

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

What this study highlighted was that, by and large, the prosthodontic programme was essentially working and the department was on track with realising its aims and objectives. The department was also sensitive to feedback from students and was willing and did modify the course, within limitations, to make it more relevant without detracting from the aims and principles of the curriculum innovation. These may be taken up by the other educational programmes within the school in an attempt to refine their own programmes and ensure that they produce graduates who are not only able to provide comprehensive patient care that is scientifically based and technologically appropriate, but also able to appreciate, understand and actively seek solutions to current intellectual, social, behavioural, and philosophical problems in dentistry. This would therefore allow programmes to remain relevant by being attuned to what the industry demands of them.

The aim of this study was to adjudicate how the department of prosthodontics had managed to move from a traditional, teacher centered, lecture based pedagogy towards more interactive, student centered, small group focused and contextualised learning and teaching strategies and if it had been able to equip dental students adequately in the field of prosthodontics. The study evaluated how the programme worked out, in its own terms, using an illuminative evaluation approach. By adopting an illuminative evaluation approach, this study described how the instructional system or prosthodontic plan was realised in the learning milieu. It provided a close study of how a particular educational programme within its particular context was instituted. From this, greater insights were gained on the degree to which the aims of the educational programme were realised using specific education tools (PBL DLPs). In particular, the study of the realities of the learning environment unearthed issues which ordinarily were not apparent and had not been taken into account in the instructional system (issues such as assessment fatigue, as perceived by students). If the evaluation had been conducted utilising the classical agricultural – botany approach, wherein preordained criteria and tools are used, it is doubtful whether many of these insights would have been gained. Illuminative evaluation generates a description of how programme aims

and objectives are operationalised and takes into account any issues that may emerge which would ordinarily not be focused upon using classical evaluation paradigms.

As noted, benefits were realised by using the illuminative evaluation approach, however, the study was also challenged by limitations. Chief amongst these was the lack of prosthodontic specific DLPs. This may have provided a richer description of the actual programme and made deductions from the obtained data more meaningful. This may have enabled closer scrutiny of how the subject was taught and therefore created opportunities to then make realistic deductions pertaining to the question of whether students are adequately prepared in the field. This was also informed by the hybrid nature of the curriculum. The curriculum, as noted, was not a pure problem based learning one where all teaching and learning activities are aligned along specially selected problem based cases and all disciplines and subjects taught are then temporally situated to follow suite. As such the utilisation of non specific but prosthodontic rich DLPs had to suffice.

An additional opportunity lost was the inability to observe all the different teaching platforms such as the clinical sessions, the subject tutorials / lectures, the preclinical sessions etc. This may have provided an enriched data set to better evaluate what was being taught and thence make it meaningful to draw inferences. However, the decision was made to limit the observational aspect of the study to one platform due to the limited resources available – the time restrictions imposed by the nature of the MEd programme requirements; the researcher being the only person available to do the observations, the cost and time implications etc. As van Rensburg (2007) clearly argues in her study, illuminative evaluation projects are costly and need to be limited to research at a doctoral level or above. However, this does not take away from the importance of what this field adds to the knowledge – base and how this additional information can and does assist in improving programmes. The potential inherent benefits with this method of evaluation in educational programmes can never be under or overestimated.