rather than conceptual richness of content, seems more prevalent in school-based contexts than in the campus-based lessons, where the students are required to give account of the conceptual strengths of their lesson. Students are in a better position to understand the relationship between their grasp of the content knowledge, planning and a successful lesson when they have had a positive first experience of teaching a well-conceptualised lesson. This seems to reduce the likelihood of students 'struggling for survival' (Maynard & Furlong 1995) through their first attempts at teaching.

The quantitative analysis shows that 59% of lesson observation reports written in school-based contexts provided student teachers with guidance about managing learners. In contrast, only 17% of student teachers received guidance about classroom management and routines during the campus-based model. Lecturers believed there was good reason to engage with conceptual structure ahead of classroom management concerns. Sibongile, for example, explains that 'because students go back to the school with a much clearer sense of how to manage the lesson content' there is much less likelihood of 'learners being quiet or disruptive because the lesson is not going anywhere'. Claudia concurred with this point: 'If knowledge is what teachers teach, then the clearer that is before they go into the authentic context which is also complicated by so many other things, the better. Even when students say they don't know how to discipline learners, I tell them the key is interesting knowledge. So the focus on lesson structure and clear explanation in lessons is of primary importance, and their classroom management follows'. Claudia's comments here confirm Sibongile's perception that learners are more difficult to manage when a 'lesson is not going anywhere'. These comments suggest that the effective management of ideas during a lesson establishes logical conditions necessary for effective management of learners, but does not necessarily ensure it.

(iii) Adapting lessons to the learning needs of children

It seems intuitive that lecturers should be able to provide more feedback on how students pitch their lesson at the level of learners within a school-based context. However, the data in Table 3 show that whereas 19% of lesson observation reports written in a school setting gave students guidance about being responsive to learner needs, 32% of reports written during the campus-based support programme mentioned this aspect. There are two possible reasons for this pattern. Firstly, consideration of learning needs of children in the class (such as learners' prior knowledge, language competence, and socioeconomic context) in relation to the lesson topic is an explicit requirement of the presentation of the lesson design. (Point 4, Appendix A). Peers are expected to provide feedback on the way the student has considered such needs. Secondly, analysis of the interview data suggests that students rehearsing the teaching of their lesson on the second day of the campus-based support programme may take more for granted in the university context than when they are at their allocated school. As Sibongile explains, 'At [the] campus-based programme, students sometimes teach to [the] level of their classmates.

Explanations and questions can be pitched too high. Students teach knowing that the peers have a much deeper content level, and probably understand more of the terminology'. This may explain why adjusting the lesson for the level of learners is a more prevalent concern in the campus-based support programme.

(iv) Coherent lesson conceptualisation

When students present their rationale for lesson design, Sibongile feels more empowered to 'help [students] ensure that their purpose is clear ... [because] the appropriateness of strategies and resources can only be assessed in light of a clear purpose'. In this sense, she explicitly draws students' attention to what it takes to make their lessons coherent. In the analysis of the two cohorts we see that in 2006, 30% of lesson observation reports mentioned outcomes, whereas in 2012, only 17% contained reference to the way students articulated the lesson's purpose. This appears to contradict Sibongile's claim, unless one considers that in 2006 under outcomes-based education, the emphasis was on a rather mechanical copying out of learning outcomes from the national curriculum policy, whereas in 2012, students are required to identify the main concept/s and skill/s which they intend to teach learners during a particular lesson.

## 2. Developing spaces to talk together about practice

Classroom spaces are often private spaces where teachers work in isolation from one another. When students return to campus for two days with a draft lesson, they are 'all grappling with the same task' (Emma). Student teachers benefit from opportunities to 'talk about knowledge and explaining ideas with each other' in relation to the lesson they will have the opportunity to teach to an actual class of learners (Claudia). By 'articulating their thoughts, ideas, fears and intentions', lecturers are better able to 'create a communal space' in which student teachers at the same stage of their development do not feel as if they are embarking on their first attempts at teaching in isolation (Lesley). The opportunity to share their intentions on learning and the organisation of knowledge with one another 'normalises shared experiences' (Lesley) within a 'safe and collegial space' (Betty). The early engagement of student teachers in this kind of practice-based dialogue creates possibilities of learning from pedagogically focused conversations that Robinson (2000) observes have been absent in many South African schools.

Students are often more able to 'identify shortcomings in their peers' lessons than their own' (Betty). This creates a 'greater openness to receiving feedback and working collegially' on the management of ideas within the lessons they teach. The opportunities for students to be 'scrutinised by an audience [of peers]' and in turn to participate in the scrutiny of the lessons of others contributes to the development of students' own critical lens on practice (Steve). Furthermore, the provision of opportunities for pedagogically focused discussions during the campus-based programme in which students are deeply invested provides opportunities for them to use and listen to a language with which they can describe and analyse practice.

During the campus-based support programme, Emma and Sibongile indicated that they spend more time on feedback to students and less time on observing actual lessons. However, in a school situation, lecturers spend more time observing students' lessons. Although they acknowledged that feedback to students is crucial for their development, they conceded that there is limited time to spend reflecting with each student due to the scheduling of other students whose lessons they also need to observe.

Furthermore, schools can sometimes be 'unhappy places' and lecturers recounted instances of students who found it intimidating to speak openly about some of the teaching and discipline practices they had observed their supervising teachers using in the school context. One student had 'waited until the end [of their practicum] and whispered to me that she saw a teacher hit a learner. On one hand, the student knew it was wrong, but on the other, she felt intimidated by exposing what was going on to me' (Claudia). Although there is no quantitative data to support these perspectives, it seems like there is greater potential for the



Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

creation of an open environment for honest discussion in a campus-based programme than there is when lecturers meet students individually at school-based observations.

## 3. Other limitations

While there are different pedagogical benefits offered by the school-based and campus-based models of support for students undertaking their first attempt at teaching, we need to be mindful of the limitations associated with these models. In the discussion that follows, we consider the most significant limitations that emerged from the qualitative data.

### (i) Campus-based model: Preparation and engagement of the student teachers

The success of the campus-based model is reliant on students coming to campus on both days fully prepared, and willing to engage with one another's presentations. Lesley reflects on the extent to which student preparedness influences the quality of the programme: 'Some students arrive unprepared and this makes it difficult to work with the student. Sometimes they hear teachers say to students that planning is not important and if this is the case, why should they bother to plan?' Emma, too, concedes that the quality of the experience for students is somewhat variable but she attributes this to the extent to which classmates are willing to engage with one another's presentations: 'Some are committed and are responsive throughout, but others duck and dive, and really don't contribute. I don't know how to resolve this, but it does make the experience better for some students than others'.

### (ii) School-based model: Workload and time constraints

In the school-based model, lecturers indicated that the number of students and different schools they were required to visit was a logistical challenge for them. For example Lesley explained, "Time is often a factor as I have had to move between seven schools spread out in different areas, dealing with a myriad of different starting times and timetables in the various schools'. With the several other (senior) students to observe at school, Emma indicated that it is 'not always possible to focus on those just starting to teach'. The interactions with first-year students in school-based settings tend to be 'brief' and about the 'more generic' aspects of teaching, resulting in junior students receiving the least amount of support. On the campus-based support programme, there is an exclusive focus on first years at a specific time, when they are all grappling with the same task. The campus-based programme offers possibilities for staffing efficiency, as fewer lecturers are needed for two dedicated days than would be required to see all students who are beginning their teaching in a school-based programme. Claudia believes that she is able to use her time 'more productively' with 'intensive mentoring' on a campus-based programme, rather than 'driving from one school to another'.

### (iii) Potential for monitoring students' professional development

When undertaking school-based observations, a lecturer may provide students with guidance, but is seldom able to observe students reteach the same lesson with revisions (Betty). The uptake of feedback can only be assessed by observing a different lesson on a different topic. However, the school-based model does enable university tutors to see students teaching over a range of lesson topics. The two-day nature of the campus-based model, on the other hand, provides an opportunity for lecturers to 'provide feedback and see if the student has been able to follow guidance' in their subsequent lesson rehearsal (Sibongile).

During a campus-based session, Claudia recalls how she 'pushed' a student to get to a deeper conceptual understanding of her lesson topic. Had the conversation taken place in a more unfamiliar and public



Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

environment, like a school staffroom, she doubts she would have engaged at that level. 'When I saw the same student teach the following practicum', Claudia continues, 'I was delighted to see that her lessons continued to have conceptual depth. She "got it" during the campus-based programme and then she could run with it'. While Claudia supervised this student's practicum both in the campus programme and subsequently in a school setting, this is not always the case. The campus-based model does not enable lecturers to see how the students manage the lessons in the context of the classroom. It is expected that supervising teachers provide further feedback on working with learners, managing the classroom and so on.

## Discussion

Both the school-based and campus-based models offer support to student teachers in their early attempts at teaching. However, the two models enable lecturers to work with quite different aspects of students' developing teaching practice.

In the school-based model, students teach their first lessons in a situation of increased authenticity and more complexity. From the outset, student teachers are expected to manage ideas and learners simultaneously, as a practising teacher would. The analysis of our data suggests that this opens up spaces for lecturers to provide feedback on a wide range of issues. The planning stages remain private and the focus is largely directed at the lesson delivery and managing learners. A school-based model therefore enables lecturers to provide feedback on urgent, more visible matters of classroom management, which sometimes take priority over the less visible, more substantive matters (such as the knowledge structure of a lesson). Because of the variability of students' lessons, and the unpredictability of classroom life, the school-based model closes down opportunities for a systematic decomposition of practice in which focused attention is paid to particular aspects of practice (Grossman et al. 2009). This model transmits assumptions to student teachers that lesson planning does not necessarily require public scrutiny and that learning to teach is largely about effective lesson delivery. The transmission of these assumptions is unlikely to challenge conceptions student teachers may hold about learning to teach as a straightforward mastery of classroom routines (Hammerness et al. 2005).

During the campus-based model, the presentation of a rationale for students' lesson design makes the lesson conceptualisation process a valid object of study. This conveys a notion that lesson planning is not merely an administrative task of completing paperwork for the benefit of an observer. Lesson conceptualisation is presented as a constituent part of teachers' complex (but often invisible) work. Our analysis shows that the campus-based model creates an approximation of practice, where a degree of unauthenticity enables students and lecturers to focus their attention on how the student intended to introduce and mediate ideas without being distracted by less predictable elements such as learner behaviour. During the lesson rehearsal, learner engagement and learner understanding are hidden from view, but students' representations and explanation of knowledge and use of questioning are brought to the fore. The message about the nature of teaching conveyed to student teachers through the campusbased model are that teaching requires careful thought (and discussion) of knowledge, and how best to structure that knowledge for learning before lesson delivery. It also conveys a message to student teachers that thorough preparation sets conditions for a successful lesson. It has the added benefit of being more efficient in terms of the staffing required to provide support for students who are teaching for the first time.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we show how two models of university support for students on the cusp of teaching their first lesson influence the kind of feedback lecturers provide to them. Given the complexities of classroom life, lecturers who observe students' first lessons in a school-based model provide students with retrospective



Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

feedback on a wide range of issues. These include students' engagement with learners, working with learner misunderstandings, and their classroom management. While these are undoubtedly crucial parts of learning to teach, they may be more easily learnt once a firm foundation of sound content knowledge and coherently conceptualised lessons is in place. The campus-based model offers several pedagogical benefits, in particular for drawing students' attention explicitly to how they manage ideas within a lesson. In enabling students to understand the importance of building a strong conceptual foundation for their developing practice, the campus-based model does not leave students to 'sink or swim' through the complexities of managing ideas and managing learners simultaneously. While this offers valuable support to all student teachers about to teach for the first time, it is essential in contexts where supervising teachers offer encouragement but little more in the way of pedagogical guidance.

Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

## Notes

1 It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider when would be an appropriate time for students to teach learners for the first time. For Bachelor of Education degree students, this is often scheduled when students have acquired some level of subject and pedagogical knowledge, and are in a position make links between their university coursework and their experiences in the classroom.

2 We acknowledge that there are a wide range of possible models. In this paper we focus on the two that have been used in our institution's recent past.

3 This lesson topic had no relation to what they would teach in their upcoming practicum.

## References

Ball, D.L., Thames, M.H. & Phelps, G. 2008. Content knowledge for teaching: What makes it special? Journal of Teacher Education 59:389–407.

Cochran-Smith, M. 2005. Teacher educators as researchers: Multiple perspectives. Teaching and Teacher Education 21:219–225.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. 2007. Research methods in education. London: Routledge.

Council of Higher Education. 2010. Report on the National Review of Academic and Professional Programmes in Education, August 2010. HE Monitor No. 11. Pretoria: CHE.

Darling-Hammond, L. 2006. Powerful teacher education: Lessons from exemplary programs. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Darling-Hammond, L., Banks, J., Zumwalt, K., Gomez, L., Sherin, M.G., Griesdorn, J. & Finn, L.-E. 2005. Educational goals and purposes: Developing a curricular vision for teaching. In L. DarlingHammond & J. Bransford (Eds.), Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do, 169–200. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Green, W. 2012. Forward. In R. Osman & H. Venkat (Eds.), Research-led teacher education, iv–vi. Cape Town: Pearson.

Grossman, P. 1990. The making of a teacher. Teacher knowledge and teacher education. New York and London: Teachers College Press.

Grossman, P. 2011. Framework for teaching practice: A brief history of an idea. Teachers College Record 113(12):2836–2843.

Grossman, P., Compton, C., Igra, D., Ronfeldt, M., Shahan, E. & Williamson, P. 2009. Teaching practice: A cross-professional perspective. Teachers College Record 111:2055–2100.

Hammerness, K., Darling-Hammond, L., Bransford, J., Berliner, D., Cochran-Smith, M., McDonald, M. & Zeichner, K. 2005. How teachers learn and develop. In L. Darling-Hammond & J. Bransford (Eds.), Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do, 358–389. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Joram, E. & Gabriele, A.J. 1998. Pre-service teachers' prior beliefs: Transforming obstacles into opportunities. Teaching and Teacher Education 14(2):175–191.

Kennedy, M. 2004. Reform ideals and teachers' practical intentions. Education Policy Analysis Archives 12(13):1–38.

Lampert, M. 2001. Teaching problems and the problems of teaching. United States of America: Yale University Press.

LePage, P., Darling-Hammond, L. & Akar, H. 2005. Classroom management. In L. Darling-Hammond & J. Bransford (Eds.), Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do, 327–357. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Loughran, J., Mulhall, P., & Berry, A. 2008. Exploring pedagogical content knowledge in science teacher education. International Journal of Science Education 30(1):1301–1320.

Maynard, T. & Furlong, J. 1995. The growth of professional knowledge: Mentoring student teachers. London: Routledge.

McNiff, J. 2008. The significance of 'I' in educational research and the responsibility of intellectuals. South African Journal of Education 28:351–364.

National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU). 2013. The state of literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase. Government Gazette. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Osman, R. 2010. The promise and challenge of university based teacher education. In Focus 56: On Teaching and Learning, 21–25. Johannesburg: Helen Suzman Foundation Richardson, V.

2005. Constructivist teacher education. London: The Falmer Press.

Robinson, M. 2000. Mentoring and teacher development: A case study. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Cape Town: University of Western Cape.

Rusznyak, L. 2008. Learning to teach: Developmental teaching patterns of student teachers. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

Rusznyak, L. & Walton, E. 2011. Lesson planning guidelines for student teachers: A scaffold for the development of pedagogical content knowledge. Education as Change 15(2):271–285.

Sleeter, C. 2001. Preparing teachers for culturally diverse schools: Research and the overwhelming presence of whiteness. Journal of Teacher Education 52(2):94–106.

Spaull, N. 2011. A preliminary analysis of SACMEQ III South Africa. Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers: 11/11. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch.

Shulman, L.S. 1987. Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. Harvard Educational Review 57(1):1–22. Reproduced in L. Shulman & P. Hutchings. 2004. Teaching as community property: Essays on higher education. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Venkat, H. & Osman, R. 2012. Teacher education and quality schooling in South Africa. In R. Osman & H. Venkat (Eds.), Research-led teacher education, 1–20. Cape Town: Pearson.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. 2005. Understanding by design (expanded 2nd edition). New Jersey: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.

Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

## Corresponding author

Moeniera Moosa
University of the Witwatersrand
Email: moeniera.moosa@wits.ac.za

## APPENDIX A: Campus-based model, Day 1: Presentation of rationale for lesson design

| Instructions to students for the presentation |
|---|
| 1. State which grade, subject and topic you will teach<br>2. Explain your understanding of the most important content knowledge you will teach<br>3. Briefly describe the lesson steps:<br>- How do you intend to introduce the lesson?<br>- What learning task do you have for the children to do?<br>- How do you intend to close the lesson?<br>4. How have you considered learners' prior knowledge, context and needs?<br>5. Why have you chosen the teaching strategies and resources you intend using? |

| Guidelines to observing peers for providing formative feedback |
|---|
| As you observe your fellow students presenting their rationale for lesson design, consider:<br>1. Is the student teacher clear in his/her explanation of the lesson topic?<br>2. Does the lesson have a clear focus?<br>3. Has he/she considered how this lesson topic may be relevant to learners' prior knowledge or experiences?<br>4. Has he/she considered the abilities, language proficiency and learning needs of learners in the class?<br>5. Do you think that the resources he/she plans to use enhance or detract from learner understanding?<br>6. Are the teaching strategies and learning activities suitable for consolidating, practising or extending what has been taught?<br>7. Is the lesson coherent? Are the teaching and learning activities aligned to the lesson's purpose? |

## APPENDIX B: Campus-based model, Day 2: Rehearsal of lessons

Questions to consider when watching a student rehearse his/her lesson

- Does the student teacher explain the content knowledge clearly?
- Does the teacher help learners to understand the conceptual structure of the knowledge (e.g. main ideas, sub ideas)
- Are examples relevant and useful in promoting understanding of the lesson topic?
- To what extent are learners involved in the lesson?
- Are the instructions for a learning activity clear?
- Does the student teacher speak clearly, using a language that children will understand?
- Does the student teacher maintain eye contact with the class, and use a confident, comfortable body language?

Downloaded by [The Library, University of Witwatersrand] at 01:34 19 March 2014

View publication stats