

**CURRICULUM REFORM IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
A HUMANITIES CASE STUDY**

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Abstract

This study explores the nature of curriculum change in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand. In particular, it focuses on the relationship between the new socio-economic and political context and curriculum reform trends. While the literature indicates that trends throughout the world tend to privilege particular curriculum discourses informed by global and market pressures at the expense of institutional driving forces, neglecting the role of agency or local and institutional discourses rooted in the particular histories and cultures of institutions (Kishun, 1998), there is some indication that there could be room for institutionally informed choices at the curriculum level (Slaughter & Lesley, 1999). Using a qualitative approach, this study explores curriculum responses of the faculty within the context of global and national pressures in order to better understand the nature of contextually-based challenges, strategies, practices and emerging curriculum trends.

University curriculum across the globe is experiencing significant pressure to transform from its 'insular', distant and abstract form to one that is more responsive to the direct needs of society. This increased focus on responsiveness results in a shift toward mode 2 knowledge approaches (Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott & Trow, 1994) which prioritise curricula that focus on skills, application and problem solving.

This shift is particularly challenging for programmes in the Humanities and Social Sciences, which have prided themselves on opportunities to step back, reflect and explore knowledge from a position of reasonable distance from everyday occurrences. This study embarks on a journey to explore what the implications of the emerging utilitarian discourses are for curriculum in the Humanities.

This study argues that the dominant global-speak evident in the literature is not sufficient to account for the nature of curriculum change. While utilitarian discourses dominate curriculum transformation efforts in the faculty, there are various strategies for achieving responsiveness or usefulness, which has various implications for traditional liberal curriculum practices. In fact, the study suggests that responses differ by discipline, programme and even department, and range from radical to conservative curriculum transformation. Thus sweeping generalisations do not sufficiently and

accurately account for the complexity of responses and outcomes at the institutional or faculty level. Curriculum reform therefore results from the interplay of a number of external and internal factors that occur within very specific contextual conditions.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Fatima Adam

_____ day of _____, 2009

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Embarking on the PhD was not quite what I expected. I envisaged something like my Masters thesis, but slightly longer. I quickly learned that this was not the case. This journey was like no other I had undertaken. It had so many facets to it that it could be compared to a life journey. It was long and arduous, exciting, invigorating, lonely and sometimes even boring. It is a journey like no other because it trains the mind in a very special way. However, it is certainly not an easy journey, and at times quite rough. As with any important endeavour, this could not be achieved without the support of the ‘other’ that provides a combination of intellectual, personal, emotional, psychological and financial support. It is time to recognise those who assisted me through what, at times, seemed like an endless road to nowhere.

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Contents

Abstract	ii
Declaration	iv
Acknowledgements	v
List of Tables	xii
List of Diagrams	xiii
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms	xiv
Chapter One: Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction and background to the study	1
1.2 Aim of the study	3
1.3 Research focus and questions	3
1.4 Conceptual framework	4
1.5 Thesis statement	5
1.6 Structure and outline of the thesis	5
Chapter Two: Reviewing the Scholarship	10
2.1 Introduction	10
2.2 Curriculum as complex and dynamic	11
2.3 The changing socio-economic and political order	14
2.4 ICT and the higher education landscape	15
2.5 Contemporary curriculum debates: mode 1 versus mode 2	18
2.6 A manifestation of mode 2: breaking disciplinary boundaries	22
2.7 New modes of co-ordination and control: the rise of the stakeholder university	26
2.8 Spaces for national and institutional responses	28
2.9 Curriculum reform in higher education: South African trends	30
2.10 Policy imperative: a double-edged sword	31
2.11 Competing curriculum discourses	33
2.12 Main points from the literature	38
2.13 Conceptual framework: the sacred and the profane	40
Chapter Three: Justifying Methodological Choices	43

3.1	Introduction	43
3.2	Epistemological perspective	44
3.3	Research paradigm	46
3.4	A case study approach	48
3.5	Selection of the case	50
3.5.1	Opting for a single case	50
3.5.2	Defining the parameters of the case: selecting the institution	51
3.5.3	Carving a path through the faculty	53
3.6	Managing the data	56
3.6.1	Data collection	56
3.6.2	Extensive literature review	57
3.6.3	Document analysis	57
3.6.4	Interviews	58
3.7	Data analysis	62
3.8	Validation strategies	63
3.9	Ethics procedures	64
3.10	Style conventions	65
3.11	Conclusion	65
	Chapter Four: Institutional Context and Curriculum Reform: The Rise of the Stakeholder University	67
4.1	Introduction	67
4.2	Conceptual framework	68
4.3	The making of an ivory tower: liberalism and the centrality of internal stakeholders	71
4.4	Knocking on the doors of the ivory tower: pressure from civil society	77
4.5	Institutional restructuring and the affirmation of Wits as a stakeholder university	83
4.6	Conclusion	88
	Chapter Five: Curriculum Policies and Strategies in Higher Education in South Africa: National and Institutional Pathways	90
5.1	Introduction	90
5.2	Conceptual framework: consensus, consultation and control	91
5.3	Transforming the higher education sector: key policy moments	93
5.3.1	Introduction	93

5.3.2	The apartheid legacy	95
5.3.3	Last efforts of a dying horse: apartheid education revamped	97
5.3.4	Proposing an alternative: first efforts by the anti-apartheid movement	98
5.3.5	A policy framework to overhaul the system	99
5.3.6	Steering curriculum change in higher education: efficiency and accountability	103
5.4	Responsiveness: access and usefulness	108
5.5	Wits policy framework: between the traditional and the contemporary	111
5.5.1	Tensions between new and old curriculum discourses	111
5.5.2	Access and equity: a high priority	114
5.5.3	A multifaceted conception of societal responsiveness	116
5.5.4	Efficiency and performance	119
5.6	Conclusion	123
	Chapter Six: Steering and Control: New Management Practices and Curriculum Reform	125
6.1	Introduction	125
6.2	Conceptual framework: steering and interference	125
6.3	Wits embraces a new management regime	128
6.4	Managerialism and the academic project	132
6.4.1	New management trends at Wits	132
6.4.2	Managerialism and academic identity	132
6.4.3	The rise of the administrative academic	133
6.4.4	Low-key resistance to managerialism	140
6.5	Implications for curriculum reform	143
6.6	Conclusion	150
	Chapter Seven: Drivers of Curriculum Change: Symphony and Cacophony	151
7.1	Introduction	151
7.2	Conceptual framework: key drivers of curriculum change	151
7.3	Faculty trends: chalk and cheese	152
7.4	Responsiveness to markets and society: the growing utility discourse	154
7.5	Meeting the markets halfway: the hybrid discourse	161
7.6	Keeping the markets at arm's length	166
7.7	Conclusion	169

Chapter Eight: Professionalisation of Curriculum: Overall Trends in the Faculty of Humanities	171
8.1 Introduction	171
8.2 A conceptual framework: dissecting mode 2	172
8.3 Wits promotes society-curriculum alignment	176
8.4 Curriculum trends in the faculty: a flea market frenzy	177
8.4.1 Humanities under pressure to transform	177
8.4.2 Programme expansion and diversification: meeting market and student needs	179
8.4.3 Reconstituting the disciplines	183
8.4.4 Concerns with solving society's problems: a focus on practice	184
8.4.5 Theorising practice: understanding contemporary phenomena	188
8.4.6 Regionalisation: the coalescing of disciplines	191
8.4.7 Genericism: the rise of the skills discourse	192
8.4.8 Commodification of knowledge: the borders of regionalisation, disciplinary reconstitution and genericism	194
8.5 A skills versus theory approach	197
8.6 Lamenting the loss of theory: disillusionment and contestation	199
8.7 Conclusion	201
Chapter Nine: Breaking Disciplinary Boundaries: The Status of the Disciplines	203
9.1 Introduction	203
9.2 Conceptual framework: the roots of the discipline	204
9.3 Wits encourages cross-fertilisation	206
9.4 Faculty trends: pressure on the traditional disciplinary form	207
9.4.1 The discipline evolves	207
9.4.2 The discipline: a key organising unit in the faculty	207
9.4.3 Some disciplines do not survive the storm	209
9.4.4 Vulnerable disciplines that weather the storm	218
9.4.5 Interdisciplinarity at Wits: emerging trends	225
9.4.6 Interdisciplinarity and regionalisation assume different forms	226
9.4.7 Interdisciplinarity: site of struggle and contestation	232
9.5 Conclusion	235

Chapter Ten: Conclusion: Making Sense of the Complexity	237
10.1 Introduction	237
10.2 Theoretical journey	238
10.3 Noteworthy insights emerging from the study	240
10.4 Overall findings: a summary	229
10.5 Opportunities for future research: deeper and wider	251
Bibliography	253

List of Tables

3.1	Summary of document analysis process	58
3.2	Style conventions for interviews	65
5.1	Summary of policy process timeline	94
8.1	Summary of curriculum reform trends	178
8.2	Characterisation of present and past curriculum trends	179

List of Diagrams

3.1	Breadth and depth of selected interviewees	61
4.1	Stakeholder analysis framework	71
5.1	Framework for analysing policy	92
7.1	A continuum of responses by departments and disciplines	154
8.1	Conceptual framework for curriculum reform trends	175
8.2	Curriculum approaches in the faculty	202

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
BARAT	Budgeting and Resource Allocation [model]
C2005	Curriculum 2005
CESM	Classification of Education Subject Matter
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CNE	Christian National Education
COTEP	Committee for Teacher Education Policy
CUMSA	Curriculum Model for South Africa
DoE	[national] Department of Education
ERS	Education Renewal Strategy
FFACT	Forum for Accelerated Comprehensive Transformation
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ICT	Information and communications technology
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MED	Master of Education
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NECC	National Education Co-ordinating Committee [formerly National Education Crisis Committee]
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NRF	National Research Foundation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDM	Public Development and Management
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SASA	South African Schools Act
SASCO	South African Students Congress

SAUVCA	South African Universities Vice Chancellors Association [now Higher Education South Africa (HESA)]
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDF	United Democratic Front
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Naal
UNISA	University of South Africa
UWC	University of the Western Cape
WISER	Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and Background to the Study

My initial interest in higher education was ignited by the increasing public debate and heated discussions both in the media and around dinner tables on a variety of issues pertaining to the sector. I was particularly intrigued by the strong and widespread opinion that universities are producing poor quality graduates because they have 'lowered their standards' or they 'offer outdated curricula' or they 'do not train students to operate in the real world'. A range of unfounded statements became accepted as uncontested facts in many circles. Several assumptions underpin these arguments. The first is that higher education exists primarily to feed the economy. The second is that theoretical knowledge is not useful in itself, and that a focus on practical and real-life issues yields far better graduates. The third is that programmes in the humanities do not provide students with valuable skills and should therefore not be undertaken if graduates want to be 'successful'. As a researcher these arguments concerned me because they make strong claims about what curriculum is of most value without sufficient data or evidence to support them. From a socio-political perspective, these arguments concerned me because they focused only on education in economic terms, which devalues socio-cultural education and has the potential to undermine the democracy and citizenship dimension. It is in this context that I embarked on a journey of exploration about curriculum change in higher education.

Turning from public opinion to the literature, I found that higher education has become intricately tied to society's progress and development. This in turn has resulted in increased stakeholder involvement in the business of curriculum. Therefore, it is expected that higher education actively participates in solving society's social, economic and political challenges. This has placed pressure on curriculum to become more responsive, relevant and accountable to society. Thus curriculum change is underpinned by notions of relevance and responsiveness to societies needs. As a result

higher education is presently undergoing changes, which have been labelled in the literature as significant, extensive and fundamental (see Chapter Two for details).

Similar to public debates about higher education, the literature indicates that there is widespread contestation about the role of higher education and what the new curriculum should look like. Some lament the death of the humanities while others rejoice in the opportunity to transform it. The literature abounds with titles such as *Bonfire of the Humanities* (Hanson et al., 2001), *The Demise of the Humanities Department* (Tapp, 1997), and *Crisis in the Humanities* (Perloff, 2001). At the same time, there are others who suggest that the crisis is over-stated and that education is always perceived as being in a crisis.¹

However, the dominant perspective is that universities are experiencing fundamental curriculum changes as a result of the new socio-political and economic environment. The advent of information and communication technology (ICT) has transformed the economy from a production line workplace to one in which innovation has become the key to competitive advantage. This is dependent on increased levels of skill and knowledge to compete in the economic terrain and on using technology to innovate. This has placed demands on higher education to produce more graduates as well as graduates with high-level skills to serve the economy. There are also demands for universities to meet the socio-cultural and political needs of the society, even though these are less prominent than the economic needs. This is further complicated by the fact that macroeconomic policies in most countries have resulted in reduced spending on higher education. As a result, higher education is expected to produce more with less, by being efficient.

Therefore two discourses underpin this curriculum transformation process – the utilitarian discourse (Gibbons, 2000, Griesel, 2004) and the efficiency discourse (Manns & March, 1978). In particular, the literature suggests that curriculum trends across the globe favour economic or instrumentalist discourses (Muller, 2000b). This is particularly significant in the South African context because it has the potential to

¹ In fact John Searle (1990) said, “I can recall no time when American education was not in crisis.”

undermine the role of universities in strengthening democratic practices and citizenship.

Having reviewed both the public and academic domains through the literature, I embarked on a process of exploring curriculum transformation patterns in the South African context. More specifically, my study focuses on understanding curriculum reform in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits).

1.2 Aim of the Study

This study explores the changing nature of curriculum in the context of new socio-economic and political imperatives for change. These imperatives include concerns with responsiveness at disciplinary, market and socio-cultural levels, and global and local pressures around competitiveness and institutional efficiency. The study aims to contribute to:

- an understanding of how curriculum is changing and what this means for universities in South Africa; and
- a contextually based curriculum reform theory.

1.3 Research Focus and Questions

This study explores the nature of curriculum change in higher education in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand. More specifically, the study examines curriculum transformation in the context of new socio-economic and political imperatives that have influenced knowledge conception in the humanities over the past ten years. The focus is on the nature of the faculty's responses to this changing environment.

The main question that the study addresses is: How is curriculum in the Faculty of Humanities transforming? More specifically, the study addresses the following sub-questions:

- What emerging response patterns (practices, trends and strategies) can be identified in curriculum reform?

- What are the global, national and institutional determinants and drivers of curriculum reform in the faculty?
- What knowledge and curriculum discourses/theoretical models underpin these responses?
- What are the implications for knowledge conception and production in the faculty?

1.4 Conceptual Framework

The study borrows three theoretical considerations from the literature to locate the debates and discussions of this particular case. First, the study builds on the assumption that curriculum reform is an outcome of a complex interplay of external factors (globalisation, democratisation, marketisation), sometimes mediated through state policy and internal factors (academic identity and the structures of knowledge) which manifest themselves differently at different sites of academic practice. Thus the conceptual framework for this study draws on both sociological (external) as well as epistemological (internal) considerations of curriculum change. Second, the study draws on the knower/utility discourse which is concerned with understanding the ways in which curriculum is shifting toward notions of usefulness. In order to locate the utility discourse, the study builds on the notion of responsiveness as an overarching concept that locates external drivers of curriculum, without which curriculum reform policies and practices in South Africa cannot be adequately understood. It borrows the notion of curriculum change as a function of societal responsiveness from Moll (Moll, 2004). Furthermore, the study disaggregates the utility discourse into the voice discourse and market discourses. The market discourse focuses on the role of higher education in economic development; the voice discourse focuses on the role of higher education in emancipating society, and is underpinned by egalitarianism and socio-cultural responsiveness. Third, the study suggests that there are non-utilitarian discourses that underpin curriculum reform activities. In particular the focus is on the 'knowledge discourse' which suggests that knowledge has its own internal structure that allows one to view the world in dispassionate and 'relatively' objective² ways in

² I say relatively objective because I am using the concept of critical realism which acknowledges truth in the context of socially constructed knowledge.

pursuit of the truth. Thus the knowledge discourse is concerned with recognising that curriculum is also influenced by the internal structure of knowledge itself. This knowledge discourse can also be linked to the personal development discourse, which focuses on developing the human mind and is underpinned by personal liberties and individual rights.

1.5 Thesis Statement

Curriculum reform in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand reflects a shift toward relevance underpinned by both global and local pressures to become more responsive. This manifests in different notions of relevance that are characterised by tensions between utility (economic and socio-cultural) discourses and non-utilitarian conceptions of education. Therefore, curriculum reform in the faculty is more complex and nuanced than trends described in the literature which focus on economic responsiveness. Curriculum reform trends in the Faculty of Humanities suggest that while there is a shift toward utilitarian curriculum approaches these have resulted in a variety of responses driven by a number of different factors within different departments and disciplines. Thus curriculum reform is informed by a range of factors (internal and external) that configure in different disciplinary spaces, resulting in an array of different outcomes. This suggests that curriculum reform is not as predictable and clear-cut as indicated in the literature, but rather is more complex and nuanced.

1.6 Structure and Outline of the Thesis

The dissertation attempts to provide a comprehensive and logical narrative and analysis of a curriculum case study. It starts with an overview of the field, which leads to the development of key research questions and associated strategies and processes for obtaining answers to these questions. It then shifts gear from the process issues to contextual issues, and attempts to locate the study within the broader socio-political and economic environment. This includes providing an overview and analysis of the policy context as well as the socio-political and economic context in which the case is situated. After setting the macro scene within which the study was conducted, the

study explores the case in more detail – that is, a micro analysis. In particular, the study zooms in on the curriculum in the faculty with an emphasis on what the curriculum looks like, what has changed, and how and why it has changed.

The study comprises ten chapters which capture the entire research journey.

In Chapter Two, ‘A Review of the Scholarship’, I reflect on key threads emerging in the literature on curriculum reform patterns in higher education. In this chapter I capture the voices of other researchers, to provide an overview of the field and to help to frame my own study. This chapter includes an analysis of key debates about what is taking place as well as perspectives on why this is the case. It also draws from other similar studies in the field. The literature review highlights the dominance of the globalisation curriculum discourse in higher education reform, and refers to the widespread shift to utilitarian discourses in university curricula across the globe. However, it also states that there are different manifestations of this in differing contexts. In addition, the literature review suggests that utility and responsiveness are not the only factors explaining the nature of curriculum changes. It draws attention to a range of factors that influence curriculum reform and suggests that these result in particular responses and outcomes depending on the country and institution. This leads to an overall conceptual framework which provides a basis for exploring and analysing the study.

In Chapter Three, ‘Justifying Methodological Choices’, I provide an account of the journey that I undertook to answer my research question. In particular, this chapter focuses on why I chose to explore my research question in the way that I did. I provide a rationale for the methods and processes used to pursue my research interest, argue for a qualitative case study and justify the selection of the Faculty of Humanities at Wits. This chapter reflects the complex path of qualitative research, but also suggests that rigour is essential to any research study and that a qualitative approach is not an excuse to forego systematic research.

In Chapter Four, ‘Institutional Context and Curriculum Reform’, the institution and faculty is situated within the broader socio-cultural and economic context. This chapter is an attempt to understand the relationship between curriculum change and the society

in which these changes are located. It argues that the changing socio-political and economic environment affects the ways in which curriculum is constructed and delivered. Tracing socio-economic and political issues over time, it contends that stakeholders are becoming increasingly influential in determining curriculum in the twenty-first century. This includes a range of key stakeholders – business representatives, professional bodies and community representatives – who have consolidated their space within the institution through the reconstitution of key institutional structures such as Senate. These stakeholders demand higher levels of accountability underpinned by conceptions of usefulness and efficiency.

In Chapter Five, ‘Curriculum Policies and Strategies in Higher Education in South Africa: National and Institutional Pathways’, the focus is on the larger political and regulatory context in which curriculum reform occurs. It tries to understand what underpins national and institutional policy and draws out implications for curriculum reform. In terms of national policy, the argument posits three interrelated claims. First, unlike the case of schooling, the South African government has not developed a systematic and coherent national policy framework for curriculum reform in higher education. Second, this particular frame of reference points to some powerful and somewhat conflicting policy imperatives relating to access and equity, responsiveness and efficiency/effectiveness. Third, the conflicting nature of these and the diverse institutional legacies are reflected in a diversity of policies and strategies underpinning institutional curriculum practices. In terms of institutional policy, the argument in this chapter suggests that the university attempts to reconcile the demands of equity and responsiveness with concerns around efficiency/effectiveness in the context of its traditional liberal approach to education.

In Chapter Six, ‘Steering and Control: New Management Practices and Curriculum Reform’, the study focuses on the relationship between one key driver of change and curriculum reform outcomes. One of the previous chapters raised the implications of new stakeholder interests in higher education and the accompanying demands for accountability. This chapter explores the new accountability framework through the concept of managerialism. Managerialism is referred to as the use of performance management strategies to manage institutions, and places importance on efficiency and measurable performance of institutions and entities. The study found that new

management practices at the university are underpinned by an increased focus on performance-based management of academic entities, through the use of key efficiency and productivity instruments. These practices are facilitated through new and existing layers of administrators and managers, and have a significant effect on the academic culture of the institution. This chapter explores the relationship between emerging managerialist practices and curriculum reform at Wits. This chapter argues that new managerialist practices at Wits affect academic identity. It also suggests that managerialism can be linked to pressures to transform the curriculum and often favour instrumentalist perspectives of knowledge.

In Chapter Seven, 'Drivers of Curriculum Change: Symphony and Cacophony', the study explores the relationship between key drivers of change, and disciplines and departments in the Faculty of Humanities. This chapter takes a closer look at what is transpiring at the faculty level, focusing on understanding the key drivers of curriculum change. Thus this chapter attempts to map out the key factors that are influencing curriculum reform strategies and outcomes in the faculty. It discusses the interplay between several factors (survival factors, the strength of academic identity and scholarship, disciplinary boundaries and the nature of leadership within schools/departments) that result in an array of curriculum responses and outcomes. This chapter argues that curriculum responses in the faculty are underpinned by a number of different discourses, despite the fact that the literature focuses largely on the market discourse. More specifically, this study suggests that responses in the Faculty of Humanities can be located on a continuum from reactive market approaches to more traditional academic approaches.

In Chapter Eight, 'Professionalising the Curriculum: Overall Trends in the Faculty', the focus is on developing an understanding of the curriculum changes that have occurred in the Faculty of Humanities. It focuses on the faculty's response to the emerging relevance discourse that is dominating curriculum reform efforts in higher education across the globe. Changing global and local realities has placed pressure on higher education to strengthen the relationship between academia and society. This pressure has manifested in a number of curriculum transformation strategies that focus on skills, problem solving and application-based approaches to curriculum which point to the professionalisation of higher education. This chapter explores particular trends and

strategies that the faculty has embarked on in response to these pressures. It suggests that there are shifts from traditional curriculum approaches toward increased professionalisation of teaching and learning approaches at Wits. However, it also suggests that this is achieved through a number of different strategies that have different implications for curriculum reform outcomes. This chapter argues that the response to the professionalisation of curriculum in the humanities is complex and not as straightforward as proposed in the literature.

In Chapter Nine, 'Breaking Disciplinary Boundaries: The Status of the Discipline', the focus is on one aspect that is dominating curriculum reform efforts across the globe. This chapter deals with key debates regarding the appropriateness of the discipline as a means of organising knowledge and socialising students in the twenty-first century. The literature suggests that the notion of the discipline is under pressure to change and is no longer regarded as the most suitable strategy for teaching, learning and research in the higher education sector. This chapter focuses in detail on one component that was discussed in the previous chapter – that is, it explores what has transpired in terms of disciplinary knowledge in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand. This chapter argues that despite new knowledge production strategies which promote interdisciplinarity, the Wits case continues to reflect a strong disciplinary base as fundamental to its teaching, learning and research programmes. However, this does not imply that disciplines continue as they always have. Instead the Wits case shows that disciplines are under pressure to change and that several change strategies are evident in the faculty, including the emergence of new interdisciplinary programmes.

Chapter Ten, 'Conclusion: Making Sense of the Complexity', is an attempt to put the pieces of the puzzle together and to integrate the insights from all corners of the study in order to add to existing knowledge on curriculum change in the field. This chapter presents several key conceptions that provide a comprehensive analysis of curriculum change in the faculty. The overall message suggests that curriculum change occurs at the nexus of a multiplicity of drivers of change which result in an array of responses, which in turn give rise to different logics about how and why curriculum is changing.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEWING THE SCHOLARSHIP

2.1 Introduction

This chapter locates the study within key debates and trends that are taking place internationally and nationally. Generally, the literature indicates that significant curriculum reform processes in higher education are underway in both developed and developing countries, as a result of new trends in the world economy and recent socio-economic and political pressures. While higher education has always undergone changes as societies change, institutions seem to be experiencing more significant and fundamental changes than previously. A widespread problem in current debates on higher education change is the tendency to privilege the role of global pressures (global economy, knowledge economy and technological change) at the expense of local and institutional drivers, neglecting the role of agency or local and institutional discourses rooted in the particular histories and cultures of institutions. I draw attention to the fact that, even though there are many common trends across the globe informed by global pressures, changes in higher education also reflect national and local particularities. Therefore, while the dominant claim in the literature suggests that global pressures – such as the fiscal and financial crisis in higher education due to reduced state budgets and the ‘perceived’ requirements of global competitiveness – have driven higher education institutions to an almost inevitable compliance, there are indications that institutions and countries do not respond deterministically to these pressures; these are mediated within the local context. Finally it must also be stated that in some instances it is difficult to demarcate the divide between global and national economic and social imperatives. For instance, massification and access to higher education may serve both global and national imperatives.

This chapter examines four key claims that emerge from the literature. The first is that higher education is becoming critically important as a role-player in the ‘knowledge economy’, which is becoming increasingly dependent on the skill and knowledge generation capacity of its human resources, in order to position itself successfully in the

global environment. The second is that globalisation relies on higher education to produce the knowledge and skills to serve the economy and enhance global competitiveness. The third is that new imperatives to change higher education curricula are not only driven by economic responsiveness but are also informed by universal notions of social justice. The fourth is that while utilitarian discourses dominate curriculum reform, the literature suggests that curriculum reform is not only driven by utilitarian imperatives but is also underpinned by non-utilitarian conceptions of knowledge.

In South Africa, too, curriculum reform involves an interplay of global, national and institutional factors. This results in a number of different discourses, strategies and trends (Kraak, 2004) which could be referred to as “glocal” (Moja, 2004:21). However, while there are some similarities with trends across the globe, there are also several particularities that are the result of South Africa’s particular history and context. For instance, shifts toward a high-knowledge, high-skills curricula, a focus on efficiency models and reduced financial support for higher education are clearly aligned with global trends. At the same time, however, there are particular manifestations of access and equity imperatives that underpin transformation in South African higher education.

The chapter considers the following main themes dominating debates on curriculum reform: (i) curriculum as a complex and dynamic concept; (ii) globalisation and the new socio-economic and political order; (iii) new knowledge production trends and discourses; (iv) changing modes of co-ordination and control and their implications for curriculum practice; and (v) national and institutional imperatives in determining curriculum choices and processes. These themes are explored with specific reference to the South African context.

2.2 Curriculum as Complex and Dynamic

Curriculum debates show that the notion of curriculum represents a dynamic and complex phenomenon which changes as societies change. An analysis of these debates over time suggests that such discussions were rooted in the schooling sector until very recently, when they also began to feature in the higher education context (Le Grange,

2006). Thus curriculum principles in higher education tended to remain similar over the ages (see section 2.3) and curriculum debates were minimal. However, recently curriculum debates that have been occurring in the schooling sector have now been replicated into debates about curriculum in higher education. These debates suggest that a variety of different discourses inform different curriculum strategies, and that many of these have been recycled in different forms over time.

Because curriculum has come to mean so many different things to different people, debates are not always easy to compare. Curriculum has been viewed as content, syllabus, programme of study and even teaching. As a result debates have ranged from the philosophical to the more pragmatic (Kelly, 2004). Joseph *et al.* (2000) and Pinar *et al.* (1995) developed a comprehensive framework within which to locate curriculum debates. They suggest that curriculum is a complex process framed by epistemological, political, economic, ideological, technical, aesthetic, ethical and historical dimensions. Joseph *et al.* (2000) consider six main cultures of curriculum, which highlight the different purposes of education. These include: (i) training for work and survival by focusing on basic skills in order to function in the workplace and contemporary society; (ii) connecting the canon to acquire core cultural knowledge, traditions and values; (iii) developing self-spirit to foster individual potential, creativity and autonomous thinkers who can construct their own knowledge; (v) developing the skills required to function in a democracy; and (vi) confronting the dominant order to examine and challenge oppressive social, political and economic structures and to support reconstruction of society. Pinar *et al.* (1995) refer to the important contribution made by Marxists who suggest that curriculum can only be understood within a social, economic and political context and that it can be used to oppress or liberate. Different strands can be identified within this tradition. The first is the reproduction theory, where the school plays a role in reproducing the existing society with its values, class lines and so on. It includes dealing with the issue of ideology, the production of meaning and what is defined as normal and natural. The second is the use of education to support resistance. This includes viewing curriculum as value-laden and contextualised, and entails questioning appearances and taken-for-granted practices, and probing assumptions aimed at promoting social emancipation (Cornbleth, 1990).

This gives rise to a conception of curriculum that is dynamic, context-based and underpinned by issues of power.

These different conceptions of curriculum are informed by various theoretical perspectives about education and knowledge, and range from radical to conservative. Pinar *et al.* (1995) provide a historical perspective of curriculum discourses. They show the rise and fall of classical curriculum discourses (memorisation, rote learning), shifts to Herbartianism (away from memorisation towards viewing learning as an active process where learners learn new knowledge based on already acquired knowledge), to child centeredness (a strong pedagogical movement focused on learners, which gained academic respectability when it came to be associated with experimental psychology), and finally the progressive period which proposed that the child's experience should form the basis of the curriculum. A range of these curriculum theories have re-surfaced within contemporary curriculum debates. These include, for example, contemporary conceptions of constructivism as well as the debates that focus on experience and practice as a basis for enhancing learning.

While universities have also undergone curriculum change as their roles changed, until recently little has been written about curriculum in the higher education sector (Le Grange, 2006). A survey of articles published in prominent curriculum journals such as the *Journal of Curriculum Studies* and *Curriculum Inquiry*, for instance, shows that very little space is given to articles on higher education, even though the term was first used in the higher education sector (Le Grange, 2006:7). This is probably due to the fact that in general curriculum issues were left to individual academics whose focus was on transferring certain expert or disciplinary knowledge to students, and 'curriculum debates' were viewed as being the domain of schooling and education faculties. For example, chemistry lecturers will not 'waste' any time debating different conceptions of curriculum because this will not build their careers. Instead they will focus on chemistry as a discipline as their core business. However, the new socio-political and economic context has led to an increased focus on debates about higher education curriculum.

2.3 The Changing Socio-economic and Political Order

There is widespread acknowledgement that the new socio-economic and political context is fundamentally different from the previous one and influences all aspects of our lives, including our educational needs. This has implications for the ways in which universities constitute themselves, particularly their roles and responsibilities.

Even though higher education has played a variety of roles since the inception of universities in the twelfth century,³ the principles underpinning university education generally remained the same – that is, they were underpinned by the principles of a ‘traditional liberal curriculum’ which emphasised theoretical and general curriculum approaches, instead of technical and specialised curriculum approaches. Thus higher education played a number of different roles which have been assigned to them by their societies over time (Imenda, 2006:63). These include : (i) promoting the ideological apparatus of the nation state; (ii) functioning as a mechanism for selecting the elite; (iii) generating new knowledge; and iv) producing professionals to serve the economy (Castells, 2001c:206). These roles are not mutually exclusive but received different emphases depending on the historical period and the socio-political context (Castells, 2001c:206). However, as stated above, until recently the curriculum remained the same despite the different roles. The tradition liberal curriculum is associated with Eurocentric conceptions of knowledge characterised by the following principles:

- enculturation of the mind (Sanderson, 1993);
- knowledge as an end in itself (Muller, 2000b);
- discipline-based knowledge(Sanderson, 1993);
- citizenship(Enslin, 2003);
- critical thinking and contestation (Tsui, 2002);
- claims of collegiality (Johnson, 2005);
- individual competition, meritocracy, high performance and low participation (Rothblatt, 2003);
- eurocentric curriculum (Murray, 1997).

³ Even though the first medieval university is said to have existed in India in 700 BC, the University of Bologna is generally considered to be the first ‘university’ as we know it today.

The literature suggests that the present postmodern period affects university curricula in fundamental ways. Many have referred to this period as postmodern in an attempt to define and explain the new socio-economic and political order, which is regarded as fundamentally different from the previous ‘modern’ era. In the modern era the economy was based on the production of large quantities of the same items or goods – that is, it was a Fordist economy (Levin, 2003). Political systems were informed by national governments⁴ who used both ideological and military means to obtain consensus and to deal with conflict (Abercrombie & Turner, 1978). There were very clear boundaries between countries, nations, classes, groupings and even jobs, which resulted in unambiguous and clear identities (Storper & Scott, 1992). Today society has changed in economic and socio-political terms. Global economies are replacing national economies, and production line workers are being replaced by highly skilled innovative workers. Nation states are inextricably linked to global political frameworks, societies are networked through technologies and people have multiple identities (Muller, 2000a). These changes have been catalysed by information and communication technology (ICT) and have implications for knowledge conception and production (Castells, 2001a). This results in significant pressure on universities to transform in accordance with market and society needs.

2.4 ICT and the Higher Education Landscape

Information and communication technology is the pillar of the new global economy and the basis of its competitiveness. It has affected all aspects of our lives and has significant implications for the ways in which we conceive and deliver higher education. The advent of ICT has led to an economy that operates in real time across the globe and requires high knowledge and high skills to compete in the global market. This economy is able to produce custom-made goods and services through innovation by using technology. While the Fordist economy was characterised by mass production, high volumes and low cost, this is no longer the basis for a competitive edge. The new economy is premised on the “need for flexibility with potential to produce both low volume customised quality as well as high volumes” and can be

⁴ Readings (1996) argues that the change in relationship between the Nation State and the university is one of the critical catalysts for the rise of market driven higher education.

rapidly adapted (Muller, 2000a:27). In this economy, knowledge is the driving force of innovation and business growth (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994:46). Since this economy is dependent on “innovation through the production of knowledge (mainly through scientific research), its transmission through education and training, its dissemination through ICT technologies and its use in technological innovation”, higher education is a critical player in this process (Commission of the European Communities, 2003:4). This places higher education under significant pressure to transform.

ICT impacts on higher education curricula in three significant ways – it serves as a catalyst of new knowledge conception and production processes, it demands different knowledge and skills of higher education graduates, and it acts as a driver of new ways of delivering knowledge (Institute of International Education, 2001). Firstly, because ICT changes the way in which we operate, it results in new ways of conceiving and producing knowledge (see section 2.5 on contemporary knowledge debates later in this chapter). In the context of ICTs, knowledge is produced at many different sites across the globe, using teams of different experts working at a fast pace. As a result what constitutes knowledge is no longer what is contained in traditional disciplinary text-based systems in universities but is much more dynamic and amorphous. Thus there is widespread acknowledgement that ICT fundamentally influences the nature of knowledge production and conception. This has resulted in the increased prominence of Mode 2 knowledge production approaches and has impacted on the nature of curriculum and research in higher education (Castells, 2001c).

Secondly, ICT has led to increased demands on the higher education sector to produce graduates who are able to function effectively in what is termed the knowledge economy. This calls for a workforce that has high skills and high knowledge in order to compete in the global economy, which has implications for the curriculum in higher education. This results in an emphasis on skills, science and technology, which has implications for curricula in the humanities and social sciences.

Thirdly, there is a demand for more higher education graduates to serve the economy – in other words, the massification of higher education. This demand for more graduates combined with the network capability of ICT has led to the use of ICT for delivering

higher education programmes.⁵ Therefore, ICT is viewed as having the “potential to offer flexible, custom based education available to anybody, anywhere and anytime which paves the way for a different kind of learning environment, i.e. e-learning”, which changes the higher education landscape in important ways (Tiffin & Rajasingham, 1995:118). It has the potential to scale up education provision substantially (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994). It changes the nature of the student body to include working students, as well as students from across the globe (Kishun, 1998:63), since students can study when and where they prefer (Tiffin & Rajasingham, 1995). It also provides opportunities for a variety of institutions and organisations to offer education programmes through the Internet to and from anywhere (Scott, 1997), thereby increasing competition in the higher education sector (Löfstedt, 1999).

However, it must be noted that there are different opinions about e-learning. Some believe that e-learning will become the dominant delivery strategy in higher education (Negroponte, 1995:16), impacting on the idea of the university as we know it, while others believe that it will not play a critical role in changing the delivery mechanisms of higher education (Sadlek, 1998:11). In addition, some argue that it enhances teaching and learning and provides better access (Barker, 1997:9, Daniel, 1997, Fox & MacKeogh, 2003, Institute of International Education, 2001), while others believe that it compromises high-level learning and does not provide physical or epistemic access (Fukuyama, 1998, Hall, 2001:232, Kishun, 1998, Muller, 2000b, Noam, 1995).

Clearly ICT has several implications for the curriculum in higher education. This places pressure on the traditional liberal curriculum to become more utilitarian and skills-based. It also focuses on science and technology programmes and undermines the humanities as a field of useful study. Furthermore, it changes the student population

⁵ Even though Muller (2001) believes that not all countries need highly skilled workforces, most who want to compete in the global economy are going the high-skills route. Muller believes that there are three possible routes for countries to follow, each of which has different implications for education requirements. The first is to opt for technological innovation, which is high-end and requires advanced knowledge and research skills. The second is technological borrowing and adaptation, which requires intermediate scientific knowledge and some research experience. The third option is technological improvement, which requires good quality secondary education. However, in general competitive economies require a greater emphasis on codified or high-end knowledge (Muller, Cloete & Badat, 2001) Muller, J., Cloete, N. & Badat, S. (Eds.) (2001) *Challenges of globalisation: South African debates with Manuel Castells* (Pinelands, Cape Town, Maskew Miller Longman)..

and the ways in which students learn, resulting in pressure on the curriculum to shift away from traditional conceptions of knowledge (for example, developing curricula that have more visual elements or ensuring that students are computer-literate). This has led to the mode 1 versus mode 2 conception of knowledge located in contemporary curriculum debates.

2.5 Contemporary Curriculum Debates: Mode 1 versus Mode 2

The literature claims that the new socio-political and economic context requires higher education to become responsive and relevant to the needs of society (Beck & Young, 2005, Castells, 2001c, Gibbons, 2000, Kraak, 1997). This is the result of the increased dependence of the economy on knowledge, and the increased pressure for higher education to support the needs of the global economy by producing the high skills and high knowledge required to serve the economy in the twenty-first century. Readings (1996) suggests that this pressure to shift toward more market driven approaches to higher education has left the university in ruins. Contemporary debates on curriculum in higher education appear to focus on the mode 1 versus mode 2 paradigms which are required for “the different goals for education, different extents of integration or non-integration of subjects with each other and with everyday knowledge and also the depth versus breadth of knowledge to be covered” (Taylor & Vinjevold, 1999:109).

Frank & Gabler (2006) add to this debate by suggesting that curriculum change is a function of our understanding of reality, and that it changes as our realities change. They suggest that modified global models of reality alter the nature of knowledge in higher education. They argue that while external drivers such as markets and policy affect the curriculum, the conception of cosmology and ontology also has a bearing on what constitutes knowledge (Frank & Gabler, 2006:20). They use the evolution vs. creationism debate as an example (Frank & Grabler, 2006:24). First, since society has come to accept evolution rather than creationism as an explanation of existence, the curriculum is under pressure to change accordingly. This results in the weakening of traditional authoritarian structures in society and the rise of egalitarianism. Authority no longer lies with the gods or the masters; instead there is a sense that ordinary people can use knowledge to change their lives.

'In short by the onset of the twentieth century, a syndrome of forces had come together to propel a profound shift in the globally institutionalized ontology. The taken-for-grantedness of divine actorhood was in rapid decline, and to humans were increasingly attributed broad spectrum capacities to pursue specific ends (Frank & Gabler, 2006:25).

This resulted in shifts from divine to human capacities to act and know. Therefore, a curriculum that provides human beings with the capacity to act takes precedence, and a curriculum that focuses on the masters or gods no longer has currency (Frank & Gabler, 2006).

- This emerging knowledge paradigm is referred to as mode 2. It is characteristically different to mode 1, which has traditionally been associated with higher education (Gibbons et al., 1994, Scott, 1997). Mode 1 is referred to as the discipline-based and academic knowledge traditionally taught at universities. It represents particular modes of analysis, critique and knowledge production that emphasise mastery of concepts and modes of argument which form the basis for new knowledge (Ensor, 2002:274). This approach is located within particular social and cognitive practices that have come to be associated with Western rationalist thought (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994:3). Mode 2 refers to utility-based knowledge that is related to the world of work; it is pragmatic and skills-based (Kraak, 2000:14). The characteristics that define the shift from mode 1 to mode 2 knowledge production include: a shift towards more practical utility-based knowledge;
- a shift towards skills and competencies;
- an emphasis on curriculum and research that is application-based and interdisciplinary in nature;
- research production at many sites;
- massification of higher education through the use of information and communication technology (Kraak, 2000:40).

The shift to mode 2 knowledge approaches is informed by utilitarian discourses about the purpose of higher education. The utilitarians approach calls for education that is responsive to society's needs. This responsiveness favours economic instrumentalism

but also includes socio-political responsiveness which argues for the recognition and respect of difference and a focus on access and equity (Muller, 1997:197).

Proponents of mode 2 approaches view it as an opportunity for higher education to become relevant, accessible and accountable, making higher education more productive and useful to society (Gibbons et al., 1994, Jacobs, 1999, Kraak, 1997, Scott, 1997). They suggest that in mode 2 knowledge production, partnerships with other stakeholders result in inclusivity and higher levels of efficiency and accountability in higher education (Gibbons, 2000:50). They also believe that mode 2 results in shifts from elite to mass systems (Kraak, 2000), promoting increased access and reducing costs (Institute of International Education, 2001:20).

Opponents of mode 2 view it as an attack on the autonomy of higher education (Altbach, 2001, Kishun, 1998, Slaughter & Leslie, 1999), or as being underpinned by market ideologies that undermine socio-political and academic agendas. (Kishun, 1998:61) and (Orr, 1997) suggest that this results in the promotion of knowledge as a commodity which can be manufactured, bought and sold, thus impacting on what is being taught and how it is being taught. Others are concerned with the dominance of neo-colonialist perspectives of new knowledge production approaches (Altbach, 2001) which undermine local notions of identity and culture, which are central tenets of curriculum (Nckwhehva, 2000).

The shift to mode 2 is also informed by contestation about which curriculum produces the best graduates. For instance, some believe that the kind of skills required by the economy can better be developed in the context of application (Gibbons, 2000). Some affirm the importance of tacit knowledge – in other words, for them the competitive edge in the global economy is underpinned by effective use of tacit knowledge over theoretical knowledge (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994). Others argue that theoretical and broader-based liberal education combined with some tacit knowledge will serve the economy better since it produces graduates who are able to think (Guile, 2006). Two key issues lie at the heart of this debate: the contestation about technical or specialised training versus general education; and practical training versus theoretical education. For example, it is argued that ICT has resulted in the need for symbolic capacity which is

better served by theoretical or system thinking rather than the 'know-how' focus that is derived from experience (Gibbons et al., 1994, Taylor & Vinjevoll, 1999:128).

While deliberation on the mode 2 versus mode 1 debate represents stark perspectives on curriculum reform, a third perspective argues for a more nuanced and strategic relationship between the two modes. This is supported by Bawa (1997:46) who advises that the relationship between the two should be viewed as non-linear, complex and iterative, and also by Muller (2000b:79) who suggests that viewing mode 2 and mode 1 in such distinct ways creates a false dichotomy which is not useful. They recommend a more complex continuum in order to understand knowledge production. Muller (2000b:80) asserts that mode 2 has always been around but that it is becoming more dominant, and also that it cannot exist without mode 1 because mode 2 competence depends on mode 1 disciplinary knowledge. In considering this perspective, it is important to note the work of Ekong & Cloete (1997:11) who believe that mode 1 and 2 are not mutually exclusive but do have tensions that need to be explored in terms of its implications for curriculum.

The literature also suggests that the curriculum reform debates revolving around mode 1 versus mode 2 can be located within relativist versus universalist notions of what constitutes knowledge. Universalists view education as neutral and objective with universal validity, which is associated with Western rationalist thought (Searle, 1993). Relativists are concerned with understanding and explaining the rise of plurality and the acceptance of difference, diversity and an emphasis on the social construction of knowledge and its relationship to power, which is characteristic of mode 2 knowledge approaches (Beck, 1993:2, Searle, 1993). At the same time characteristics like 'global skills' and the need for universally relevant scientific knowledge are better suited to the modernist paradigm (Van Niekerk & Venter, 2002:101). This means that curriculum reform is located in both paradigms, and that issues of national and institutional differences are located not only within a context of choice and plurality but also within a wider framework of global essentialist tendencies. Since universalists are unable to accurately represent subjectivity and difference (Tierney, 2001:355), while the relativists' accommodation of everything is not useful (Best & Kellner, 1991:258, Degenaar, 1997:258), a combination of perspectives may be better suited to understanding present-day society (Best & Kellner, 1991:181).

This argument is reiterated from a different angle by Moore & Muller (1999), who suggest that both the relativists and the positivists view knowledge in stark opposites, and attempt to reconcile these views. The relativist denies that knowledge has a set of universal criteria for defining it as true. This discourse is associated with postmodernism, progressive pedagogy and a critique of the enlightenment project, and is associated with a shift to social justice and inclusivity (Moore & Muller, 1999). This discourse “counters hegemonic claims and re-asserts the primacy of experience or practice over theory” (Moore & Muller, 1999:194). It attempts to conflate epistemological and socio-political aspects of knowledge. Moore & Muller (1999) argue that any explanation of knowledge must take account of the sociological as well as the epistemological aspects of knowledge; they refer to this approach as the realist conception of knowledge. The epistemological account of knowledge views knowledge as defined by a set of criteria, standards and principles that are universal, and defines knowledge as truth in its own right. Thus they argue that knowledge cannot be understood by mere relativisation but rather by including an account of knowledge that is informed by a set of criteria that legitimatises its claims (Moore & Muller, 1999). They also warn against a positivist account of knowledge which does not view knowledge as socially constructed, and refer to this as critical realism.

2.6 A Manifestation of Mode 2: Breaking Disciplinary Boundaries

The emergence of mode 2 approaches is underpinned by the weakening of boundaries between theory and application, education and training, and academic and everyday knowledge. This has been referred to as the difference between monism and dualism (Muller, 2004:221). Monists do not distinguish between education and training or between modes of knowledge; instead they focus on problems and attempt to reduce disciplinary boundaries. Dualists, on the other hand, offer very clear demarcations between different knowledge forms and qualifications, have strong views about progression and are rooted in the disciplines (Muller, 2004).

One of the key manifestations of the shift to mode 2 knowledge approaches is an increased focus on interdisciplinary programmes and strategies.⁶ Traditional disciplinary approaches that have been associated with university curricula for centuries are under pressure to transform toward cross-, trans- or interdisciplinary approaches (Gibbons, 2000:39). Disciplinary knowledge represented the dominant tradition in university curricula across the world. The ‘discipline’ formed the basis of socialising “the young since the 19th century” (Moore & Young, 2001:446). However, in the twenty-first century there are strong arguments for moving toward inter- and cross-disciplinary curricula in higher education. The proponents of interdisciplinarity believe that it offers great possibilities for integrating skills and knowledge, workplace and formal education, and also provides interesting problem-solving opportunities (Marais & Marais, 1999, Zietsman, 1996:73). It is also felt that this results in shifts from elitist theoretical approaches which are inaccessible to students (Belefeld & Jama, 2002, Gibbons et al., 1994) to more egalitarian and accessible curricula. The opponents believe that there is insufficient evidence of the pedagogical and epistemological benefits of interdisciplinarity (Harley & Wedekind, 2003, Taylor, 2000) and are concerned that interdisciplinarity reduces conceptual and theoretical depth, which has implications for the longer-term sustainability of knowledge production capacity (Harley & Wedekind, 2003). They also believe that integration of disciplines overshadows coherence and progression which are central to systematic learning (Harley & Wedekind, 2003).

Shifting the focus of knowledge from disciplines to interdisciplinarity is complex and requires an understanding of the epistemological, social and structural arrangements that exist and also of the new arrangements required. Firstly, disciplines operate like separate communities with their own sense of identity and cultures, and know little about other disciplinary communities (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Academic cultures include ways of operating, ways of seeing the world, and are even indicated in the kinds of paraphernalia in academics’ offices – for example, the pictures on the walls and the books on the shelves (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Becher & Trowler (2001) refer to hard and soft sciences and to applied and pure sciences to differentiate the disciplines, and indicate that these have different characteristics. For example, the hard sciences have a

⁶ While Scott (1998) differentiates between trans-discipline and interdiscipline, many writers use inter-discipline as the overarching concept to cover all forms of discipline integration.

much higher level of consensus while the soft sciences tend to be more contested (Becher & Trowler, 2001). They argue that these disciplines are strongly rooted in certain practices and cultures, and therefore shifting to interdisciplinarity is more complex and challenging than was envisaged.

Secondly, disciplines are structured on the basis of power and control in relation to each other, and restructuring disciplines would require a restructuring and reorganisation of the power relations that exist – that is, the boundaries between disciplines exist in the context of power relations which are reconstituted when boundaries are broken (Bernstein, 1971). Bernstein (1971) refers to the notion of classification and framing to explain the relationship between different disciplines. Classification refers to the extent of differentiation between contents. The more differentiated contents are from each other, the more strongly classified it is, which results in collection-type relationships between them. Similarly the less differentiated the content forms, the more open the relationship and the greater the possibility for integration of the contents (Bernstein, 1971). Framing refers to the extent of control the educator and learner have over what is taught. Strong framing means that educators have little control over what they teach, while weak framing means that they have more control (Bernstein, 1971).

Thirdly, disciplines are differently positioned in terms of their potential to accommodate the external world Muller (2003:110). Thus the knowledge structures of disciplines shape their accommodation to markets and policy pressures. Different disciplines have different relationships to the outside world, and any understanding of knowledge must take account of the fact that knowledge is informed by both external and internal factors.

On this basis, Bernstein (1971) argues that different knowledge forms have different capacities to become interdisciplinary. Bernstein (2000) differentiates between vertical and horizontal discourses⁷ to explain a discipline's capacity to integrate with other knowledge. Vertical discourses are coherent and based on organised and principled

⁷ Bernstein (2000:155) suggests that these discourses have been referred to as symbolic versus practical by Bourdieu, instrumental rationality versus life world by Habermas and as dis-embedded and expert based versus experiential by Giddens. Horizontal discourses are oral, context-dependent, tacit and segmental – that is, everyday and academic knowledge.

knowledge structures which describe academic knowledge. Academic knowledge is further divided into ‘vertical or horizontal knowledge forms’. Vertical or hierarchical knowledge is abstract, and has integrative potential in that new knowledge replaces or adds to old knowledge to build stronger explanatory power – that is, hierarchical knowledge is either refuted or incorporated based on empirical evidence. Horizontal knowledge is additive in that new knowledge does not replace old knowledge and is not refuted. It usually consists of many incommensurable languages and is based on plurality. In general, the sciences are classified as hierarchical knowledge forms while the humanities are considered to be horizontal knowledge forms (Bernstein, 2000). When hierarchical knowledge is selected for a curriculum, it is often done on some rational choice of necessary knowledge, while horizontal knowledge always allows for choice and selection based on the privileging of some or other content (Bernstein, 2000). Therefore, it is easier to integrate horizontal knowledge forms than vertical knowledge forms.

However, irrespective of whether the integration is between horizontal or vertical knowledge types, the conditions for integration must be met in order for this endeavour to be successful. In this regard, (Bernstein, 1971:64) refers to four conditions that need to be met to enable effective knowledge integration in the curriculum. These are:

- Disciplines must give way to some relational idea. In addition, there must be consensus about the integrating idea and it must be explicit.
- The nature of the linkage between the integrating idea and the knowledge to be co-ordinated must be spelled out.
- A committee of staff must be set up to provide feedback and act as an agency of socialisation into the new code.
- Assessment procedures, criteria and practice must be very clear.

2.7 New Modes of Co-ordination and Control: The Rise of the Stakeholder University

The literature indicates a significant shift in modes of co-ordination and control practices in higher education from the twentieth to the twenty-first centuries. This is largely the result of changing relationships between the university and the state, and between the university and the society. Most theorists on globalisation agree that the traditional role of the nation state in determining and directing higher education has changed as a result of the increased globalisation of knowledge production and innovation through ICT, the reduced funding by the state and increased market participation and associated market steering models, underpinned by trends in the global economy (Carnoy, 2001, Institute of International Education, 2001, Slaughter & Leslie, 1999). As a result government steering and associated funding models and mechanisms are changing (Jenniskens, 1996). In the era of industrial capitalism, knowledge was largely defined at national level and the state was influential in defining knowledge and the values that reinforced the reproduction of existing power relations (Carnoy, 2001:25). There are many examples of government steering of higher education, where the state steps back, assigning to itself a less exclusive role (Jenniskens, 1996:42). In this model the state does not have the same ideological role to play as it did in reproducing a capitalist society (Castells, 2001b:211).

Instead, a range of other stakeholders influence higher education. First, the market or economic stakeholders are particularly dominant and influential, which results in the following trends (Becher & Trowler, 2001):

- increased power of customers;
- commodification of knowledge;
- increased partnerships between higher education and business;
- increased shifts toward efficiency models of operating.

The increased deployment of market-based models into university environments results in an increased focus on efficiency and financial considerations in curriculum decision making. In addition, the increased focus on the role of the university as

serving the needs and interests of the markets affects what knowledge is considered worthy of academic pursuit. Also, when students become clients or customers, they influence what constitutes curriculum. This has been associated with the rise of managerialist practices in the higher education sector (Bleiklie & 2004, Kogan, 2004).

One of the consequences of adopting market-driven models in higher education is the changing role and identity of academics. The implementation of efficiency, planning and quality assurance mechanisms to steer the sector has affected the traditional role of academics (Henkel, 2004). Academics are now focusing much more on administrative tasks, which undermines the curriculum agenda and their role as academic agents (Johnson & Cross, 2005). This has implications for the identity of academics as knowledge experts (Henkel, 2005). Some argue that managerialist strategies erode the autonomy of academic work and reconfigure their identities (Henkel, 2005:155). This, it is felt, undermines the academic project and relocates power from academics to administrators. However, others argue that academics still have reasonable autonomy and that internal and external procedures only affect them marginally (Kletz & Pallez, 2002:9).

Secondly, there is a range of other stakeholders, such as civil society, that are also making demands on higher education to transform. These stakeholders demand that higher education curriculum becomes more socio-politically and culturally responsive. This includes increasing access to higher education, and recognising different knowledge forms and different learning cultures. This is informed by the social justice discourse which is underpinned by universal conceptions of access, equity and respect for difference (Ramirez, 2004).

In the context of a stakeholder-driven higher education strategy, the role of the state is one of steering and quality assurance. The literature suggests that the state is increasingly shifting towards a steering as opposed to controlling role in higher education (Jenniskens, 1996). Jenniskens (1996:405) refers to various government relationships with universities (no involvement of government, government oversight and supervision role, and total control by government), and supports the continued involvement of government in higher education. It is argued that the state can play a critical role in balancing market forces (Carnoy, 2001:28) and in overseeing quality

(Jenniskens, 1996:63). Furthermore, this approach has the potential to neutralise the power of the markets and to ensure that other national agendas are met, because market-driven models can erode the interests of the nation state and the autonomy of the university (Mills, 2000). Therefore, the absence of government steering is likely to result in the uncritical acceptance of market-driven options (Jenniskens, 1996:405). Others support less involvement by the state and the increased use of market models to regulate higher education, as they believe this will result in greater efficiency and effectiveness (Oman, 1995:5). For some the state and markets can often become one voice. Thus in many instances market values underpin national policy. Muller (2001) suggests that present-day societies do not reflect such stark differences between the state and the market as was previously the case (Carnoy, 2001:22). Subotzky (2000:127) supports the involvement of civil society as it can assist in balancing the powers of market forces and can support education for public good.

What does all this mean for curriculum? First, the increased participation of a variety of stakeholders in higher education results in increased pressure on the curriculum to serve a range of different interests and needs that are generally linked to conceptions of responsiveness. Second, the use of efficiency measures to inform curriculum decisions has implications for programmes that are not cost-effective or not popular. Third, the state's new steering and co-ordination strategies can affect the autonomy of institutions, which has implications for their decision-making power in the curriculum design arena. Fourth, the steering and co-ordination strategies can lead to increased adoption of instrumental curriculum discourses because it is easier to quantify products and outcomes.

2.8 Spaces for National and Institutional Responses

In general, higher education throughout the world is under pressure to adapt to a global model while at the same time responding to national forces (Meyer *et al.*, 1997). These competing forces have points of both tension and alignment, a situation which results in contradictory and dialectical processes that are not easily predictable (Mittelman, 1996:231). Evidence from a number of countries indicates that different institutions respond differently to global change imperatives, despite similar pressures to transform the curriculum. The literature suggests that the interplay between global

and national pressures and institutional context must be considered when exploring curriculum reform, since it highlights critical issues of human agency and historical context.

The first trend is that there are some common policy and implementation practices in higher education throughout the world. For instance, there is widespread support across the globe for the massification of higher education. It is estimated that the total number of higher education students globally increased by 61 per cent from 1980 to 1995 (from 51 million to 82 million) (Sadlek, 1998:101). This has partly been enabled by the use of ICT to support distance learning, which was estimated at US\$300 billion worldwide in the late 1990s (Warwick, 1999:4). There is also evidence of shifts to mode 2 knowledge production approaches, reduced state funding, calls for public-private partnerships and increased accountability to stakeholders.

Lessons from a four-country case study (USA, Canada, UK, and Australia) show evidence of:

- shifts towards commercial research and away from basic curiosity-driven research;
- shifts toward utility-based notions of curriculum;
- increased student participation and reduced budgets;
- restructuring in line with market concepts of efficiency;
- declines in state expenditure and increased private funding; and
- shifts towards electronic learning (Slaughter & Leslie, 1999).

However, while countries generally reflect some common global practices, there is also evidence of differences linked to particular country contexts. It is argued that the shift towards academic capitalism is far from uniform. Slaughter & Leslie (1999), for example, refer to the example of the USA and Canada, where the latter has opted for less market involvement in education than the former. A comparative study of Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China indicates that educational development is reflective of global trends in marketisation and corporatisation but also reflect national imperatives (Mok & Lee, 2001:18). For instance, privatisation of higher education, a focus on application-based research, academic exchanges with other countries, decentralisation,

denationalisation and automisation are evident in the Far East countries (Mok & Lee, 2001). However, Mok and Lee (2001:16) suggest that while the above trends are common to all three countries, indications are that decisions are also informed by particular national agendas. For instance, curriculum changes in Hong Kong are part of a public reform process, while Taiwan is responding to socio-political issues and the Chinese model is driven more strongly by local factors than by global factors. They conclude that while common contextual factors shape education in this region, particular responses show that change is complex and is the outcome of the interplay between national, global and regional forces (Mok & Lee, 2001:13). This is further supported by a study of OECD countries, which suggests that responses from universities are not systematic and wholly predictable, despite some common trends (Kameoka, 1996:34). For example, (Hansson & Holmberg, 2003) indicate that higher education in Sweden is not taking a predictable globalisation route. This, they say, is a result of the fact that higher education is free to students. As a result, students do not explore global study opportunities and Swedish universities do not explore international markets. Another contextual dimension is that, in some instances, global concerns are also local concerns – that is, there is an alignment between global and local factors. For instance, Ramirez (2004) refers to the fact that in both South Africa and the USA there were pressures to deal with issue of race and racism; both countries, therefore, experienced some components of social justice in universal ways (Ramirez, 2004).

In fact, the South African case reflects the complexity of global and national imperatives that are not fully predictable and are the result of global and national pressures within the context of institutional histories and cultures. The following sections will discuss the South African case in more detail.

2.9 Curriculum Reform in Higher Education: South African Trends

The literature suggests that global and national factors put in place equally compelling imperatives to transform higher education in the South Africa context. This is reflected in the policy framework which is underpinned by a range of competing interests, such as access versus efficiency. This makes implementation complex and results in a number of different curriculum reform trends that are the outcome of interplay

between a variety of factors including markets, policy, institutional factors and disciplinary factors.

2.10 Policy Imperative: A Double-edged Sword

South Africa recently instituted a significant policy and legislative process in order to transform its higher education sector. This constituted a lengthy and highly participatory process which culminated in several policy documents and structures (Badat, 2003, Moja & Hayward, 2000). Critical milestones included the setting up of the National Commission on Higher Education in 1995, followed by the Green Paper of 1996 and finally the White Paper of 1997, which provided the framework for transforming the higher education sector (Cloete, 2002). The key principles underpinning the White Paper on higher education (Department of Education [DoE], 1997) include equity and redress, democratisation, development, quality, effectiveness and efficiency, academic freedom, accountability and autonomy. These principles culminated in the following transformation programmes:

- institutional restructuring, institutional mergers and the creation of a single and unfragmented higher education system;
- new funding strategies based on efficiency and redress;
- articulation between qualifications through the National Qualifications Framework (NQF);
- co-operative governance and partnership strategies;
- significant access targets;
- curriculum restructuring towards relevance and flexibility;
- increased responsiveness to social and economic needs (Badat, 2003:7).

Three key issues frame the policy process:

The first is that the state's role in driving higher education change through policy imperatives has been more significant than initially anticipated. Between the late 1990s and the mid 2000s the South African state moved from distant steering to higher levels of control and interference (Johnson, 2005). This has been referred to as a 'highly

active state supervision model' (Johnson, 2005, Kraak, 2001). In the 1990s the state endorsed a role of non-interference and oversight for itself. However, in the 2000s the state took a decision to become more involved in higher education affairs. This role of interference is facilitated through the new planning, financial and quality assurance framework developed to manage the sector. This shift is highly contested by a range of stakeholders who believe that the autonomy of institutions is being eroded (Jansen, 2004:296).

The second key issue is that policy is underpinned by tensions between global and local imperatives, and this has significant implications for implementation. The literature suggests that the South African policy environment reflects a dynamic tension between global and national priorities. For instance, tensions between redress, equity, access⁸ and efficiency result in challenges at the implementation level (Maassen & Cloete, 2002:30)⁹. As a result there is disagreement about the extent to which local versus global imperatives are privileged. According to Kraak (2000:16), South African policy provides a reasonable combination of imperatives for both global and national priorities as stated in the higher education White Paper of 1997. However, for others South African policy is more strongly influenced by global pressures than national pressures (Jansen, 2000:156, Kishun, 1998:61, Thompson, 1997:2), which they see as compromising national agendas (Alexander, 2001:139). They urge that South Africans should find locally appropriate solutions and not accept the global positions in a deterministic way.

The third issue is that curriculum policy is broad and ambiguous in that it promotes both traditional disciplinary as well as professional approaches to curriculum. The curriculum 'directives' set out in the White Paper on higher education emphasise both mode 1 and mode 2 knowledge production (Ensor, 2002:279). This includes support for eroding the boundaries between education and training, between academic and everyday knowledge, and between different knowledges/disciplines/subjects while also acknowledging that disciplinary knowledge is necessary. Clearly policy on curriculum is

⁸ While there is acknowledgment that access is also a global imperative, the particular manifestation is local

⁹ This has been referred to as the tension between equity and development (Cloete, N. & Moja, T. (2005) Transformation tensions in higher education: equity, efficiency and development, *Social research*, Vol 73(No. 3), pp. 693 - 722.

broad in its attempt to be inclusive, making it open to a wide variety of interpretations at the implementation level (Ensor, 2002:279). This broad policy framework has resulted in the emergence of competing curriculum discourses.

2.11 Competing Curriculum Discourses

The literature shows that there has been an increasing interest in higher education curriculum issues in South Africa over the past few years. A quick look at the South African literature indicates that there are five key issues emerging from the studies:

- A number of curriculum discourses are reflected in the South African context.
- This manifests in debates about disciplinary versus interdisciplinary learning and formative versus vocational curriculum.
- The curriculum reform process is affected by the institutional culture and academic identity.
- There is a strong focus on access but this is largely in the pedagogical domain.
- The focus on culture and curriculum manifests in debates about diversity, Africanisation and citizenship.

Firstly, the various discourses on curriculum reform in the South African environment (Ensor, 2004, Kraak, 2004) suggest that policy is not implemented in a linear way, but rather it is mediated in the context of political, economic and institutional constraints (Kraak, 2004). This gives rise to a number of conceptions of curriculum reform in the South African context. These are drawn from Cloete & Fehnel (2002:283); Ekong & Cloete (1997); Ensor (2004); Gultig (2000:84); Kraak (2004) and Moll (2004). Cloete and Fehnel (2002:282) and Gultig (2000:84) propose that there are two types of curriculum responses – a strong market-oriented approach to curriculum reform versus a strong traditional approach – which sit on either side of a continuum. This is supported by Ensor (2004) who agrees that there are two discourses in the South African context – that is, the traditional and market-oriented curriculum approaches – but argues that the traditional approach continues to dominate curriculum reform processes. Ensor (2001) shows that while some institutions set out to repackage their

products to fit with the policy requirements of portability, relevance, coherence and interdisciplinarity, many programmes remained fundamentally the same. As a result disciplinary insulation continues to be strong (Ensor, 2004). Another conception is that of Kraak (2004) who suggests that there are three curriculum discourses; he indicates that none of these are dominant and that these discourses exist side by side in the South African environment. The first of these is the high skills discourse, which combines economic growth and development with an integrated education and training system, broad problem-solving skills and abilities to adapt to different labour market requirements, the production of high skills with a stable economic environment to create an effective labour market. It is characterised by a market discourse and is generally apoliticised. The second is the popular democratic discourse which is concerned with equity. It is meant to produce critical thinking, and is characterised by learner centeredness, interdisciplinarity, community involvement, and the link between formal education and work. The third is the residual stratification discourse, which deals with the divide between university, technikon and vocational college. However, a curriculum study commissioned by the South African University Vice-chancellors Association (SAUVCA) suggests that responsiveness to society is a critical component of curriculum reform imperatives (Griesel, 2004). The study discusses four senses of responsiveness – economic, cultural, disciplinary and learner – and suggests that these overlap with each other depending on the interplay between these notions of responsiveness and a number of other national and institutional factors (Moll, 2004). Economic refers to a relationship with the world of work, cultural refers to issues of diversity, disciplinary refers to the developments within the discipline and learner responsiveness refers to the way in which curriculum responds to the needs of the learner. Ekong and Cloete's (1997) conception of curriculum focuses on the developmentalist versus the identity approach. The developmentalists view socio-economic development as the priority. They are concerned with productivity and competitiveness and focus on utilitarian curriculum aims. The identity perspective has two categories, individual identity and collective identity. The former favours a more traditional approach and focuses on autonomy, critical thinking and independent judgment. The latter focuses on citizenship, responsible action and democracy. It is clear that there are overlaps between the various discourses in the context of implementation.

Secondly, this manifests in debates on discipline versus interdiscipline and formative versus vocational curriculum approaches which are informed by conceptions of relevance (Muller, 2005a). Therefore, even though disciplinary-based curriculum remains the dominant model in higher education, there is evidence of some shifts toward interdisciplinarity. In addition, there are different ways of understanding and constituting interdisciplinary curricula. A case study of three institutions showed that there were different interpretations and implementation plans for interdisciplinarity (Moore, 2003). Moore's (2003b) study showed that in a common field of practice (biotechnology), different institutions drew on different claims to justify curriculum changes and engaged in fundamentally different ways to cross boundary negotiations between disciplines, giving rise to different curriculum structures. This is further supported by Ensor (1998) who refers to a contentious debate at the University of Cape Town (UCT) about what an introductory curriculum on African Studies should look like. One perspective referred to a collection type of interdisciplinarity approach which maintained some level of disciplinary boundaries, while the other represented a more integrated approach to curriculum selection and design (Ensor, 1998). Harley & Wedekind (2003) warn that while interdisciplinarity was appealing to post-apartheid South Africa because disciplines were associated with elitism and inaccessibility, this approach could result in denying students access to the sets of principles that underpin knowledge construction¹⁰ and could further 'disadvantage the disadvantaged student'. The issue here is that the interdisciplinary approach has the potential to make invisible the basis upon which disciplinary knowledge is built and may hide the rules from students, which is antithetical to its intentions. In addition, the literature suggests that there is no clear answer as to whether interdisciplinarity is an academic and cognitively driven strategy or merely a pragmatic and economic one (Ensor, 2004). Ensor (2004) suggests that further research is required on the impact of interdisciplinarity on educational outcomes.

The shift to vocational and skills development as a curriculum focus in higher education is highly contested, particularly in the humanities (Jansen, 2004:308). The financial constraints which institutions face as a result of reduced funding and the

¹⁰ Bernstein (1971) refers to invisible and visible pedagogy. Visible pedagogy makes the underlying rules and principles explicit to students while these principles and rules are implicit or hidden in the context of invisible pedagogy.

policy imperatives to shift to science and technology and skills development places pressure on the humanities to transform the curriculum. This has implications for curriculum and enrolment patterns in the humanities. Jansen (2004:309) believes that the eroding of the humanities is one of the most critical and serious outcomes of present policy trends; he is concerned about what this means for the academic traditions and culture of critical and creative thought that the humanities have brought to the academic environment. Muller (2005b) suggests that the humanities are in a tight corner and believes that they are “damned if they do” succumb to markets and “damned if they don’t”. However Readings (1996) calls for innovative thinkers that are able to take the university out of the ruins without succumbing to the markets.

Thirdly, the range of curriculum responses is also a result of a complex interplay between institutional mission and strategy, academic identity and institutional capacity. This is evident in a study conducted by (Moore, 2002) which showed that two South African institutions responded differently, despite similar conditions, contexts and pressures. Differential responses can be attributed to institutional history, culture and capacity (Jansen, 2000). In South Africa this can partly be explained by the historical differences between institutions (historically black, white, etc.). However, while this typology of apartheid institutions is useful in providing a framework for locating institutional responses, it does not fully explain the changes taking place, and its limitations must therefore be noted. For example, Ensor’s (2002:285) study showed that even faculties within the same institution adopted different approaches and suggested that capacity and institutional culture are not the only determinants of choices made. This is supported by Jansen (2000:164) who asserts that there are very complex organisational and cultural arrangements that define institutional life and that these are not easily framed within simplistic mode 1 and mode 2 conceptions. The situation is further complicated by the fact that higher education institutions are loosely coupled with no single authority on curriculum and relative autonomy of academic staff (Davies, 1994:264). Therefore, it is not easy to control and predict curriculum responses and outcomes in different institutions and even different departments (Maassen & Cloete, 2002:27).

Fourthly, the curriculum discourse highlights the fact that while physical access has been achieved, epistemological access still has a long way to go. An increasing number

of black students and women have gained entry into higher education even though the percentage increase in relation to the population is not high (Cloete & Moja, 2005). There are flexible access routes such as recognition of prior learning, articulation between certificates, diplomas and degrees, and so on, which support physical access. However, increased physical access results in larger classes¹¹ and a more diverse student population with varying levels of academic preparation (Maharaso, 2003), and requires rethinking of the curriculum and teaching and learning strategies in order to ensure success. This leads to a focus on epistemic access, which is something that institutions and students are struggling to achieve (Morrow, 1993). Morrow (1993) suggests that students need extensive support to gain epistemological access – that is, relevant intellectual, cultural and academic skills required to succeed in higher education. Most studies focus on innovating around access, pedagogy and academic literacy (Griesel, 2004). Even bridging programmes that offer ‘scaffolded learning’ opportunities to support under-prepared students focus on pedagogy (Maharaso, 2003). There are also numerous studies that focus on the nature of academic skills required by students to succeed in higher education. This includes several studies on language, reading and writing in the context of academic success (Niven, 2005, Pretorius, 2005, Steinberg & Slonimsky, 2004, Viljoen, 2005), academic literacy (Hutchings, 2005), and the use of computer-based programmes to develop critical reasoning skills (Spurrett, 2005). While there is extensive focus on academic literacy and pedagogy, little has been done in terms of curriculum change and access – for example, the Africanisation of the curriculum.

Fifthly, the literature points to three key debates in terms of the relationship between curriculum and culture: i) dealing with diversity; ii) Africanisation; iii) nation building and citizenship. In terms of diversity, there is acknowledgement that the curriculum must take cognisance of both student diversity and different knowledge forms. This includes an acknowledgement of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups and the building of “bridges of meaningfulness” between academic abstractions and lived socio-cultural realities (e.g. between home and school) (Moll, 2004:5). This implies, therefore, that curriculum is underpinned by the values of tolerance for difference and

¹¹ There is a discrepancy between increased student numbers and the government subsidy – that is, student numbers have increased by 20 per cent while subsidies have increased only 7 per cent (Cloete & Moja, 2005:9).

recognition of different knowledge forms. It also manifests in the development of a variety of instructional strategies related to diverse learning styles and diverse ways of assessing students. According to Cross (2004) diversity strategies tend to focus on 'how to' instead of 'why' and do not sufficiently unpack the concept. In terms of Africanisation, this includes an acknowledgement of the fact that the student body is not only South African and that the curriculum must begin to resonate with Africa and Africans, which includes the use of African academic literature and examples that are located in African countries (Moll, 2004:13). A big issue that arises in the debate on Africanisation is that of indigenous knowledge. For instance, this could mean ensuring that African higher education is geared to solving African problems or that Africanisation involves a new way of thinking about knowledge. Visvanathan indicates that indigenous knowledge is usually 'museumised' and does not become part of the epistemological debate (Kraak, 1999:3). Moodie (2003) confirms that the focus on non-Western knowledge forms has manifested in a focus on non-cognitive elements. Some suggest that there are other ways of knowing besides the Cartesian truth or Western rationalist thought, and that we need to develop and validate these ways of knowing in academically explainable terms (Moodie, 2003). Thus there is a growing call to accept the co-existence of the plurality of knowledge structures (Kraak, 1999). In terms of culture and the curriculum, there is an interest in promoting citizenship and nation building in and through education. This includes a focus on promoting national identity and critical citizens who are able to participate effectively in a democracy. Stetar (2000:28) suggests that strengthening national identity can strengthen unity among people who share common values, and that this could permit national culture to select certain foreign practices without being dominated and subsumed by ideologically dominant nations or cultures.

2.12 Main Points from the Literature

This chapter reviews the scholarship on curriculum reform and locates the key debates and discourses that underpin these conceptions. At the outset there is a widespread view that higher education has been undergoing significant changes since the beginning of the twenty-first century as a result of the new socio-economic and political context in which the society is located. These changes place significant pressure on higher

education to transform and, because they impact on all aspects of the sector, curriculum transformation is hardest hit. In general, the new socio-economic and political context demands that higher education curricula become more closely aligned with the interests and needs of society. Thus there is pressure to transform higher education curricula from traditional theoretical and disciplinary-based approaches to applications and skills-based approaches in order to serve society more directly. These contemporary debates about curriculum are located in the mode 1 versus mode 2 knowledge approach, and refer to the extent to which curriculum is responsive to society. While responsiveness takes many forms and includes economic as well as socio-political conceptions of usefulness, the economic concerns dominate curriculum reform efforts.

This shift to a utilitarian curriculum discourse has significant implications for the humanities and social sciences, an area which has traditionally focused on non-utilitarian knowledge forms. This pressure to transform the curriculum toward applications and skills-based approaches, as well as the focus on science and technology, has the potential to undermine the place and power of the humanities in the knowledge 'industry'. Thus there is concern that this kind of pressure may have serious repercussions on knowledge conception and production in the humanities. There is also concern that the critical contribution to citizenship and democracy can be undermined in the process.

The literature also draws attention to the overriding or dominant role of global factors in curriculum change – that is, the high skills discourse, efficiency and economic instrumentalism. However, it suggests that despite the dominance of global models of change, there is also room for local and institutional particularities. Thus while mode 2 is receiving increasing prominence across the globe, South Africa curriculum policy is ambiguous in that it promotes both mode 1 and mode 2 approaches. This manifests in several curriculum implementation trends across the sector, ranging from market to traditional curriculum approaches. Therefore, curriculum reform occurs where the paths of global and local, mode 1 and mode 2, economic responsiveness and socio-political responsiveness cross.

2.13 Conceptual Framework: The Sacred and the Profane

The literature provides a picture of curriculum reform trends in the country and across the globe. It also offers some key theoretical insights which, when combined, offer a powerful explanatory framework for this study. The study borrows three theoretical considerations from the literature in which to locate debates and discussions on curriculum reform in higher education.

First, the study recognises that curriculum reform is informed by an array of factors that are external as well as internal to knowledge itself. Thus the conceptual framework for this study will draw on both sociological (external) and epistemological (internal) considerations of curriculum. Therefore while Gibbons (1994) focuses on externally driven conceptions of knowledge, Bernstein (2000) argues that knowledge is driven by both external as well internal factors. Bernstein suggests that all knowledge has both profane (external focus) and sacred (inner focus) relationships, and argues that the new socio-economic and political context is tipping the balance from inward to outward knowledge focus:

...Knowledge, after nearly a thousand years, is divorced from inwardness and literally dehumanized... (Bernstein, 2000:86).

This approach also draws on Muller and Moore's conception of critical realism which suggests that while knowledge is true by its own standards it is also socially constructed (Moore & Muller, 1999, Moore & Young, 2001, Muller, 1996). In this way they mediate between extreme positivist views of knowledge and extreme relativist views of knowledge.

This concept provides an overall framework within which to understand and explain curriculum reform from all angles. It represents an umbrella concept which has the potential to account for all explanations of curriculum change. With the overall framework in place, the remaining concepts provide detail that deepens this overarching conception of curriculum reform.

Second, the study draws on the knower/utility discourse, which is concerned with understanding the ways in which different stakeholders influence curriculum in higher

education. This discourse reflects a shift away from the dominance of viewing knowledge from an inward perspective to viewing knowledge from an outward perspective. This results in a shift from traditional canonical perspectives toward one in which stakeholder interest and participation make particular claims on knowledge conception and production. The study builds on the notion of responsiveness as an overarching concept that locates external drivers of curriculum, without which curriculum reform policies and practices in South Africa cannot be adequately understood. It borrows the notion of curriculum change as a function of societal responsiveness from (Moll, 2004). The new economic and socio-political context has placed responsiveness at the centre of academic practice in higher education and includes:

- national socio-economic and political factors such as the imperatives of access and equity as well as citizenship and nation building;
- global discourses which prioritise competitiveness, efficiency and performance frameworks which are affecting curriculum;
- market discourses which focus on the professionalisation of curriculum and emphasise skills, applications-based approaches and cross-disciplinarity.

Furthermore, the study disaggregates the utility discourse into the voice discourse and market discourses. The market/economic discourse focuses on the role of higher education in economic development. It is underpinned by conceptions of efficiency, 'performativity' and skills development. The voice/social justice discourse focuses on the role of higher education in emancipating society and is underpinned by egalitarianism and socio-cultural responsiveness. This discourse focuses on issues of equity, as well as socio-cultural and political usefulness. This includes the role of curriculum in developing citizenship. This approach provides an opportunity for the study to locate the 'responsiveness lobby' but it goes further by providing a means of disaggregating different conceptions of utility which are critical to developing a complex and nuanced understanding of curriculum change. This is particularly important in the context of the range of different stakeholder interests and the fact that South Africa has equally compelling economic and political concerns.

Third, the study draws on the notion that knowledge is informed by its own internal structure. Historically, knowledge in higher education has generally focused more strongly on the inward, embedded in non-utilitarian discourses. This is concerned with the knowledge discourse which suggests that the internal structures of knowledge define conceptions of truth that are distinct from external reality. The knowledge discourse suggests that knowledge is based on certain criteria and standards that deem it 'true'. This internal character influences the culture of the particular knowledge disciplines and has a bearing on academic identity (Becher & Trowler, 2001). This culture also influences the extent and nature of its responses to the external environment (Muller, 2005a). For the purposes of this study the knowledge discourse will also be linked to the personal identity discourse¹² that focuses on developing the capacity of the human mind. It is argued that the knowledge discourse and the personal identity discourse are similar in that they are non-utilitarian and that they focus on developing dispassionate ways of engaging with knowledge.

This concept is useful because it offers an understanding of the ways in which different disciplines respond to the external environment. It is evident from the literature that different disciplines are structured differently with their own values, principles and conceptions of knowledge. These disciplinary characteristics must be accounted for in the process of curriculum reform.

The combination of the above concepts provides both an umbrella within which to locate curriculum reform explanations and offers a means of disaggregating the overall curriculum approach using both external and internal conceptions of knowledge. This should provide a comprehensive framework within which to locate trends, patterns and insights emerging from the study.

In addition to the above umbrella conceptual framework, each chapter has its own conceptual framework that is more closely linked to the specific issues pertaining to the chapter. These conceptual frameworks can be located within the broader umbrella framework set out above.

¹² It must be noted that while some authors view the personal identity discourse as utilitarian, this study locates it in the non-utilitarian discourse.

CHAPTER THREE

JUSTIFYING METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I record my research journey, and in so doing provide an account of why I chose to explore the research question in the way that I did. The chapter includes an account of the research design, data collection methods, data analysis strategies, sampling procedures and other methodological considerations. It also includes an account of the challenges that I experienced and the ways in which I tried to deal with them. In this chapter I argue for the use of a qualitative paradigm and case study approach, as it is best suited to the research question. I also focus on some of the concerns that are commonly associated with the selected approach and some steps toward addressing these concerns. I suggest that there is a disjuncture between the planned research process and what happens in reality. This speaks in particular to research in which control over the process is not high and in which the steps are not linear and clear cut.

When I started developing my methodology I believed that it would be a straightforward and logical process. I felt confident that it would provide me with a clear pathway which would set out in unambiguous terms all the steps that needed to be followed in order to carry out my study. The assumption underpinning this approach to research is a technical one and could be likened to using a recipe to cook. Part of the difficulty arose out of my own perceptions of the research process as a technical exercise instead of a conceptual one. However, I quickly realised that the research process was not simple and straightforward. The element of certainty vanished and was replaced by a messier and less technical process, which I try to capture in this chapter. This is aptly described by Kaplan in Neuman:

Kaplan (1964:3-11) refers to two logics, a logic in practice and a reconstructed logic. He suggests that a reconstructed logic refers to the logic in most quantitative studies which is highly organized, formal and systematic. It is a cleansed model of how research should be done and the logic appears in books and rules are clear. 'However, logic in practice is relatively messy with more ambiguity, and is tied to specific cases and oriented toward the practical completion for a task.' This logic is based on judgment calls or norms shared by the academic community. Few procedures are standardized.(Neuman, 2000:330).

This affected many aspects of the research process including the selection of units of analysis, keeping to timeframes and analysing data. The selection of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand as a case represented an easy starting point in the research process. However, the selection of the departments/ disciplines as well as the courses/ programmes represented the beginning of a difficult and messy process. I struggled with decisions about which schools and programmes to select and at what levels (undergraduate or postgraduate, etc.). This was further complicated by the fact that it was difficult to adhere strictly to agreed timeframes for conducting fieldwork. Interviewees were quite busy and gave me opportunities to meet with them weeks after I requested meetings. Also, information in interviews led to several interviews that were not accounted for in the initial planning exercise. This is clearly because, as a researcher of real life activity, one often has little control over the situation that one is researching. This complexity did not end with the data collection process, but continued through the data analysis process. Once the data was collected I thought my problems were over as it was now a matter of analysing who said what, which could be done on time as planned since I had control over this process. However, the data analysis process was even more difficult than the data collection process and took substantially longer than I had estimated. This process was conceptually difficult and administratively arduous, and showed that research is not only a technical process but also a conceptual one.

3.2 Epistemological Perspective

A researcher's understanding of what constitutes knowledge or knowing affects the ways in which she or he approaches research endeavours. The type of research that one conducts, the methodologies adopted and the strategies for analysing the data are

informed by one's epistemological orientation. The literature presents three possible epistemological perspectives that could inform the research study. First is the positivist orientation which preferences quantitative methods, uses experiments, surveys and statistics, and makes predictions based on causality (Neuman, 2000:6). Positivists view social reality as objective and "use deductive logic with empirical observation" to draw causal relationships about human behaviour (Neuman, 2000:66). Positivists generally operate within a framework of certainty and absolutes and do not view knowledge as socially constructed. Positivism represented a powerful and dominant approach in the 1960s and 1970s but its popularity in the social sciences has been declining since the 1980s (Neuman, 2000:66).

Second is the interpretive social sciences approach which is related to hermeneutics, and which developed in the nineteenth century. This approach includes hermeneutics, constructivism, ethno-methodology, phenomenology and qualitative sociology. In the interpretive tradition, a researcher conducts "a reading to discover meaning embedded within text" (Neuman, 2000:70). Thus interpretive social scientists study social action which is located in subjective meaning. In many instances these approaches reject the notion of truth and objectivity (Moore, 2004:148)

The third approach, and the one adopted for this study, is the critical realist approach. This approach is anti-positivist in that it suggests that positivism is too narrow a way of understanding social action. However, it also rejects interpretive approaches as being too relativist and subjective and not cognisant of macro-level structures and systems (Neuman, 2000:76). Critical social theorists view reality as being social, but also recognise the notion of truth and objectivity (Moore, 2004:149). Critical realists view knowledge as being rooted within the political, social and cultural context, and thus rooted in tensions, conflicts and contradictions. However, at the same time, "they seek the conditions for truth" (Moore, 2004:149). Their search for truth is based on the notion of reliability, which argues that some ways of producing knowledge are more reliable than others (Moore, 2004).

My personal history lends itself to both positivist as well as relativist perspectives, and this makes the critical realist option very appealing as it attempts to combine these perspectives. My experience as a science student and laboratory worker is strongly

embedded in a positivist paradigm where causal relationships dominate research practices. At the same time, however, my political and cultural history leans toward a modified relativist paradigm. This relativist perspective arose out of my experience as an anti-apartheid activist in search of explanations about why some values and cultures were viewed as superior to others and why some concepts are viewed as facts instead of opinions or perspectives. This is particularly pertinent in my understanding of apartheid and the dominance of Western values and cultures. In this instance I am more strongly embedded in a relativist epistemological paradigm, which recognises that some truths or versions of truth are created by those in powerful positions and are therefore socially constructed and relative. Clearly, different spaces have led me to different epistemological places. I seem to oscillate between these paradigms depending on the issues at hand. A critical realist approach would be the most appropriate considering my own history and was therefore adopted for this study.

This research study calls for an approach that is scientific in that it offers a means of studying phenomena in a relatively objective framework. However, it also acknowledges that knowledge is socially constructed and contested. Since this study is aimed at exploring ways in which curriculum transformation occurs, and is intended to view this through the complex web of relations and interactions located within the concepts of structure and agency, this cannot be done using a positivist approach or only an interpretive approach. The critical social sciences approach allows for the interplay between micro social action that is taking place in the faculty and the macro socio-political framework within which this action is embedded.

3.3 Research Paradigm

A qualitative research paradigm has been adopted for this study because it is better suited to the nature of the research endeavour. A research approach was selected to ensure that the process of data collection for the particular question was consistent, valid and accurate (Kerlinger, 1986:280). Generally researchers choose between quantitative and qualitative methods based on the research question. In some studies both methods are employed; however, this is usually a costly exercise and can result in lengthy studies (Cresswell, 1994:7). My interest lies in understanding the nature of curriculum change including unpacking layers of meanings and perspectives about

what is occurring in the faculty context. This approach is better suited to a qualitative research paradigm.

Qualitative approaches are characterised by close-up and detailed analysis of phenomena, which better explains relationships that are too complex for large-scale quantitative approaches (Kerlinger, 1986:359, Yin, 1984:25). Qualitative researchers are generally concerned with developing new concepts rather than testing existing ones and focus on discovering meaning (Neuman, 2000). For qualitative researchers the context is important in understanding the social world. In other words, the meanings that are derived from the study of social actions are informed by the social context in which they occur. In qualitative research data is in the form of words, and analysis of data is often inductive and particular (Neuman, 2000). Qualitative researchers rarely use the tools of quantitative research such as statistics and hypotheses.

Quantitative research systematically analyses empirical evidence to understand and explain social life. The test hypothesis and data are generally in the form of numbers (Neuman, 2000:33). Thus quantitative approaches are more effective in drawing generalisations and basic causal relationships (Kerlinger, 1986:122, Yin, 1984:25).

It must be noted that some people think that qualitative research is easier and also inferior because it does not have a clear linear approach and findings cannot be generalised through causality (Neuman, 2000:122). It is true that qualitative research does not generate the kind of certainty and does not have the same predictive power as quantitative studies. However, it is very useful when going beneath the surface and allows for the exploration of complex contexts. While quantitative researchers gather very specific information about many cases, qualitative researchers may explore one case in greater detail. Henning suggests that the difference between quantitative and qualitative approaches has to do with depth versus breadth of inquiry (Henning, 2004:3). In addition, while the research journey in a quantitative study is more clearly demarcated, “there is no cookbook for doing qualitative research” (Maxwell, 1998:85).

This study explores various aspects of curriculum change in detail and focuses on the interplay between macro and micro drivers of curriculum change as well as multiple levels of curriculum responses. Since the study requires complex and in-depth

information about the phenomena being studied and focuses on structure as well as agency, it is concerned with a messiness that is better suited to qualitative methods.

3.4 A Case Study Approach

The mode of inquiry selected for this study is the case study. With the qualitative paradigm in place, a decision had to be made about the type of qualitative study to be undertaken. There are various qualitative modes of inquiry that have developed within different disciplines and that have emerged with distinctive methodologies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). These could be non-interactive as in the case of research conducted by historians or interactive which includes ethnography, phenomenology, case studies, grounded theory and critical studies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:35). The research questions must be suitably matched to the research approach – that is, the research question informs the type of research design that is adopted (Cohen & Manion, 1994:6, Yin, 1984:17). This section argues that the case study represents the most suitable mode of inquiry for the particular research question.

A case study examines “a bounded system” in detail, “employing multiple sources of data found in the setting” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:36). Thus the case study demarcates the boundaries of the study and within the boundaries allows for a variety of issues to be explored. Case study approaches are suited to research:

- that is exploratory in nature;
- that requires detailed information on a number of aspects within a site;
- that explores contemporary real-life phenomena which cannot be divorced from their real-life context; and
- in which there is little control over events being studied (Yin, 1984:16).

This research study meets all of the above criteria, making the case study a highly suitable research design option. First, the study is exploratory since there have been relatively few such studies in the country (Ensor, 2001, Moore, 2003)¹³ and also

¹³ Refer to chapter two, a review of scholarship, for details.

because the research question calls for an approach that is not set in stone but requires investigation and probing. Second, the nature of the research question demands detailed information on a number of aspects of the particular case being studied. This includes information on curriculum models, reform trends and strategies in the faculty, schools and disciplines as well as how the institutional context influences these changes. Case studies allow one to examine many features of a single case in reasonable depth (Neuman, 2000:32). Third, the study is focused on a contemporary phenomenon which cannot be separated from its real-life context. Linked to this is the fact that case studies allow researchers to connect micro level actions to macro level social issues (Vaughan, 1992).

Finally, even though the case study is selected for its strengths in dealing with the research question, it also has weaknesses that need to be considered in the design process. As stated above, the strengths of the case study includes that it allows for flexibility and uncertainty within the research framework, is not limited by instruments (Henning, 2004), and is able to deal with real-life phenomena in detail using a variety of evidence (Yin, 1984:16).

One of the key weaknesses of the case study approach is that it can deteriorate into an amorphous and shoddy research piece which is about everything and nothing. A quote in Neuman (2000:327) by Robert Wuthnow aptly describes this scenario:

The very business of sociology is assumed to be one of interpretation, not one of discovering objective facts from some procrustean bed of empirical reality or of adducing lawful generalization about the causal ordering of facts... as a community of scholars our goal must always be to promote discourse about our interpretations, not to advance them simply as authoritative pronouncements. Too often, however, interpretive sociology has served as a masquerade for shoddier research and pious opinion.

Other weaknesses include that case studies are susceptible to bias, they may result in massive unreadable documents and cannot be generalised to populations (Kerlinger, 1986:374, Yin, 1984:21).

These weaknesses must be taken into account in the design process where possible, through instituting validity and reliability procedures (Kerlinger, 1986:300, Yin, 1984:27). One of the ways of strengthening the case study is to use multiple sources of

evidence and to ensure rigorous and documented processes (Yin, 1984:40). This study utilises a range of institutional and faculty documentation to support interview data. Furthermore, the data collection and analysis processes are documented to mitigate the weaknesses of the case study approach (see sections below).

3.5 Selection of the Case

At this stage, the selection of the particular case or cases for the study required an assessment of the research path in order to obtain some sense of the logical research pathway that would guide the journey. This included making a selection of the particular case and defining the parameters of the case.

3.5.1 Opting for a single case

A single case, the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, has been selected for this research study. The single case study approach provides an opportunity for the researcher to explore the research question in great depth. It must be noted that while a multiple case study of two faculties in two different institutions or even two different faculties in one institution would have added significantly to the study, this was not feasible. Multiple case studies require extensive resources and time, they can sacrifice depth for breadth, and data is generally too voluminous (Yin, 1984). My research proposal argued for a comparative study between Wits and the University of Johannesburg and included both Faculties of Science as well as Humanities. However, this was too ambitious and did not materialise.

When I started this research process, I realised that the Faculty of Humanities at Wits was itself very large, comprising five schools, about 30 different departments and disciplines, and hundreds of courses. This case alone needed to be limited by selecting units of study in order to make it more manageable and to allow for in-depth analysis. Since the study required extensive exploration of the concept of curriculum change across a relatively large faculty, the multiple case options proved too extensive for the purposes of the PhD. Therefore, even though a multiple case study approach could have provided invaluable information about the relationship between institutional culture and curriculum reform, this option was not feasible. While the single case

study is limited in that it does not allow for comparisons across institutions (which are not sufficiently undertaken in research studies), it does have the advantage of providing an in-depth analysis of the site of study through various lenses, using a variety of evidence.

3.5.2 Defining the parameters of the case: selecting the institution

Defining the parameters of the case study is difficult because there are no set standards and protocols that provide clear and unambiguous instruction about what should be done and how it should be done. This is particularly challenging when selecting aspects of the case for close up and detailed investigation and represents a conceptual rather than a technical process.

As stated in the section above, the Faculty of Humanities at Wits was selected as the case for investigation. Wits University was selected because it represents a well-functioning state institution. Since this is a qualitative study, a non-probability approach was used to select the institution based on three criteria. First, the case was drawn from the public sector, because it represents the largest pool of higher education institutions in South Africa (Badat, 2003:6). Private institutions are small in number and very few private institutions offer programmes in the humanities and social sciences, as most offer business programmes (Badat, 2003:6).

Second, the study drew on Gultig's (2000:84) typology of South African institutions to select the institution for this particular study. Gultig's typology suggests that South African public institutions sit on a continuum from core academic institutions to market-driven institutions within a matrix of capacity and resources based on historical advantage and disadvantage. One of the historically white, English-speaking institutions was selected for this study as it was assumed that these institutions have the resources and capacity to make proactive reform choices. Furthermore, the researcher opted for exploring an institution that has traditionally been associated with an academic mission that 'is relatively distant from the society. Thus these institutions traditionally operated with relative autonomy from the state, business and society and enjoyed high levels of academic freedom. These characteristics are generally not in line with new trends underpinning higher education change, which call for greater responsiveness and accountability between institutions and society. These types of

institutions are under even greater pressure to transform. Thus Wits was selected for the case study because it represents an interesting dynamic between traditional academic focus and new utility demands located in the socio-economic and political context.

It must be noted that while Gultig's typology provided a useful guide to selecting the case study, it does have limitations which must be acknowledged. Since the South African higher education landscape has undergone considerable transformation over the past ten years, Gultig's typology may not accurately represent recent institutional changes. For example, post 1994, divisions between vocational and academic institutions and distance versus contact institutions started blurring. Also, institutions might reflect various configurations not catered for in this typology. In so doing I have attempted to deal with this weakness to ensure that there are a number of criteria informing the selection of the case.

Third, the basis for selecting Wits was a pragmatic one, informed by access and convenience. Since Wits is in Gauteng, where the researcher resides, the institution was selected as a matter of convenience. Since the researcher is a student of this institution, this allows for easy access to a range of institutional documents and statistical data which could otherwise be very difficult to obtain.

In summary, the following criteria were employed in selecting the case:

- traditionally full-time and contact-based public institutions;
- Gultig's (2000) typology: core academic and well resourced; and
- convenience and access.

In order to ensure that the study provided an opportunity to explore curriculum transformation in detail, one area of the institution, the Faculty of Humanities, was selected for the study. Humanities has traditionally been associated with knowledge that is less directly linked to workplace needs and more strongly focused on notions of 'knowledge for knowledge's sake' which places it under enormous pressure to transform in the context of emerging utilitarian discourses (Gibbons et al., 1994, Jenniskens, 1996:29). In addition, the Humanities have been relegated to second status

as a result of the growing power of the fields of science and technology, which are viewed as more important for achieving global competitiveness.¹⁴ Also, Humanities is focused on socio-political issues, which are of critical importance to building a democracy but which have received less prominence in the new socio-political and economic context. This suggests that the Faculty of Humanities offers an interesting curriculum reform case.

3.5.3 Carving a path through the faculty

Since the Faculty represents a large entity, decisions had to be made about what ‘slice’ of the entity would be selected for detailed investigation. An attempt was made to combine both breadth and depth of data collection strategies.

First, I explored the nature of curriculum change through the perspectives of institutional managers outside of the faculty. This represented a breadth approach which examined curriculum issues from the perspective of the institution as a whole. It also provided information about the policy and management of curriculum.

Second, I focused on developing an overall understanding of change across all five schools – School of Arts, School of Human and Community Development, School of Social Sciences, School of Languages and Literature, and School of Education. This provided an overall picture of curriculum transformation within the faculty and was focused more strongly on breadth as opposed to depth of knowledge.

Third, two of the five schools (the School of Social Sciences and the School of Education) were selected for more detailed exploration. This selection was informed by Becher & Trowler’s (2001) notion of soft applied and soft pure social sciences. On this basis, one pure school and one applied school was selected.

In terms of the professionally based or applied fields, the researcher had a choice of Human and Community Development, the Arts or Education. The School of Education was selected for several reasons. South Africa has undergone major education policy reform, which included the introduction of policies such as

¹⁴ See Chapter 5 on institutional policies and strategies in South Africa: National and Institutional Pathways

Curriculum 2005 (C2005), the South African Schools Act (SASA), and the norms and standards for teacher education which had significant implications for curriculum in the School of Education. At this same time, the university was restructuring as a result of the merger between Wits University's Education Faculty and the former Johannesburg College of Education which is located at the heart of the debate between vocational versus academic conceptions of knowledge.¹⁵ Also, both the School of Arts and Human and Community Development offer various professional options (e.g. speech and hearing therapy and psychology in Human and Community Development and drama and music in the Arts), while Education is generally singularly focused on educators, which makes it easier to explore curriculum change across the school.

In terms of non-professional, formative-based schools, the researcher had the option of selecting Language and Literature or the Social Sciences. The Social Sciences¹⁶ was selected because of its focus on formative education, which has weak relationships with new responsiveness discourses. This has significant implications for the transformation of such programmes.

Even within schools, certain departments and courses were selected to make the study more manageable. Masters degree programmes and courses¹⁷ were selected as the lens through which the schools would be explored, since the study was not able to analyse curriculum issues at all levels and in all disciplines or programmes. Masters degrees also offered an opportunity to explore new interdisciplinary strategies, while the undergraduate programmes were largely discipline-based. In addition, the Masters degree is generally organised in programmes¹⁸ or packages with finite options for students, while the formative undergraduate degree results in extensive course choices

¹⁵ Under the new democratic government, colleges of education were incorporated into universities. As a result, the Faculty of Education at Wits had to merge with the Johannesburg College of Education. These institutions operated quite differently, both administratively as well as in their academic missions.

¹⁶ The school includes History, Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology, Political Studies, Development Studies, International Relations and, from March 2008, Forced Migration.

¹⁷ Courses refer semester or year-long topics studied by students; programme refers to a package of courses combined in a theme or relationship; department represents a discipline or subject.

¹⁸ Programme is a newly introduced concept in higher education and refers to the thoughtful packaging of courses into a programme. This emanated from the focus on professionalisation of curriculum in policy documents.

and combination possibilities. Also, because the Masters degree programme is caught between pressures to provide professional training versus pressure to regenerate the academic community, it represents an interesting site for exploring curriculum reform trends.

In Education all Masters degree programmes offered by the school were included in the research study. This included programmes in Curriculum, Adult Education, Policy and Management Studies, Mathematics and Science Education. The programme on Human Rights was not included because the course co-ordinator and presenter felt that it would be a conflict of interest because he sits on the Ethics Committee. The Language and Literature and Psychology programmes, which are offered through their 'mother' disciplines (and not through the school), were also not included in the study.

In the School of Social Sciences an attempt was made to obtain data from all the departments or divisions in the school. However, only five of the eight disciplines were explored – Philosophy, Political Studies, History, Forced Migration and Development Studies. Attempts to include Social Anthropology, Sociology and International Relations in the study were unsuccessful as these departments did not respond to requests to participate in the study, despite several efforts to include them. Thus the study was limited by the lack of willingness or availability of academics to participate. Two people in Social Anthropology indicated that they did not want to be interviewed. In Sociology two people did not respond to communication and two that agreed to participate did not arrive at meetings that were pre-arranged. Attempts to reschedule these did not bear fruit. However, I managed to obtain interviews with two previous members of the Sociology Department. The key members of the International Relations department were overseas and on sabbatical during the time I conducted my interviews. This level of difficulty with obtaining willing candidates for interviews was not anticipated, particularly because I was a Wits student and was exploring the faculty in which I am registered.

This was further complicated by the fact that I did not anticipate the extent of organisational structure and complexity that made data collection on curriculum very challenging. This results from the fact that universities are decentralised with respect to curriculum matters, which makes it difficult to find information and also to know

where to look for information. Knowledge about the curriculum is spread across departments and resides in a range of staff. Also, since the institution is so large and decentralised, with very little in the way of official procedures and protocols, there is no common knowledge about where such information resides. For instance, when I requested the minutes of the faculty's Board meetings, I was sent from one person to the next as most university staff were not quite sure where I would find these documents. Furthermore, documents are not always available or accessible. For instance, it was very difficult to establish what previous curricula looked like – that is, the number of courses, number of modules, nature of topics and so on. Specific details like these were very difficult to obtain since they are situated in the memories of academics and in most instances are not documented. This is even more problematic when institutional memory lies in key people who have left the university.

3.6 Managing the Data

Once the case was clearly defined, the sites through which information were obtained were determined. In this instance data was collected through the literature, institutional documentation and interviews.

3.6.1 Data collection

In trying to decide the most appropriate ways to obtain information about curriculum change, I opted for three data collection methods – a literature review, documentary analysis and interviews. “The use of multiple-methods is intended to corroborate data and enhance credibility” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:428).

A literature review was undertaken to gather data about trends and debates in the field and focused on theoretical issues as well as policy and implementation. It offers a means of establishing a picture of the field. The interviews were conducted to obtain the perspectives of key deliverers and designers of curriculum. Documents were used to understand the official policies and perspectives and to triangulate data obtained from the interviews where possible.

3.6.2 Extensive literature review

A literature review was conducted on an ongoing basis to ensure that accurate and up-to-date curriculum developments at international and national level informed the study. It assisted in refining the conceptual framework and data collection process.

Literature reviews are done to ensure an understanding of the field, to link with existing knowledge and to learn from others – that is, through accessing secondary data (Neuman, 2000:446). There are many types of literature reviews. “Examples include context, integrative and theoretical reviews of existing work” (Neuman, 2000:446). This literature review which appears in chapter two included a review of the current state of knowledge with a focus on theoretical debates, policy and implementation trends, and other research in the same field.¹⁹ Literature was sourced through journals, PhD studies, textbooks and the Internet. Areas of review included:

- trends in curriculum reform at national and international levels;
- trends in knowledge conception and production in higher education;
- critical debates on curriculum reform in higher education;
- theories on institutional and curriculum reform; and
- policy and research studies on curriculum reform in South Africa.

3.6.3 Document analysis

Document analysis was undertaken because it provides accurate and tangible products for the study. “This is part of the artefacts data collection approach that allows for the provision of detailed, accurate and unbiased data” (Neuman, 2000:293). One of the challenges in the document analysis process is deciding what documents to analyse. The process can result in the selection of large amounts of documents, including many documents that do not have a bearing on the case. It can also result in gaps in document analysis as some key documents may not be selected. It is important that conceptual processes guide the selection of documents. For this study documents selected included both old and new state and institutional policy and strategy documents as well as syllabuses and rule books. The researcher used the concept of macro-political context as well as institution policy and implementation context to

¹⁹ Refer to Chapter Two, A Review of the Scholarship, for details.

guide the selection of documents. Table 3.1 provides details on the document analysis process.

Table 3.1: Summary of document analysis process

Issues to explore	Types of documents	Location
National higher education policy	Official national documentation – e.g. White Paper 3, SAQA, National Higher Education Plan, the New Funding Framework.	Department of Education Council on Higher Education SAQA
Overall vision, mission and strategic plans of the university	Official documents: Mission statements Strategy documents Academic planning documents Institutional audit and review documents	Strategic Planning Unit Academic Planning Unit University Archives
Institutional policy and programme	Official documents: Old and new university Rules and Syllabus booklets Internal reports and position papers Transformation documents	Registrar's office Academic planning office University Archives

3.6.4 Interviews

The interview is an exciting data collection activity because it allows the researcher to move beyond documents and draws directly on the perspectives and expertise of the community involved in curriculum design and delivery through dialogue. Therefore, even though face-to-face interviews are time-consuming, costly and the source of bias, it is the most common data collection approach used in qualitative research (Darlington & Scott, 2002).

Face-to-face interviews are suited to obtaining detailed information through an immediate response mechanism and probing strategy (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, Neuman, 2000:272). They allow both parties to explore and clarify issues and as a

result serve as an active meaning-making process. This method is useful when phenomena being studied cannot be directly observed. It also assists to develop an understanding of the present as well as the past, which methods such as observation cannot do (Darlington & Scott, 2002).

A range of interviews were conducted in order to obtain a variety of perspectives and to tap a range of expertise in the institution. In particular, interviews were essential to understanding what transpired in the past in terms of curriculum as well as what is taking place at present. Since there are not many historical or official curriculum documents within the faculty, the interview became an important pillar of this research study. Furthermore, some issues about curriculum required probing and dialogue which could not be done through other data collection processes. For instance, participating in a dialogue about why Religious Studies was closed down or what is understood by Africanisation of curriculum could only be achieved through the interview process. Since the depth of knowledge about curriculum is scattered across the schools and departments without a 'nerve centre', the interview becomes critical for understanding curriculum reform and often leads to information about where institutional memory resides. Finally, the interview process was the only way in which the researcher was able to unpack different perspectives, since official documents do not raise the debates that occur within the institution.

The study included a total of 30 interviews at different levels of the institution. Interviewees were selected through both purposive and snowballing sampling methods. Purposive sampling is based on deliberately selecting a particular person, setting or event for the information that they can provide which cannot be provided through others means ((Maxwell, 1998) Snowballing occurs through referral or reputation sampling, where interviewees refer the researcher to other potential interviewees based on the issues being discussed ((Neuman, 2000:198). The study also used semi-structured interviews to ensure some flexibility in the interview process while also maintaining some structure and commonality across the interviews. The following interviews were conducted:

- Semi-structured interviews with institutional managers to establish how they view curriculum change at institutional level, why they advocate for these changes and how they viewed the disjuncture between policy and implementation.
- Semi-structured interviews with the Dean and faculty heads to understand critical changes at faculty level, perceptions of change and change management implementation – for example, how cross-curricula collaboration is managed and implemented, and how changes impact on notions of knowledge conception.
- Semi-structured interviews with programme co-ordinators and course co-ordinators to understand how the drivers of change manifest at the curriculum design and delivery level.

Diagram 3.1 shows at what level interviews were conducted and reflect the breath and depth of the data collection process.

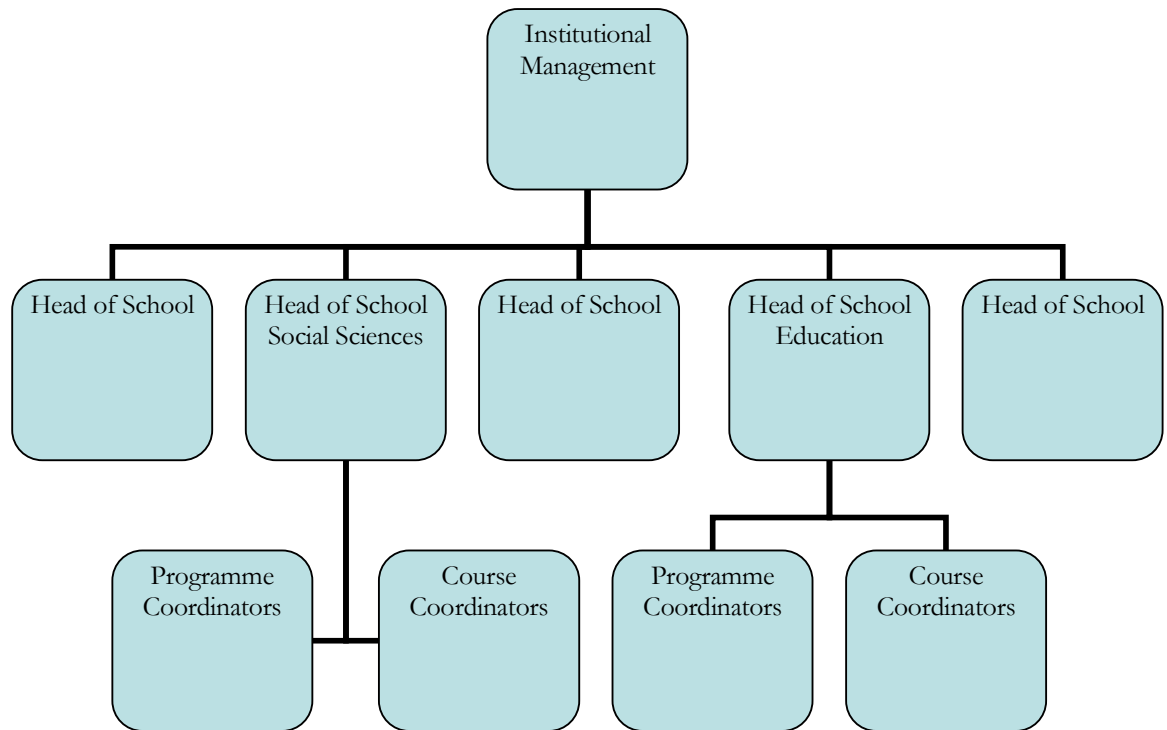


Diagram 3.1: Breadth and depth of selected interviewees

One of the critical challenges associated with the qualitative research approach is in deciding how many interviews should be conducted. Darlington and Scott (2002) suggest that there is no easy answer in making decisions about the number of interviews required for a qualitative study. A cyclical approach of data collection was embarked on, where first-round information led to second-round decisions about whom to interview. This process continued, until interview data became repetitive with no new information emerging. However, it must be noted that this is a challenge because in many instances interview planning is done in advance. It is best to adopt a planned approach that allows some flexibility. As a researcher one always fears that insufficient data is collected and there is a tendency to continue even when data becomes repetitive. It is sometimes better to conduct a few interviews, do a preliminary analysis and then resume the process.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data was analysed through creating clusters of themes and sub-themes, informed by the literature, as well as additional themes that emerged during the research. Qualitative data analysis is largely about organising data into categories and identifying patterns (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:462). Data was categorised through coding, a commonly used technique in qualitative studies (Neuman, 2000:420). Coding qualitative data involves the organising of data into themes and categories, taking account of the research question and the literature. There are three types of coding – open coding, selective coding and analytic memo writing (Neuman, 2000). All three types were used at different stages of analysis. The first round of analysis involved open coding which is loosely framed and where the researcher assigns themes in an initial attempt to deal with the quantities of data. This represents the first attempt to cluster ideas and themes. A second level is to move beyond the concrete data toward abstract concepts, where coding clusters the concrete data into more abstract data based on emerging conceptual debates. This process focuses on linking the actual findings to broader theoretical issues and discourses. In qualitative research it is best to make the conceptual framework explicit; otherwise readers of the findings will employ their own framework which may affect the reading of the data (Neuman, 2000). The third approach is the analytic memo, which involves making notes during the analysis which are intended to raise thoughts or ideas that the researcher has about coding. This is important in that it provides a space for the researcher to set aside ideas that are emerging as she looks at the data. Basically coding provides a systematic way of viewing data and allows one to move from concrete to more abstract analysis (Neuman, 2000).

The data analysis was an iterative process. It started with an initial categorisation of data in terms of what was said and located at the literal level. The first round of analysis was focused on the questions and responses across the interviews. An attempt was made to understand what was common across the responses and what was different. This was difficult because the questions were very broad and resulted in several different responses. The first analysis also focused on the perceptions of the different interviewees without making any inferences about what they might mean. The

second round of analysis was an attempt to categorise the findings into various themes that had emerged in the literature such as Africanisation, access and so on. Several rounds of categorisation and re-categorisation occurred in order to emerge with a few key themes. Themes were changed and added as the analysis proceeded. At this stage the researcher created narratives around each of the key themes. Eventually there was enough information to create chapters. For example, narratives pertaining to themes on quality assurance, financial difficulties and overloading of academics with administration led to the chapter on managerialism.

With qualitative data information can be categorised or carved in many different ways, making the process complex, uncertain and subjective. In this context the conceptual framework and literature play a critical role in guiding the process of analysis. Once a rudimentary thesis argument was developed, it guided the structuring of the thesis. The argument was initially quite literal and became more conceptual and theoretical over time. However, it was only after the chapters were written that the argument became visible.

3.8 Validation Strategies

In order to ensure that a research design is informed by acceptable quality criteria and mitigates against the weaknesses of the selected design, it should satisfy the conditions of validity and reliability. First, it is important to build in ‘construct validity’, which ensures objectivity. This is achieved through using multiple sources of evidence, ensuring a chain of evidence and allowing key informants to review the report (Yin, 1984:36). The researcher has already indicated the use of multiple sources of evidence and, in addition, the researcher followed the case study protocol and offered participants an opportunity to review the report.

Second, it is necessary to factor in reliability to ensure that the process is transparent and rigorous (Yin, 1984:45). This was achieved through ensuring that a case study protocol was followed and by ensuring that all procedures were documented in detail. In terms of data analysis the researcher utilised an independent transcriber to ensure that the raw data was not manipulated. This approach ensured a chain of evidence

between data collected and findings (Cohen & Manion, 1994:248), which is important for ensuring the trustworthiness of the research (Yin, 1984:35).

The third factor is to ensure triangulation. The use of interviews at a number of different levels and document analysis is intended to ensure triangulation, as is the use of different data collection methods while studying a certain aspect of human behaviour (Cohen & Manion, 1994:233, Neuman, 2000:124). Triangulation is important in order to secure the trustworthiness of the research (Yin, 1984:37). It offers a way of cross-checking and reinforcing findings and patterns by comparing data from a number of sources (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:478).

3.9 Ethics Procedures

Ethical considerations are critical in ensuring the protection of communities that are under study and is a mandatory component of research studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. The researcher conducted all studies in line with the requirements set out by the university's Ethics Committee. These include:

- requesting and obtaining permission to study the site and access institutional documents;
- requesting and obtaining signed permission from interviewees to conduct interviews;
- obtaining signed permission to record interviews;
- ensuring that participants identity is not revealed if requested; and
- providing participants with sufficient information to ensure that they are fully aware of the reasons for the study and also of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage during the interview.²⁰

²⁰ It must be noted that while all relevant procedures were followed and approval by the Ethics Committee was granted, the first ten interviews were conducted by seeking verbal permission; signed permission was obtained after the interviews were conducted.

3.10 Style Conventions

In order to ensure that the report is consistent in terms of style, a style convention was applied throughout the dissertation (see Table 3.2). First, all interviews were coded in order to ensure anonymity, which was requested by at least half of the participants. This coding reflected the various university constituencies interviewed.

Table 3.2: Style conventions for interviews

Entity	Convention	Example
University management (registrars, head of strategic planning, etc.)	UCS	UCS1, 10 Feb 2007 ²¹
Faculty management (heads of school, dean, etc.)	HM	HM3, 7 Jan 2008
Faculty of Humanities: School of Social Sciences	HSS	HSS7, 10 May 2007
Faculty of Humanities: School of Education	HED	HED2, 5 April 2007

Second, all references to books, journal articles and other literature are cited in the text. All interviews and case study documents are footnoted; special or additional notes or comments are also footnoted.

3.11 Conclusion

The journey of developing and undertaking research was exciting, challenging and also unexpected. In the first instance, the journey taught me that research design is not a technical activity but a conceptual process. In the second instance, the process is complex and uncertain and it is not set in stone. This requires the researcher to accept

²¹ UCS1, 10th Feb 2007 means that this is interviewee 1 from university management, interviewed on 10th Feb 2007

the fact that the research process is dynamic and may change. It also requires the researcher to solve problems as they arise. In the third instance, this does not mean that 'anything goes' nor did it give the researcher permission to be shoddy and unsystematic. In fact, it still calls for rigour in the design and execution of the research process. In the fourth instance, the key is creating a balance between the technical and conceptual processes that together offer the flexibility within the context of rigour required for effective research endeavours.

Once the research journey was clearly marked, the next step was gathering of data for the study. This began with an analysis of the macro-political and economic context in which curriculum reform is occurring, and this is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND CURRICULUM REFORM: THE RISE OF THE STAKEHOLDER UNIVERSITY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between curriculum reform and the socio-political and economic climate within which the university is located. It begins the research journey with an analysis of the relationship between the transformation of curriculum and the transformation of society. It does so through the following questions:

- What is the socio-economic and political context in which the institution has been located for the past three decades?
- How has this influenced institution-society relationships?
- What are the implications for stakeholder reconfiguration, and how does this affect curriculum reform?

This chapter outlines the socio-economic and political context in which curriculum transformation is occurring and suggests that there has always been a relationship between societal change and university curriculum. However, I argue that the present socio-economic and political environment is having a more fundamental effect on curriculum reform than previous eras. This is informed by the fact that higher education is assumed to be of critical importance in the socio-economic and political context. It is this assumption about the importance of higher education in society's development that has led to the increased interest and involvement of a variety of stakeholders in the education sector.

Stakeholders have become increasingly influential over curriculum in the twenty-first century. In order to develop a historical sense of the changing stakeholder environment and its relationship to curriculum reform, this chapter explores three

generations of stakeholder relationships. The first generation of stakeholders is largely internal to the university, with the community of scholars serving as the main stakeholders. The second generation comprises the political stakeholders that emerged in the 1980s and who placed pressure on the university to become part of the struggle for emancipation. The third generation of stakeholders is very diverse, but economic growth and development dominates their interests. It includes industry, students, government and new university management. These stakeholders call for a curriculum that is more useful to society, with a particular emphasis on economic responsiveness. These demands are mediated through particular institutional cultures and histories, resulting in tensions between the traditional liberal curriculum discourse in which the institution has been rooted and the utility discourse which is gaining momentum through stakeholder pressure. These debates are traced through three main themes:

- Wits as an ivory tower;
- knocking at the doors of the ivory tower: pressure from civil society
- Institutional restructuring and the affirmation of Wits as a stakeholder university.

4.2 Conceptual Framework

This chapter draws on three analytical dimensions to locate the discussion. First, it suggests that the socio-economic and political context in which the institution and society is located is important in understanding the nature of curriculum reform (Castells, 2001c:206; Frank & Gabler, 2006:3).. This pays particular attention to the role of national and institutional legacy on curriculum reform trends (Cloete *et al.*, 2002). In this regard, the relationship between apartheid and the university is of critical importance in understanding its present position, contradictions and dilemmas.

Second, it draws on the relationship between curriculum practice and institutional culture. This suggests that curriculum practice is not simply about implementing education policy, whether apartheid or post-apartheid, but it is also a function of institutional culture and history (Jansen, 2000). Thus the outcome of curriculum is an interplay of educational policy, society and institutional culture.

Third, it draws on the notion that universities are increasingly influenced by an array of different stakeholders who place enormous pressure on universities to transform. Universities are thus located in the nexus of stakeholder power and interest, and have to mediate transformation in this context. In order to locate the discussion on stakeholders, Mitchell, Agle and Wood's (1997) conception of stakeholder attributes is drawn on and adapted. Stakeholders are often defined as primary and secondary, external and internal, or macro and micro (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997). However, these categories do not sufficiently explain the positioning and influence of the various stakeholders. They also tend to oversimplify and homogenise stakeholders on the basis of crude categories such as external and internal. A useful way of viewing stakeholders is through their power and interests, their influence and their networks (Ramirez, 1999).

Mitchell *et al.* (1997:855) refer to three attributes that characterise stakeholders:

- their power to influence the organisation;
- their legitimacy within the organisation;
- the urgency of the stakeholder's claim on the organisation.

Power is when social actor A is able to get social actor B to do something she would not otherwise have done. Legitimacy assumes that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within socially constructed norms and values. Urgency is the degree to which stakeholder claims call for immediate action (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997:869). This concept is further expanded by suggesting that stakeholders with two or more of the attributes tend to be taken seriously while those with one attribute tend to be ignored (Jongbloed & Goedegebuure, 2001:12). Similarly, it is argued that stakeholders with all three attributes are referred to as definitive stakeholders while those who possess two of the three are expectant stakeholders and those who possess one are considered to be latent stakeholders (Jongbloed & Goedegebuure, 2001:12).

In order to apply this concept to the discussion in this chapter, two adaptations are made. The first is to suggest that stakeholder influence is not only about having all three attributes but that it could also be related to the strength or prominence of a

particular attribute. By using this approach, one can compare the different levels of legitimacy or power of different stakeholders, allowing for an analysis of more subtle differences between stakeholders. In this approach it may be possible for a stakeholder to have two of the three attributes but still exert considerable influence. The second adaptation is to add another stakeholder attribute, which is referred to as exclusivity. Exclusivity defines the stakeholder by virtue of unique knowledge or expertise that other stakeholders do not possess. While this category could easily fit into a sub-category of power, it was felt that in the context of academic institutions it is more fitting to locate it on its own. It is also clear that different attributes have different degrees of prominence or importance at different periods in time. Diagram 4.1 sets out the framework for analysing stakeholders.

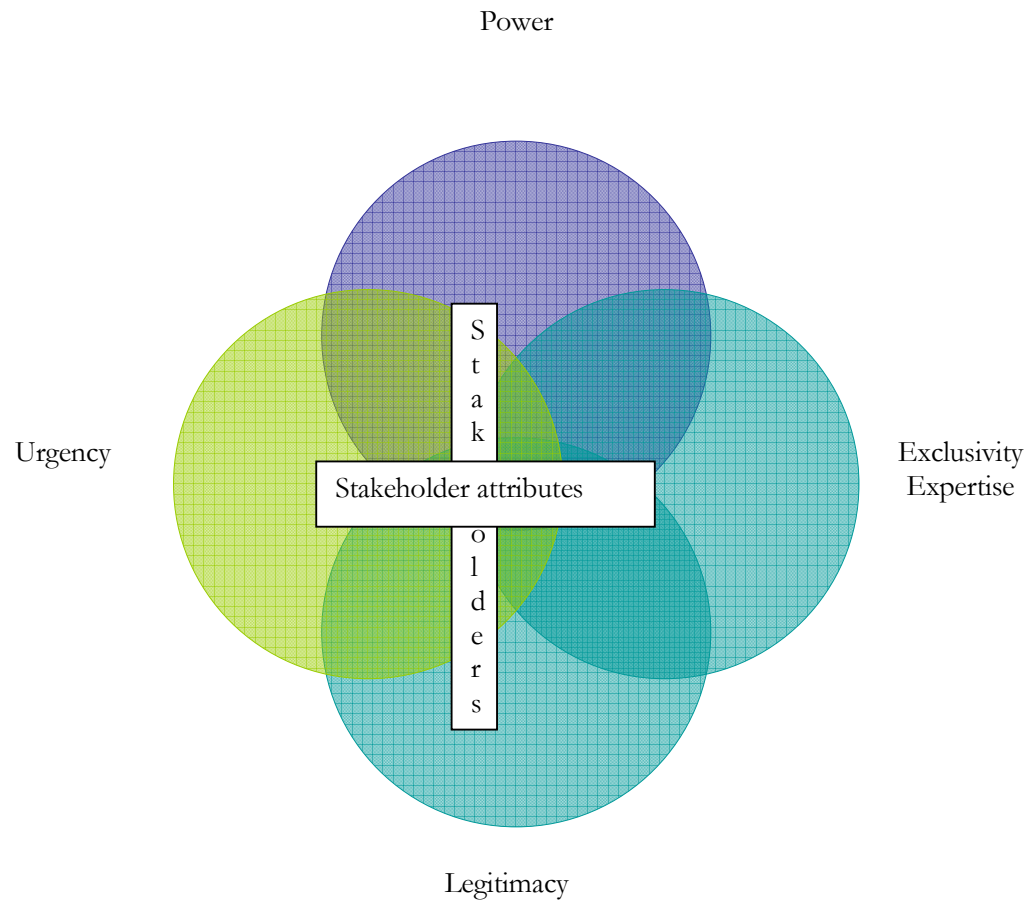


Diagram 4.1: Stakeholder analysis framework

4.3 The Making of an Ivory Tower: Liberalism and the Centrality of Internal Stakeholders

From its early beginnings until the 1980s, the University of the Witwatersrand operated with relative independence from both the state and society, enjoying a high degree of autonomy and academic freedom (Johnson, 2005:22). During this period Wits prided itself on being independent, which was pivotal to the philosophy it espoused in the

open manifesto to which it committed in 1954.²² The core characteristics of this philosophy are underpinned by conceptions of academic freedom and autonomy. This included the right to choose what to teach, who to teach and how to teach (Bentley et al., 2006). This period was characterised by the university's independence from the apartheid state and from society, strong internal control over its curriculum and institutional culture, and the centrality of academics as key stakeholders.

This adherence to the liberal education tradition positioned Wits in opposition to the apartheid government. Even though this opposition was informed by the institutions interest in academic freedom and autonomy and was not based on a purposeful disengagement with the apartheid system as a whole²³, Wits became pitted against the government. There were two key points of contention: enrolment policies and curriculum practices. In the 1950s Wits participated in demonstrations against the academic segregation imposed by the Nationalist government, and in 1960s the university enrolled 269 black students against stipulated legislation (Moodie, 1994). Wits also opposed the state's Ministerial consent requirement for black students in 1976.²⁴ This anti-government stance became stronger in the 1980s when the university opposed both the Quota Bill, which attempted to place quotas on the numbers of black students that could enter higher education,²⁵ and the De Klerk condition, which was aimed at forcing universities to control student activities on and off campus in order to prevent anti-government activity.²⁶

While Wits positioned itself in opposition to government, it must be noted that “although many English-language campuses took anti-government stands during apartheid, on the whole, these were often defences of academic freedom”.²⁷ This is clear in the Chancellor's response to government at a university gathering on 28 October 1987:

²² Institutional culture study, Wits University proposal, 2006.

²³ Thus Wits disagreed with government on curriculum and enrollment practices because of their liberal philosophy but did not tackle other key tenets of apartheid such as the group areas act or the right to vote.

²⁴ In 1976 the State declared that black students could not attend white universities without obtaining approval from the Minister of Education.

²⁵ Declaration by the Chancellor, Mike Rosholdt, University of the Witwatersrand, General Assembly of the University, 1987.

²⁶ Declaration by the Chancellor, Mike Rosholdt, University of the Witwatersrand, General Assembly of the University, 1987.

²⁷ Report of the institutional culture survey, University of the Witwatersrand, 2002. p. 35.

We are gathered today in response to the gravest threat to its autonomy the university has ever had to face. This autonomy was first violated in 1959 when racial segregation was forced on the university. In 1983 the Universities Amendment Bill gave the ministers power to impose racial quotas on universities and withdraw subsidies from those not complying with imposed conditions. The latest threat to the university is being presented in the guise of help from the government in the preservation of academic freedom on campus. Let no one be taken in by this stratagem....²⁸

This liberal tradition did not only affect Wits' unwillingness to comply with racial enrolment practices, but it also informed its curriculum and pedagogical practices,²⁹ which resulted in tensions with the apartheid government. As stated in Chapter Two, some of the key features of the liberal tradition include:

- cultivating the mind (Sanderson, 1993);
- support for "knowledge as an end in itself" (Muller, 2000b);
- individual competition, meritocracy, high performance and low participation (Rothblatt, 2003);
- a Eurocentric curriculum (Murray, 1997);
- fostering critical thinking and contestation (Enslin, 2003, Tsui, 2002).

These features were diametrically opposite to the curriculum practices espoused by the apartheid government. First, the traditional liberal approach supports a general education that is aimed at developing the individual's mind and is not focused on instrumentalist conceptions of knowledge (Rothblatt, 2003). This is defined by the focus on 'knowledge for its own sake', support for the canon and discipline-based

²⁸ Declaration by the Chancellor, Mike Rosholdt, University of the Witwatersrand, General Assembly of the University, 1987.

²⁹ In this context, the principles of autonomy and academic freedom informed Wits' position as opposed to its response to the apartheid government. In fact, Wits did not take in too many black students; they offered separate teaching facilities and many students found the university to be complicit with racist practices (Reddy, T. (2004) Higher education and social transformation. South African case studyCHE). This did not imply that students and academics as individual citizens did not participate in anti-apartheid activities. A number of students and academics actively participated in anti-apartheid activities, and, as a result many of them were banned and detained (Moodie, 1994:7).

learning. The Wits curriculum had a strong disciplinary and theoretical focus³⁰ which emphasised understanding and analysis rather than practical problem solving.

Second, academic work represented the core business of the institution and superseded all other work. Therefore, academic work was not undermined by administrative or financial procedures and did not succumb to external pressures. This implied that curriculum and research represented the most important work within the institution, while management and administration represented subordinate support roles (Johnson & Cross, 2005). Furthermore there was minimal interference from external forces with regard to the conception and production of knowledge.

Third, the liberal tradition is based on collegiality which represents a loosely structured form of accountability and independence. This allows academics to pursue their own interests within a framework of professional and academic standards set by the academic community (Johnson, 2005). This means that colleagues support and assess each other through widely accepted norms, although these norms are not explicit to members outside of the academic community (Johnson, 2005). In curriculum terms, this led to hidden or non-explicit ways of inducting academics and of assessing students.

Fourth, the liberal tradition is guided by high performance, meritocracy and individual competition (Rothblatt, 2003). Thus it was informed by an elite system through which the best few were selected for enculturation. In curriculum terms this meant that classes were small and institutions demanded high performance with little provision of support or ‘hand holding’. In addition, the liberal education tradition prided itself on the promotion of critical thinking as a central tenet of its approach (Rothblatt, 2003).

Fifth, this liberal tradition was largely based on and influenced by European trends. Many academics who taught at Wits had postgraduate degrees from Cambridge and Oxford, which further cemented their relationship with the European curriculum (except for Sociology and Psychology, which have American influence) (Murray, 1997). This was also aimed at providing white youth with education “that was just like their

³⁰ University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg: its response to the distinctive educational and research priorities of South Africa, 1983.

peers in Europe”.³¹ One of the features of the Wits curriculum was the focus on European intellectuals, with little or no focus on intellectuals from the East and from Africa. For example, the English curriculum focused on English classics and ignored South African or broader African literature, and History was largely European-based (Murray, 1997:243). Even within professional programmes, the bias was in terms of understanding European society. For example, until the late 1990s the medical curriculum focused largely on high-tech curative medicine as opposed to preventative medical approaches that were better suited to the South African environment (Murray, 1997).

This relationship with Europe continued to grow in the apartheid era despite calls for academic boycotts to isolate South African universities. Academics believed that it was their right to co-operate with other colleagues across the world (Bentley *et al.*, 2006). Thus Wits maintained a relationship with the outside world even when the country was experiencing its most volatile political encounters. Since Wits was viewed by the outside world as being anti-apartheid, it was not subjected to the same academic isolation experienced by Afrikaaner universities (Moodie, 1994). This ensured its continued relationship “with the international fraternity of English speaking Universities further cementing its Eurocentric bias” (Moodie, 1994:31).

Sixth, this strong liberal tradition positioned Wits in opposition to the tenets of Bantu Education. As a result, the institution rejected curriculum that was informed by the principles of Christian National Education (CNE) and fundamental pedagogics, both propagated by the Apartheid state. CNE and fundamental pedagogics were instruments used by the National Party government to justify apartheid, validate particular cultures, and promote conformity and authoritarian practices (Moodie, 1994:23). Since the educational values of CNE and fundamental pedagogics were starkly different to Wits’ liberal education practices, the university vehemently opposed these educational philosophies. This meant that the institution engaged with content and pedagogical approaches that could be regarded as subversive, and also participated in social science research that was not welcomed by government. For instance, since the mid 1970s there was a significant focus on Marxism and other schools of radical

³¹ Report of the institutional culture survey, University of the Witwatersrand, 2002. p. 35.

thought in the Sociology and History departments of institutions like Wits (Moodie, 1994). Even though this did not represent the majority of courses, it did provide conceptual and theoretical lenses which became powerful tools in the fight against apartheid. Furthermore, Wits adopted a pedagogical approach which encouraged contestation and differences of opinion. This was unlike CNE or fundamental pedagogics which tended to promote particular perspectives as the truth, encourage obedience and avoid contradictory and controversial issues (Moodie, 1994:31).

In terms of research, Wits conducted a range of studies that exposed the apartheid government. For example, the History Workshop reflected alternative historical perspectives, and Sociology exposed students to notions of race and class conflict using Marxist theories. This was unlike the research agenda promoted by the government, which was intended to serve as an instrument of apartheid.³²

Therefore, Wits' approach to curriculum positioned it in opposition to the authoritarian and instrumentalist discourses propagated by the apartheid government.³³ This did not mean that the institution promoted a radical curriculum but rather that it did not support the instrumentalist approach because this approach did not align with the university's liberal education tradition.

It is clear from the above discussions that Wits was able to maintain a high level of academic freedom and autonomy from the state and society during this period. An analysis of stakeholder relationships suggests that the university was largely driven by its internal community. The stakeholders included academics, administrative and support staff and students. During this period academics were the strongest stakeholders characterised by power, legitimacy and exclusivity, while students had urgency and power, and administrators and support staff had less power and legitimacy than academics and more power than students. In this context academics represent definitive stakeholders who monopolised the university. Senate, which was the most powerful structure within the institution, was led and driven by academics (Johnson, 2005). Both students and administrators represented expectant stakeholders with little

³² HM4, 14 March 2007; UCS1, 11 March 2005; HM2, 20 May 2005.

³³ This is common in Afrikaner universities that have a very narrow way of solving problems with little attempt to probe, understand and disrupt policy (Bunting, 2002a).

influence over the curriculum. This constituted a closed organisation in which the external community was largely excluded from influencing the institution in significant ways. While the university manner of governance ensured external participation through the University Council (which comprises representatives from business and civil society), this body did not have the power or legitimacy to influence decision making within the institution and Senate continued to serve as a powerful decision-making structure within the institution.

4.4 Knocking on the Doors of the Ivory Tower: Pressure from Civil Society

The 1990s was characterised by increasing political pressure against the apartheid government, culminating in calls for institutions to denounce apartheid and work toward transformation. This pressure resulted in the increased involvement of civil society in the affairs of the university, but it did not affect curriculum in significant ways.

Up until the 1980s, Wits was able to maintain its position of independence without interference from society. As stated earlier, Wits' efforts to uphold its principles of autonomy and academic freedom created the perception that it was located in the anti-apartheid camp. It was this perception that gave Wits the space to conduct its business as usual in the 1980s, without too much external interference. This perception of Wits as opposing apartheid was reinforced by the university leadership in the 1980s:

The University of Witwatersrand has over many years maintained a firm and consistent stand against apartheid, not only in education but in all its manifestations.... The consequences have been severe for the university – the banning, deportation and detention of staff and students, as well as the invasion of the campus by riot police to disrupt peaceful protest meetings. Many incidents of harassment have been reported by students and staff, culminating in the assassination of in 1989 of political activist Dr David Webster.³⁴

The fact that Wits perceived itself as strongly anti-apartheid partly explains why it did not look inward to the dynamics of racism and sexism that manifested on the campus.

³⁴ A continuing commitment. University of the Witwatersrand, 1990.

Wits “tended to assume a somewhat uncritical position towards its own institutional practices by virtue of its claims as an ‘open’ and non-racial university”.³⁵ Because Wits perceived itself as politically legitimate, it did not acknowledge its own history in relation to apartheid. A study conducted by Mabokela (2001) highlights the institution’s role in legitimating apartheid practices. An interviewee noted that:

...all universities are unique just given the historical, their history, given the way in which they located in South Africa and when they arose in the South African setting. ... However, whenever I walk the corridors of this university, whenever I look at the old books that are produced here, the old photographs, I always am reminded by where this university comes from. That it was in fact built on the blood and sweat of black people. That it still has not acknowledged the way in which it was in fact producing the South African social landscape and there’s no acknowledgement of that and that makes me feel resentful towards the university. And also because of that the university has taken a position of a denialist orientation that makes it very difficult for marginalised groups to be here.³⁶

This lack of acknowledgment of its collusion³⁷ with apartheid was probably also due to the fact that most student protests at the time were levelled at the apartheid government, leaving the university relatively free from pressure to transform. During this period there was heightened opposition to the apartheid government, which led to the establishment of the United Democratic Front (UDF), the rejection of the Tricameral Parliament, running battles between the police and communities, and eventually the declaration of a State of Emergency (Shear, 1996:91). This period was characterised by the most violent and protracted student protests directed at the apartheid government (Shear, 1996:80). This did not mean there were no protests against the institution, but rather that the focus of student protests was on the apartheid government. While students and workers did protest against Wits for not

³⁵ A continuing commitment, University of the Witwatersrand, 1990.

³⁶ HM5, 22 March 2006.

³⁷ Wits was also complicit in propagating apartheid practices in the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, in the early 1970s black students were allowed to study at Wits but were not allowed to use the university’s facilities – for example the sports facilities. Black and white students had to sit in separate sections during institutional gatherings. Furthermore, many students attest to the fact that discrimination at Wits went beyond the social arena and into the classroom (Murray, 1997). Despite these and many other forms of racism that were present at the university, at that stage Wits did not acknowledge its role in apartheid and positioned itself as a liberal institution, divorced but not actively engaged with anti-apartheid struggles.

being active enough against apartheid, these protests were subsumed by the larger anti-government ones. As a result Wits was able to maintain its 'status quo'.

This liberal stance came under fire in the late 1980s and early 1990s when it became obvious that the apartheid system was on the brink of collapse. As a result, pressure mounted on all institutions to make a stand against the apartheid regime. This period was characterised by a shift away from violence and repression toward a negotiated settlement and the setting up of a government of national unity in 1994. At this stage the focus was on developing new legislation and policy to remove existing discriminatory laws and to introduce democratic laws and practices throughout the society. It was in this context that Wits came under scrutiny. The close scrutiny revealed that Wits had a long way to go in order to transform its structures, constituency and curriculum. Wits lost its protected space as stakeholders lambasted it for being racist, exclusionary, unresponsive to societal needs and upholding the status quo, and demanded change (Johnson, 2005). This resulted in high levels of instability as calls for the institution to reinvent itself grew from all quarters (Shear, 1996)

This period was underpinned by increased pressure from a range of internal and external stakeholders to transform university structures, policies and curriculum, and to play a more active role in promoting a democratic society. Pressure mounted from students, staff and civil society to reposition the university from its elite beginnings to one that is more inclusive and democratic. Unlike in the 1980s when academics represented the 'all-powerful stakeholder', the mid 1990s were characterised by an increasing involvement of students and civil society in the life of the institution. Students' growing dissatisfaction with the existing dispensation placed pressure on the university to transform all aspects of university life. Students demanded representation on governance structures and called on the university to change the race and gender profiles of Wits academics and the senior management team (Johnson, 2005). Students also complained about the institutional culture and curriculum, suggesting that it was alien and paternalistic (Davies, 1994).

Dissatisfaction with the institution did not only occur at student level, but was also evident among staff. For instance, a mission statement developed by Wits in the 1990s was rejected by many staff members because it was not developed through an inclusive

and participatory process (Johnson, 2005). Staff also reflected their unhappiness through perception surveys, which suggested that the institutional culture was perceived as alienating and racist³⁸. At this stage the university did not even have an equity plan or specific equity targets in place.³⁹

Pressure on the university did not stop at the internal university community, but extended beyond it. External stakeholders demanded that Wits step down from its ivory tower and become an integral part of South African society. These stakeholders included non-governmental organisations (NGOs), unions, civic and political organisations which felt that universities had to play a role in liberating society from its apartheid history. At this stage the principles of autonomy and academic freedom came under fire as community stakeholders demanded that higher education become more accountable to society and carved a space for their involvement in higher education. It was felt that Wits should not decide who to teach and what to teach, and that these decisions should be made by the wider community.

The Wits curriculum was viewed as heavily Eurocentric and individualistic and was not well-received by students and communities who were trying to remove the shackles of European and colonial influence. Both internal and external stakeholders demanded that higher education become more inclusive and relevant, and that its curriculum become emancipatory, empowering and responsive to society's needs. Such demands were informed by the principles of the Freedom Charter, which found its voice through the People's Education movement (Kruss, 1988), the Right To Learn campaign and several other education developments such as the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) which was aimed at developing alternatives to existing apartheid-based education and advancing the cause of 'education for liberation' which began in the 1980s, from slogans to concrete action (Kruss, 1988). In this context, calls for the Africanisation of the curriculum, critical pedagogy and education for social justice grew (Davies, 1994)..

Wits made several attempts to become inclusive and responsive to pressures from civil society. First, it widened participation in governance by including representatives of

³⁸ Institution surveys were conducted in 1986, 1988 and 2002.

³⁹ Draft academic support and development document. University of the Witwatersrand, December 1992. p. 2.

both students and civil society in decision-making structures (Johnson, 2005). This involved the reconstitution of the Council and the expansion of the Senate. Representatives from civil society as well as student and union members were appointed to key governing structures. The university also set up several forums to focus on transformation, including the Forum for Accelerated Comprehensive Transformation (FFACT) (Johnson, 2005). Although there are debates about whether these changes were far-reaching and fundamental or merely token, this chapter will not deal with those debates since the focus of this thesis is curriculum. (See Johnson's (1995) thesis for a discussion of this issue).

Second, Wits increased black student enrolment and initiated community outreach efforts. In the 1970s and even the early 1980s, when very few black students attended Wits, they were required to 'adapt or leave'. However, as black student enrolment increased, Wits recognised the need to support these students and embarked on academic development and support programmes. Therefore, Wits acknowledged the need for an academic support strategy and initiated several programmes in this regard. Initially these comprised a few add on programmes but these later developed into an integrated model of support⁴⁰. Academic support and development focused on offering extended degrees to ensure that black students developed the academic literacy skills required to succeed at university. Education Development Officers were appointed in six faculties to assess, develop and implement teaching and learning strategies (Shear, 1996:265). Although academic support programmes were a step in the right direction, these programmes required students to assimilate to the existing institutional culture and did not intend to question or transform it – that is, it was premised on assimilation strategies (Mabokela, 2001).

Third, while Wits made several efforts to transform its governance structures and provides academic support; little was done in terms of transforming the curriculum. Thus, as stated above, most interventions were aimed at providing additional support for students to cope with the existing curriculum.

This did not mean that there were no efforts to develop more locally relevant curricula, just that the dominant trend was Eurocentric and liberal. For example, the History

⁴⁰ University of the Witwatersrand, draft document on academic support, 1992.

Workshop is testimony to the excellent work that Wits did to develop an alternative History to both European and apartheid-based perspectives:

For example, as History Workshop we had a weekly page in *New Nation*, which was one of the oppositional papers; we had cultural festivals which attracted thousands of trade unionists on campus. There was very intense political debate about the significance of different interpretations of really obscure things like the history of land tenure in South Africa and that sort of thing. it was very passionate.⁴¹

Therefore, while political stakeholders did enter the university fray, academics continued to have relative freedom and autonomy to decide what to teach and what research to conduct. This was not different to practices at the University of Cape Town (UCT) where Eurocentric practices continued to dominate the university curriculum into the late 1990s:

Historically, African Studies developed outside Africa, not within it. It was a study of Africa, but not by Africans. The context of this development was colonialism, the Cold War and apartheid. This period shaped the organisation of social science studies in the Western academy. The key division was between the disciplines and area studies. The disciplines studied the White experience as a universal, human, experience; Area Studies studied the experience of people of colour as an ethnic experience. ... If you look at the reading list of the course actually taught in the faculty, you will find none of the key African intellectuals in it (Mamdani, 1998:63).

Wits' efforts to transform were met with criticism for the university's lack of commitment to fundamental transformation. This crisis was personified by media coverage which highlighted the conflict that characterised institutional relationships at that time.⁴² The media focused on issues of access, standards and transformation. This highlighted Wits' lack of commitment to transformation:

An icon of liberalism where blacks and whites barely talk suggests that Wits continues to be plagued with racism. Nzimande claims Wits lacks commitment to transformation (Hartley, 1996).

Sasco demands education for all, suggesting that Wits needs to accept more black students and not punish students for being poor (Keeton, 1996).

⁴¹ HSS10, 7 March 2007.

⁴² This included: *The Star*, 1993, ANC backs Wits students; *The Star*, 1994, Wits is looking inward for a route to change; *Sunday Times*, 1994, Wits at the crossroads.

Even though the 1990s represented a period of mounting political pressure from many quarters to change, curriculum practices remained generally the same. While the political stakeholders increased their stranglehold on some aspects of the university (Johnson, 2005:147), academics remained in control of curriculum. Thus in the 1990s academics continued to be the most powerful stakeholders by virtue of their power, legitimacy and exclusivity. On the other hand, civic organisations and students had power, legitimacy and urgency. Academics did not have urgency and civic organisation, and students did not have exclusivity. One could argue that academics had more power than students and civic organisations by virtue of their possession of expert knowledge which the other stakeholders did not have. Therefore, even though stakeholders were reconfigured, with students becoming stronger and civic organisations entering the stakeholder arena, academics continued to have power over curriculum by virtue of their exclusivity or expert knowledge. Senate remained the locus of power for academics, and students became secondary stakeholders (Johnson, 2005:105).

4.5 Institutional Restructuring and the Affirmation of Wits as a Stakeholder University

This period is characterised by the increased interest and power of a wide range of stakeholders in knowledge conception and production matters. Up until the 1990s the university managed to maintain control over its curriculum, despite political pressure to change it to become more locally relevant. However, this situation changed in the twenty-first century as increasing numbers of stakeholders became concerned with the university's 'products and processes'. This is attributed to the new socio-economic and political context in which higher education has come to play a prominent role. First, the economy is dependent on high skills and high knowledge to compete successfully in the global market (Jongbloed & Goedegebuure, 2001). Second, the economy requires a stable democracy underpinned by conceptions of citizenship (Enslin, 2003). Third, there is pressure to redress past imbalances in order develop and maintain a stable and thriving socio-economic and political climate (CHE, 2004). It is assumed that universities are critical and necessary components of a stable and thriving socio-economic and political context. Therefore, unlike previously where the university remained relatively free of interference from society, this period is fraught with

demands and expectations from all corners of society. With the increased value of higher education to socio-economic and political wellbeing, stakeholders have become actively involved in the sector in order to secure their own interests.

At Wits this has resulted in a widely constituted and inclusive Council which represents the interests of society⁴³ and an expanded Senate which includes a number of non-academic members – unheard of before this period (Johnson, 2005). In addition, students are represented on almost all important structures such as the Academic Freedom Committee, the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning and so on.⁴⁴ Furthermore the university encourages consultation and collaboration with professional bodies, potential employers and local communities in order to ensure that their students “meet employability requirements and labour market needs”.⁴⁵ Clearly stakeholders have carved out a space that allows them to influence decision making within the institution. While stakeholders are making demands on all aspects of university life, they have prioritised two key areas – efficiency and relevance.

One of the implications of the new stakeholder environment is the call for a curriculum that is responsive to the needs and interests of society. While this refers to both socio-political and economic responsiveness, the economic imperative is by far the dominant discourse (Castells, 2001b; Gibbons, 2000). This discourse is not only dominant in institutional documents⁴⁶ but is also strongly reflected in the public arena. For instance, media hype on the skills discourse attests to this widespread and dominant perspective on what the focus of the university curriculum should be:

Stakeholder congruence in contract research-essential for our times (SAPA;).

Harmonising employee training (*Business Day*, 2000a).

Paving the way for a new breed of leaders. Refers to growing demand for new generation of managers with the skills to compete globally (*Business Day*, 2000b).

⁴³ Thus the council included business, community and labour representatives.

⁴⁴ Wits HEQC evaluation audit: Self evaluation report, 2006, p. 31.

⁴⁵ Wits HEQC evaluation audit: Self evaluation report, 2006, p. 162.

⁴⁶ See Chapter Five for details.

Workplace approach to university education needed, says professor, which suggests that employees prefer people with practical experience (Star, 1996).⁴⁷

This is further entrenched by the fact that conceptions of social justice have increasingly focused on socio-economic development, unlike in the 1990s when social justice was concerned with political change. This means that political stakeholders are now more concerned with economic development than political freedom. This does not mean that there is no political lobby but rather that many political stakeholders have shifted their focus to economic development, which strengthens the skills discourse even further:

In our post apartheid society, the lack of skilled people has often been identified as a bottleneck to development. It is less seldom that this skills shortage has been identified in the area of social transformation. (Hicks, 2008:2).

Globalisation also affects modes of co-ordination and control of higher education, resulting in the emergence of new efficiency and accountability models and increased market influence over curriculum. In particular, this affects programmes that are not financially viable, placing pressure on them to change or close down. This is occurring in the context of reduced financial support from the state,⁴⁸ forcing universities to seek additional funds from other sources. As a result, the stakeholder terrain is further complicated as business and donors became even more involved in determining research agendas. In this process business and donors become role-players instead of stakeholders, thus playing a more hands-on or interfering role in the affairs of the university.

This has two implications for curriculum reform. In the first instance, there is overwhelming pressure from a wide variety of stakeholders to professionalise and vocationalise the curriculum. This pressure comes from government, the business sector, professional bodies and students and is associated with both the social justice as well as the high skills discourse. This is different from the traditional formative degree with which Wits was associated in the past.⁴⁹ This is further complicated by the

⁴⁷ The list of articles located in the Wits archives did not have dates or reporters' names.

⁴⁸ The academic strategy for Wits, University of Witwatersrand, 1992. S92/901A.

⁴⁹ One of the key concerns of professional bodies is that higher education is too abstract and theoretical and does not provide the business sector with what it needs. In response they are placing pressure on universities to align their curricula with business needs. For example, the

pressure from government and business to shift student enrolment toward the sciences in order to respond to the needs of the economy. This has implications for programmes in the social and human sciences. The White Paper on higher education is explicit in calling for more science, engineering, technology and commercial students and to ensure that more black students enter these fields rather than the Humanities (Bunting, 2002:152). This places the Humanities under significant pressure as the institution tries to deal with the vocational and instrumentalist discourses while continuing to hold onto its traditional liberal education model. As a result curriculum has the potential to become apolitical and technicist, undermining the role of curriculum in promoting personal development and knowledge production. This new context also has implications for the role of academics in determining what they teach, how they teach and what they research.

In the second instance, there is enormous pressure on the institution to abide by the quality assurance and efficiency principles that are propagated through government and business sector stakeholders.⁵⁰ This includes putting in place a quality assurance approach which focuses on technical and quantitative discourses and on reducing academic institutions to business-like places. As a result Wits operates within a new performativity framework, which is in direct conflict with its traditional liberal approach (Lockett, 2000). This affects not only curriculum but also the role of academics within the institution.

While struggles to maintain autonomy and academic freedom are not new, these liberal principles are more at risk of being undermined in the present climate than ever before. In the 1970s and 1980s the university experienced an attack on its autonomy from the apartheid state, which wanted the university to serve as an instrument of apartheid. Wits fought against this interference and succeeded in maintaining a relative distance from both the state and society. In the 1990s the threat to Wits' autonomy came from political stakeholders who demanded that the university become more actively involved in the development of a democratic society. During this period the university

undergraduate LLB at the University of South Africa (UNISA) has a compulsory course in to teach lawyers how to manage their finances (bookkeeping for lawyers).

⁵⁰ While state steering has always occurred, the institution has been left to determine its own direction for many years and the nature of present steering can be compared to 1930s when the apartheid government opted for a policy of total control over institutions.

transformed its governance structures to become more inclusive but maintained control over its curriculum, despite mounting political pressure to transform it.⁵¹

Thus unlike the 1980s or 1990s, the 2000s is a period characterised by the proliferation of stakeholders who all have a 'stake' in curriculum. First, the number of stakeholders increased to include government, business, parents and professional bodies. Second, the political stakeholders (these included political and civic organisations such as the National Education Crisis Committee) that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s continued their presence but in a different form. The interest of these stakeholders generally shifted from political transformation to socio-economic development. Third, government is now playing a significant role by steering institutions through managerialist instruments. Fourth, even within the institution there has been a realignment of stakeholder power and relationships. Previously academics served as the key internal stakeholder, with other stakeholders being less important. In the new context, however, managers and administrators have assumed a powerful role within the institution, changing the power relations between academics and managers. Other stakeholders, like students, have also increased their space and power within the university context (Johnson, 2005:263). Students are now viewed as customers whose needs have to be satisfied, which fundamentally alters the relationship between students, the institution and academics. Even parents have become more significant players in the institution as they pay for a greater proportion of their children's fees than previously.

One of the consequences of the increased stakeholder involvement in the university is the thinning of academics' power base and the institutionalisation of power in university management. Previously academics had power, legitimacy and exclusivity. However, in this global era, academics have lost legitimacy as more people are questioning their role and value in terms of their usefulness to society. At the same time, other stakeholders, such as the business sector and professional bodies, also have power and legitimacy. Furthermore, since a range of stakeholders also have access to expert knowledge, exclusivity is no longer a defining characteristic of academic

⁵¹ During this period the university did widen participation in governance structures.

stakeholders.⁵² In addition, new institutional managers and administrators have come to occupy more prominent stakeholder positions than they did previously. These stakeholders also have power and legitimacy, as calls for accountability and efficiency are hailed as best practice in various quarters. In some way, managers are also privy to expert knowledge which is the result of the professionalisation of management in institutions (Johnson, 2005:267). In this context several very powerful stakeholders compete to influence university curriculum. Academics are no longer the *de facto* owners of curriculum, and curricula is the outcome of struggles between stakeholders.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter reflects on the changing nature of the society-institution relationship and its implications for curriculum. It draws attention to this relationship by exploring curriculum trends within the institution over three decades and argues that the different periods are characterised by different curriculum imperatives and outcomes. The first decade focuses on the apartheid era and suggests that Wits maintained its autonomy from the state and society, foregrounding its liberal curriculum tradition. During this period the curriculum emphasised the cultivation of the mind, it focused on critical thinking, it was elite and based on the principles of meritocracy, and it focused on Eurocentric content. Academics occupied a powerful position within the institution and had strong control over the curriculum. The second decade, which began as the apartheid system took its last breath, was characterised by the rise of the political stakeholder who demanded that the institution play its role in ridding the society of apartheid and building a democratic alternative. This resulted in some changes at the governance level but did not interfere substantially with the curriculum, despite growing calls for 'education for liberation'. The third decade reflects a substantial increase in the number of stakeholders, all demanding that curriculum become relevant and useful. While this includes stakeholders from both socio-political and economic spheres, those with economic concerns dominate debates on curriculum change. One of the manifestations of focusing on economic concerns at the expense of socio-political ones is the rising racism evident at universities, which led to the

⁵² This is in line with postmodern trends that are concerned with the recognition and validation of different knowledge forms.

setting up of a committee by the Ministry of Education to examine progress with regard to racism and other forms of prejudice that bedevil the higher education sector. This committee indicated that very little has been done with regard to developing curriculum that promotes socio-political understanding and encourages tolerance and respect for diversity (Department of Education, 2008). For example, one of the recommendations of the committee is that the university considers offering a compulsory course to promote socio-political competencies (Department of Education, 2008:21). Perhaps these issues are leading us back to the importance of a socio-political curriculum, and the next decade might result in a revival of the Humanities. However, this revival will continue to exert pressure on liberal traditions because it is also concerned with conceptions of responsiveness.

Clearly Wits is facing significant pressures and challenges to transform from its liberal approach to one which is underpinned by responsiveness and accountability to society. This fundamentally alters the university-society relationship and has implications for conceptions of autonomy, academic freedom and academic identity which inform curriculum practices.

The next chapter explores the ways in which the socio-economic and political context influences the national and institutional policy environment.

CHAPTER FIVE

CURRICULUM POLICIES AND STRATEGIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: NATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL PATHWAYS⁵³

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on those elements of national and institutional policies and strategies that have a bearing on curriculum reform in higher education. It explores the relationship between the macro socio-political and economic context and policy making. It does so with reference to the following critical questions: What general goals for transforming higher education do policy makers in South Africa express in national policy documents? What are the implications of national policy on curriculum change in higher education? What policies and strategies for curriculum reform do leaders of South African higher education institutions suggest? How do South African national curriculum priorities and higher education institutional strategies match?

The argument pursued in this chapter posits three interrelated claims. First, it is claimed that unlike the case of schooling, the South African government has not developed a systematic and coherent national policy framework for curriculum reform in higher education. Besides the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) guidelines, a frame of reference for curriculum change is thinly strewn across several higher education policy documents and legislation. Second, this frame of reference points to three powerful and somewhat conflicting policy transformation imperatives – access and equity, responsiveness, and efficiency and effectiveness. Third, the conflicting nature of these and the diverse institutional legacies are reflected in a diversity of policies and strategies underpinning institutional curriculum practices. The chapter also argues that the curriculum policies of the University of the Witwatersrand reflect an attempt to reconcile the demands of equity and responsiveness with concerns around efficiency and effectiveness in the

⁵³ The phrase “national and institutional pathways” is borrowed from Cross & Adam’s (2005) article on ICT in higher education.

context of its traditional liberal approach to education. The argument pursued in this chapter is presented through the following themes:

- transforming the higher education sector: key policy moments;
- curriculum discourses in the South African context;
- institutional policy focus.

This chapter views policy changes from the 1980s to the mid 2000s and suggests that the different periods reflect different policy discourses. This includes policy under apartheid, policy during the last moments of apartheid, policy under a new democratic government and policy aimed at revamping the sector a decade into the new democracy.

5.2 Conceptual Framework: Consensus, Consultation and Control

This chapter draws on the concepts of consensus, consultation and control⁵⁴ as well as rational and technical policy making versus political policy making to locate this discussion (see Diagram 5.1). It also focuses on the concept of responsiveness referred to in the overall conceptual framework located in Chapter Two. First, the chapter draws on Jorgensen's (2002) concept of policy making as a process of consensus, consultation and conflict. In particular, the concept of high versus low consultation and high versus low consensus is used to locate different policy-making stages in the South African context. Some argue that a policy process that operates on high consensus and high participation is more political and less rational (Badat, 2005; Jorgensen, 2002). The aim is to obtain consensus by being inclusive in the policy process and its outcomes. This is offset by the notion of policy as a rational process which is less political and more technical. While some theorists support one or the other, many indicate that policy making is complex. They generally include technical as well as political components, and argue that focusing on consensus building alone will not result in good policy processes or outcomes (Coglianese, 2001). Both high and low consensus and consultation yield tensions in the policy arena. However, these play out

⁵⁴ This is similar to Gramsci's conception of propagating the dominant ideology through either consensus or coercion (Salami, 1991)

differently. With low consensus and consultation, the tension is more strongly located in stakeholders than in policy. In the high consultation and consensus approach, the policy is all-encompassing, which results in tensions at the policy and implementation level.

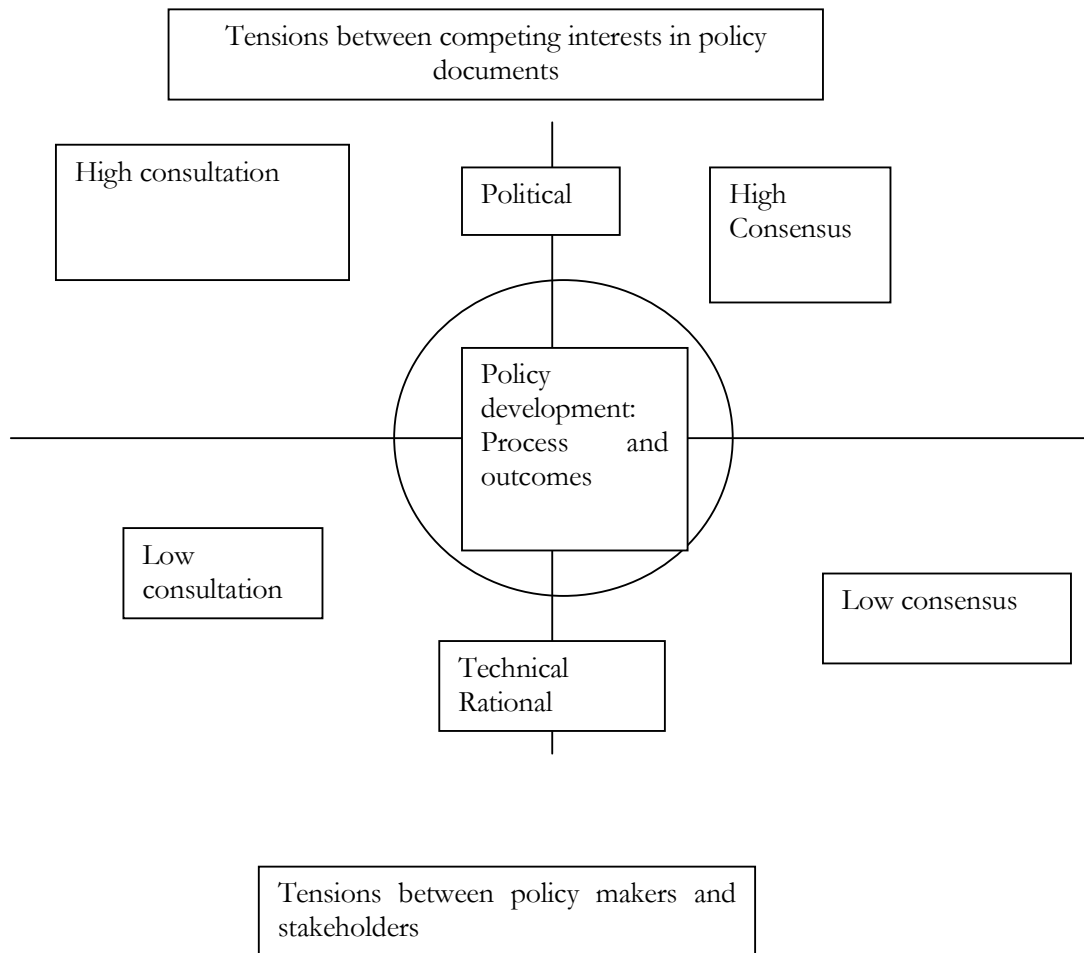


Diagram 5.1: Framework for analysing policy

Second, this chapter draws on the concept of responsiveness to discuss policy discourses. This includes economic and socio-cultural responsiveness and refers to the utility/skills discourse, access and efficiency.

5.3 Transforming the Higher Education Sector: Key Policy Moments

5.3.1 Introduction

The South African education policy process reflects a long and arduous⁵⁵ road to the White Paper on Higher Education, which breaks considerably with higher education policy in the apartheid era. The purpose of this extensive policy process was to overhaul a legacy system that was “fragmented, dysfunctional and unequal” (Cross, Mungadi & Rouhani, 2002:171). The vision was for a non-racial, non-sexist education system that could develop the full potential of all South African citizens to participate in economic, political and social activity. The policy process was hailed for its efforts to break with apartheid education and for being highly inclusive both from the perspective of the process as well as the outcome. However, the process was also fraught with many competing interests, making it complex and rendering implementation a significant challenge. This section traces some of the key education policy moments from apartheid to democracy, showing the ways in which policy processes and outcomes changed over time. The following sections discuss these key policy moments which are summarised in table 5.1 below:

⁵⁵ See Table 5.1 below for a chronology of key events.

Table 5.1: Summary of Policy Process TimeLine

Year	Milestone	Overall Thrust of Policy	Curriculum Thrust
1953	Bantu Education Act	Separate, racially based education system. Inferior education for black South Africans. Propagating apartheid ideology.	Fundamental pedagogics. Knowledge as uncontested truth. Underpinned by ideology of racism, sexism and superiority of white South Africans. Focus on creating black manual labour. Focus on rote learning.
1981	De Lange Commission	Rejected by apartheid government.	Narrow skills-based approach.
1991	Curriculum Model for South Africa (CUMSA)	Tinkered with apartheid policy.	Maintained key components of apartheid curriculum such as language policy. Proposed 'White' curriculum as unproblematic for implementation in all institutions.
1994	Education Renewal Strategy (ERS)	Separate and equal. The last attempts by apartheid to maintain status quo.	Skills focus. Did not focus on apartheid ideology underpinning curriculum.
1994	NEPI report	First attempt to carve out an alternative. Highly consultative.	Curriculum as values framework to break with apartheid ideology. Curriculum that is general and that promotes equality. i.e. broad and symbolic.
1994	ANC draft policy on education and training	Focus on schools and adult education.	Focused more strongly on overall system than curriculum in higher education.
1995	South African Qualifications Authority Act	Focus on quality and articulation.	Competencies and outcomes-based approach to curriculum.
1996	NCHE report	Highly consultative.	Curriculum to enable access. Curriculum to be re-thought in context of

			massification and also societal responsiveness. Programme diversification and flexibility.
1996	Green Paper	Highly consultative.	Focus on socio-political responsiveness. Dealing with race, gender and equity through curriculum. Curriculum to support disadvantaged students.
1997	White Paper	Reworked following criticism for excluding key issue of redress and access.	Focus on responsiveness, access and efficiency in curriculum. Ambiguous in promoting both liberal as well economic and socio-political curriculum discourses. Introduced notions of programmes and credit transfer systems and Recognition of Prior Learning. Encouraged interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches.
1997	Higher Education Act and setting up of CHE	Strong curriculum steering through quality assurance.	Quality assurance and monitoring of institutional programmes and products.
2001- 2004	Funding and financial policies	State interference.	Introducing efficiency in curriculum decisions.
2001-2004	National and Institutional Planning framework	State interference.	Focuses on directing what curriculum different institutions offer in order to prevent duplication and serve national needs.

5.3.2 The apartheid legacy

From its inception, Bantu Education served as a key instrument to promote apartheid, from a socio-economic perspective as well as an ideological perspective. It was aimed at promoting separatism and racial superiority as well as ensuring that black communities provided the unskilled labour required for the economy (Mandela, 1957).

The Bantu Education Act of 1953, which legislated racially segregated education policies, represented one of the cornerstones of the apartheid system (Fiske & Lad, 2004). In 1953 Bantu Education was focused on schools but by 1959 the principles of Bantu Education had made their way into the higher education sector (Mandela, 1957).

The key organising principle of the old higher education system was racial exclusion and the privileging of white South Africans enabled by the provision of unequal resources and unequal access to higher education opportunities (Bunting, 2002b; Badat, 2003:15). In fact, this system was not only differentiated along racial⁵⁶ lines but even ethnic⁵⁷ lines (Sedibe, 1998:271), promoting separate institutions for different race groups and privileging white South Africans through a differentiated subsidy formula until 1988 (Bunting, 2002a:117). Furthermore, apartheid education was based on a clear separation of education and training, evident in the distinct functions of universities versus technikons. (Until 2000 there were 21 universities and 15 technikons.) As a result institutions were fragmented, wasteful, unco-ordinated and unequal.

In curriculum terms, apartheid education promoted a rote learning and authoritarian culture:

... the inherited higher education system was designed, in the main, to reproduce, through teaching and research, white and male privilege and black and female subordination in all spheres of society. All higher education institutions were, in differing ways and to differing extents, deeply implicated in this (Badat, 2003:4).

The higher education curriculum under apartheid was viewed by the anti apartheid movement as being unresponsive to society's economic and socio-cultural needs, outdated because it promoted rote learning and authoritarian pedagogical approaches, and Eurocentric in its curriculum content.

Higher education under apartheid was also underpinned by strong state control. Thus policy development was top-down and driven by experts in the bureaucracy, with little room for stakeholder participation. No consultation occurred in the process of

⁵⁶ Designated by the South African government as African, white, coloured and Indian.

⁵⁷ This refers to the various homeland campuses that were set up to encourage ethnic divisions.

developing apartheid education. All curriculum decisions were made by the apartheid government (Cross *et al.*, 2002:172).

5.3.3 Last efforts of a dying horse: apartheid education revamped

While the apartheid government managed to maintain its draconian education policies for decades, this became more difficult in the 1980s because of the intensification of the anti-apartheid struggle. This increasing opposition to apartheid forced the state to reconsider some of its policies in order to appease opposition and weaken resistance to the apartheid system. Cross *et al.* (2002:172) argue that the state had to “modernise apartheid educational policies to make them less problematic to opponents”. The apartheid state embarked on a reform process which was defined by three key moments. First, the DeLange Commission which comprised largely business and selected academics was set up in 1981 to advise government on education reform strategies. The Commission’s recommendations were underpinned by a narrowly defined conception of skills to serve labour market needs (Sooklal, 2005:28) and did not deal with the key tenets of the apartheid education system (Sedibe, 1998:269). Reforms were superficial and served as window dressing, and did not dilute anti-apartheid struggles (Sooklal, 2005:29). The recommendations of De Lange were not implemented because even in its limited form was a threat to the status quo.

Second, the Curriculum Model for South Africa (CUMSA) was initiated in 1991 to deal with some of the shortcomings of the apartheid education system. The key focus of CUMSA was the vocationalisation of education and the link between education and the labour market. Thus CUMSA recommended that the curriculum become more relevant and that unnecessary overlaps between subjects should be removed (Cross *et al.*, 2002:173). CUMSA recommended a core syllabus for all departments of education which was to be informed by the existing curriculum for white South Africans. In other words, curriculum implemented in white education systems was accepted as unproblematic although it continued to promote rote learning and authoritarianism (Sedibe, 1998:272). The CUMSA model was underpinned by the same elitist and technocratic approach that informed the apartheid education system (Cross *et al.*, 2002:173). For example, it provided students with the opportunity to make language choice options, but this did not challenge the dominance of Afrikaans or English; neither did it address the African languages issue (Sedibe, 1998:272). It was

silent on socio-political issues and did not acknowledge the socio-economic conditions of learners outside of the classroom⁵⁸ (Rembe, 2005:144). At this stage the state knew that its days were numbered, and it wanted to maintain as much privileges for the white minority as it could before the 'takeover' (Rembe, 2005:143).

The third and final effort by the apartheid government to reform the curriculum, and also secure white privileges, gave rise to the Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) in the mid 1990s. The reputed aim of the ERS was to make education more affordable and accessible to all South Africans (Cross *et al.*, 2002:173). However, once again reforms occurred within the framework of apartheid, maintaining the status quo. In developing the ERS the Department of Education attempted to involve stakeholders; however, in the main, the document was developed by the Department with very little participation of civil society and the anti-apartheid movement (Cross *et al.*, 2002:173). The ERS was based on a policy of separatism and was rejected by the anti-apartheid movement. In particular, it was criticised for its vague recommendations about administrative and organisational matters and for its silence on issues of race, class and inequalities in the education system (Sedibe, 1998:271).

Efforts to revamp apartheid education in order to make it more acceptable to international and national communities failed because these efforts did not address the fundamental tenets of apartheid education. In curriculum terms, it continued to promote authoritarianism, rote learning and racial divisions, and was rejected by civil and political organisations.

5.3.4 Proposing an alternative: first efforts by the anti-apartheid movement

Apartheid education was viewed as problematic from a political, economic and epistemological perspective, and needed fundamental overhauling. First, the system was fragmented, unequal and wasteful. This was the result of the divisions between institutions based on race as well as separation of institutions that focused on education versus training. Second, apartheid education was viewed as being educationally unsound in promoting authoritarian educational approaches, rote

⁵⁸ It did not acknowledge the role that apartheid played in placing students in challenging socio-economic circumstances which hindered their success rates in educational contexts.

learning and discouraging critical thinking. Third, apartheid education was not responsive to the socio-economic and political needs of the society (Badat, 2003:4).

The anti-apartheid movement began working on an alternative vision and strategies. It was clear that they urgently needed to provide concrete alternatives to those offered by the dying apartheid government because this would form the basis of education in a new democracy (Rembe, 2005:136). However, despite the call for the development of concrete alternatives for education, initial documents were very broad and idealistic and reflected the inexperience of the African National Congress (ANC) (Rembe, 2005:174). These broad visions were informed by the Freedom Charter and needed to be unpacked in greater detail in order to translate into viable policy options.

These early attempts were associated with the Peoples Education movement which was influenced by Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy as well as other liberation thinkers. This movement called for education that liberates people and also education that would be free and accessible to all South Africans. Initially the Peoples Education Movement represented a broad and symbolic idealism that was not concrete enough to serve as a policy framework. After the apartheid government unveiled the ERS in the early 1990s, the anti-apartheid movement set up the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) to develop an alternative vision for education (Walker, 2004). The mandate was to translate the vision of a "unitary education system underpinned by non racism, non sexism, redress and democracy" into concrete policy options (Rembe, 2005:136). The NEPI process culminated in 12 reports which formed the basis of policy development in the 'new' South Africa (Sedibe, 1998; Cross, 2004).

5.3.5 A policy framework to overhaul the system

The government in waiting made significant strides toward developing an alternative policy framework for the country's education system. It initiated an ambitious process of policy making in the early 1990s in order to rid the country of its apartheid legislative framework. This culminated in the development of the White Paper on Higher Education as well as several other documents to guide the restructuring of the sector.

The process began with a significant policy undertaking between 1990 and 2004. As a symbol of breaking with the apartheid past, the policy process was highly participatory and consultative. The process involved a wide range of stakeholders including business, unions and academics, and was informed by the principles of democracy espoused by the new government.

This extended consultation is a concrete expression of the democratic will that is the motorforce of our emerging nation and reflects the Ministry's commitment to stakeholder participation in the development and formulation of policy (Department of Education, 1997:2).

The policy process constituted three distinct periods from 1990 to 2004. The first period, from 1990-1994, represented the development of the overarching principles, vision and values underpinning a new higher education system. This was a period of “symbolic policy, the prime intention being to declare a break with the past, and to signal a new direction” (Cloete & Massen, 2002:449). This period of policy making was informed by political concerns and characterised by policy as a political process rather than policy as a technical or rational process. It was also underpinned by a great deal of consultation and consensus building (Bunting & Cloete, 2004). As a result policy was broad and inclusive:

The policy changes proposed grew out of a strong commitment of the majority of South Africans not only to overcome the inequalities and injustices of apartheid, but to build something new and better. The key condition for successful policy development was consensus about the need for change. For those involved in the process, there was no doubt that the old system needed to be changed. Indeed, the system of higher education was so linked to the racism and inequities of apartheid that almost everyone involved in the policy process agreed that fundamental transformation was essential. The policy changes proposed grew out of the strong commitment of the majority of South Africans to build something new and better (Moja & Hayward, 2001:121).

The second period, from 1995 to 1998, was characterised by the sharpening of goals, structures and instruments, and linked the visions and strategies to finance and resource issues. This period represented a shift from symbolic policy making to policy making that took cognisance of the realities on the ground. It is characterised by concerns of matching grand policy to implementation possibilities within the confines of resource and capacity constraints.

In 1995 the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was established to further the work of NEPI. Its work culminated in one of the most significant documents, *A Framework for Transformation* (NCHE, 1996), which made a substantial contribution to the policy development process. This framework document led to the development of the Green Paper on higher education in 1996 followed by the White Paper of 1997, and eventually formed the basis of the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997.⁵⁹ The White Paper represents a comprehensive programme for the transformation of all aspects of higher education. It starts from the premise that the sector must be part of the wider efforts to transform South African society.

The transformation of higher education is part of the broader process of South Africa's political, social and economic transition, which includes political democratisation, economic reconstruction and development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity (Department of Education, 1997:9).

The vision espoused in the White Paper is broad and encompassing:

This vision for higher education is located within the government's broader view of a future where all South Africans will enjoy an improved and sustainable quality of life, participate in a growing economy, and share in a democratic culture (Department of Education, 1997:39).

It includes:

- meeting the basic needs of people;
- developing the country's human resources;
- building the economy;
- democratising society (Badat, 2003:4)

The key transformation programme outlined in the White Paper calls for a higher education sector that is economically and socially responsive, effective, efficient and accountable and is underpinned by the principles of equity, redress and democracy (Department of Education, 1997). To achieve this, the White Paper set out four main transformation goals:

Increase and broaden participation. This includes increasing student enrolment, changing demographic representation and increasing the participation of black

⁵⁹ The Higher Education Act provided the legislative framework and the White Paper represented the transformation programme.

students in science and technology and postgraduate studies and increasing throughput.

Responsiveness to society's interests and needs. This includes meeting the needs of the modernizing economy; generally expanding research focus through maintaining basic research but growing applications based research.

Partnerships and governance: development of democratic governance practices and enhancing cooperation between institutions and society.

Funding: This includes stabilizing higher education funding, ensuring redress and diversifying funding sources (Bunting & Cloete, 2004:7).

In terms of curriculum, the policy aims to:

- provide access to all students;
- promote critical thinking skills;
- articulate with workplace needs and citizenship needs;
- recognise different knowledge forms;
- promote high skills and high knowledge (Department of Education, 1997).

The White Paper is comprehensive and deals with all aspects of higher education transformation. This is clearly an attempt to ensure wide consensus and consultation:

The White Paper on higher education was the outcome of a highly participatory and democratic process that succeeded in forging a national democratic consensus on the principles and goals of higher education (Badat, 2003:16).

Because the White Paper represented a relatively inclusive process, it reflects a number of competing interests which are in tension with each other. The three key pillars of transformation – equity and redress, efficiency, responsiveness – often reflect these tensions. Badat (2003:15) argues that the South African policy environment is “riveted with paradoxes which make interpretation and implementation difficult. For instance, dealing with redress within the context of financial constraints results in tensions between efficiency and access imperatives. Increasing access requires increased budgets in order to provide relevant support strategies which are costly and could be regarded as inefficient. One option would be to privilege either efficiency or access goals. The danger of prioritising efficiency is that this would result in delaying equity, which undermines the new democracy. Similarly an exclusive focus on access could result in compromising quality. Badat (2003:15) suggests that institutions must simultaneously

pursue policies that stand in tension with one another. This period was characterised by decreased consensus as debates raged about what components of policy should receive priority in the context of shrinking resources. Therefore, while this period began with high levels of consultation and consensus, this changed to lower levels of consensus as the emphasis shifted from policy to implementation.

The third period of policy making, from 1998 to 2004 was defined by increased government control over higher education. National policy initially suggested that the state would manage universities from a distance in a supervisory or steering capacity (NCHE, 1996). This, it was argued, was different to the controlling model used under apartheid where government intruded in the running of the university. However, this standpoint did not last for very long and government shifted a few steps back to occupy a position of greater control (Schoole, 2001; Johnson, 2005). In this regard a range of new policy documents (focusing on finances, planning and quality assurance) were developed to increase the state's control over the sector.

These financial and planning instruments were developed to 'tighten the ropes' between government policy and institutional implementation. This period was characterised by policy as a technical rather than a political process. The state felt that transformation was progressing too slowly, and intervened to steer institutions toward desired outcomes. In some instances, it was felt that the broad and ambiguous policy framework allowed some institutions to focus only on some aspects and to avoid other transformation imperatives. Therefore, since implementation in the high policy consensus approach is fraught with tensions, the state felt it needed to intervene to make some difficult choices amid an array of competing interests (Badat, 2003).

5.3.6 Steering curriculum change in higher education: efficiency and accountability

As stated earlier, in the late 1990s the South African government shifted from a 'hands-off' policy to one of greater interference. This is attributed to the fact that many parts of the higher education system were making very little progress in terms of

transforming⁶⁰ and also that institutions were not taking sufficient cognisance of national priorities.⁶¹ This is also attributed to the general shift to managerialism as a means of managing state entities. This period is characterised by low consultation and low consensus as government strongly directed the sector.

... the extent to which a substantive national democratic consensus still exists with respect to the direction of higher education transformation is called into question ... (Badat, 2003:16).

This also resulted in a focus on policy as a rational and technical process rather than a political and symbolic one. This policy approach is driven through three key mechanisms – funding, planning and quality assurance:

Planning, funding and quality assurance are the three mechanisms used to steer the South African higher education system towards the goals set out in the 1997 White Paper on higher education transformation (Ministry of Education, 2006:2).

First, government developed a range of funding policies in order to respond to the new fiscal and financial constraints that the sector faced. These policies were aimed at increasing efficiency and performance so that higher education could deliver ‘more with less’. In line with international trends, the state subsidy for higher education was reduced in real terms over several years. In South Africa, university subsidies decreased dramatically since the 1980s⁶² and indications are that this trend will continue through the 2000s. While institutions were expecting increases in subsidies in the late 1990s as a result of the pressures to increase access to higher education, in 1996 the Ministry of Education informed universities that this would not be the case. In fact, government expenditure on public higher education has decreased in real terms over the past 15 years (SASC0, 2007:3). The White Paper acknowledges that government subsidy to higher education is constrained by the macro-economic framework and that this has implications for policy implementation. As a result, government has called for increased efficiency and diversification of funding sources in order to mitigate some of the financial challenges that universities face. Government

⁶⁰ Historically white universities continued to be white both in terms of staff and students in the late 1990s.

⁶¹ Some institutions were prioritising certain elements of transformation while ignoring others – for example, some institutions focused on increasing relationships with business but did not do enough in terms of equity and access.

⁶² The Academic Strategy at Wits. 1992. S 29/901A.

will subsidise universities up to 50% and they should seek funds from other sources to supplement this. The subsidy could be as low as 35% for those institutions capable of raising external funds. Other sources of funding include student fees and private sector contributions (Ministry of Education, 2004:5). Government also suggested that higher education reduce their unit costs, avoid duplication, deploy less labour-intensive teaching strategies, and increase throughput and success rates (Department of Education, 1997:13). This results in significant tensions between teaching and learning, access and efficiency and affects success rates in higher education.

The state subsidy is also used as a means of directing higher education toward science, technology and postgraduate studies. The state subsidy comprises teaching input grants, teaching output grants, research output and institutional factor grants. The largest allocation goes to the teaching input grant, about 56% of block grants allocated to universities. This is allocated for each full-time student equivalent and varies according to the disciplines and level of study. This is referred to as the Classification of Education Subject Matter (CESM) and reflects quite stark differences in allocations between Humanities disciplines in general compared to the sciences. Despite this generalisation, it must be noted that subsidies are not calculated per faculty but rather per discipline, with most disciplines in the Humanities allocated to lower funding categories and all science disciplines in the higher funding categories.⁶³ This clearly favours some disciplines over others, and places the Humanities at a significant disadvantage. While it is not clear what drives the CESM formula, there is no doubt that actual cost is not the only factor informing the formula, since it is unclear for example why Philosophy receives a higher weighting than Psychology or why Computer Sciences receives a lower weighting than Mathematics. One could speculate that it is informed by a combination of factors including actual costs of teaching the course, assumptions made about what constitutes reasonable class sizes in the different disciplines, and as a means of steering or incentivising universities to increase their science, technology and postgraduate outputs. It must be acknowledged that the new formula is more sophisticated than the previous one, despite its shortcomings. Historically the state provided subsidies in two categories – that is, sciences (including

⁶³ There are four categories, with category four receiving a higher ratio of subsidy than category one.

all Sciences, Health Sciences, Engineering, Architecture, etc) and Humanities (all other categories such as Fine Arts, Drama, Law, Psychology), with Sciences receiving higher subsidies (Bunting, 2002b). The previous approach was crude and simplistic in that it grouped all sciences as one and all arts as one, while the new system attempts to differentiate in accordance with the discipline or course rather than the field of study.⁶⁴

Furthermore the funding formula is productivity-driven through the teaching output grant, which places pressure on institutions to increase throughput and also to close down courses with low enrolment figures.⁶⁵

Second, the new focus on planning serves as a key instrument to direct higher education in accordance with national goals and strategies. The Department of Education has put in place significant new planning requirements as a means of improving and controlling the output of higher education institutions. The Department's new planning strategy is aimed at ensuring a more co-ordinated higher education effort, unlike the pre-1994 period when the size and shape of the sector was determined by un-coordinated institutional decisions, which the Department suggests is "untenable in the context of fiscal constraints and the need for greater responsiveness of the higher education system to the national development agenda" (Department of Education, 1997:13). This is driven through national and institutional planning strategies. The National Higher Education Plan guides targets, size and shape of institutions, growth and programme mixes, and represents the national landscape of offerings across the sector. The institutional plan is the basis upon which funding is approved for each institution and is linked to the overall national plan.

Basically the planning strategy controls what courses and programmes universities can offer. This is similar to the manpower planning strategies that were common in the 1960s, in which planning ensured that institutions delivered what society needed. Clearly this strategy favours curriculum that is more directly responsive to society's economic needs.

⁶⁴ It must be noted that some disciplines are under consideration for changing their existing category location. Also that this formula probably changes on an ongoing basis.

⁶⁵ Wits HEQC quality audit, 2006, Self-evaluation report.

Third, the quality assurance policy adopted by government represents one of the most significant curriculum transformation instruments in the sector and has major implications for curriculum reform efforts. The quality assurance policy which is legislated through the South African Qualifications Authority Act of 1995 has created a single framework – the National Qualifications Framework, NQF – within which all education and training qualifications are located. This enables the standardisation of qualifications, which allows for comparability and portability across the education and training sector. This resulted in the registration of higher education qualifications within the National Qualifications Framework and the restructuring of curriculum in accordance with outcomes-based education approaches.⁶⁶

The Department of Education set up the Council on Higher Education (CHE), legislated through the Higher Education Act of 1997, to deal specifically with quality assurance issues in the higher education sector. The CHE has overall responsibility for quality assurance in higher education and must see to the alignment of the higher education sector with the NQF (Department of Education, 2006:8). Through the CHE a Higher Education Qualifications Framework and the new academic policy for programmes and qualifications were developed. (Department of Education, 2006). This is evident in the recent quality audits carried out by the CHE on both Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Master of Education (MED) programmes across the country. The criteria that these programmes were assessed against included governance, learning programme and contextualisation, with eight of the thirteen criteria focusing on the learning programme and some on the extent to which the programme aligns with society's needs. For example, embedded in these criteria is the notion of efficiency which is measured in terms of the extent to which programmes respond to employment needs and throughput rates (CHEa, 2004:30).

⁶⁶ This was part of the process of aligning all education and training qualifications within the National Qualifications Framework.

While there are many heated debates about the new quality assurance strategy, the policy suggests that it serves as an instrument of redress and access as well as an instrument of performativity (Department of Education, 1995; Christie, 1997:59).

In general, steering through managerialist instruments results in the introduction of a technicist discourse. In this approach cost and efficiency underpin performance, and have the potential to overshadow academic decisions. This approach is the antithesis to the way in which curriculum decisions in higher education were made in the past (Luckett, 2000).

5.4 Responsiveness: access and usefulness

As stated previously, access and usefulness represent two key pillars of transformation in the higher education sector.

In terms of access, the aim of policy is to eradicate the sector of its historical inequities through and in higher education (Cele & Menon, 2006). The policy makes reference to the vision “of a transformed, democratic, non racist and non sexist system of higher education” (Department of Education, 1997:6). This includes changing the demography of both students and staff to become more representative in terms of race, gender and class. It also involves increasing the number of black students in science and technology fields of study and transforming curriculum so that it is responsive to the needs and interests of a diverse student body.

Successful policy must overcome an historically determined pattern of fragmentation, inequality and inefficiency. It must increase access for black, women, disabled and mature students, and generate new curricula and flexible models of learning and teaching, including modes of delivery, to accommodate a larger and more diverse student population (Department of Education, 1997:6).

In terms of usefulness, the call is for higher education to become more responsive to society’s needs, underpinned by the utility discourse. Two forms of responsiveness are referred to in the White Paper – economic and socio-political. In terms of socio-political responsiveness, the policy calls for higher education to develop citizens who are able to effectively participate in and consolidate a democratic culture. This includes

promoting tolerance, citizenship and nation building (Department of Education, 1997). In this regard the focus is on higher education that will lay “the foundations of a critical civil society, with a culture of public debate and tolerance which accommodates differences and competing interests” (Badat, 2003:6). A typical example of socio-political responsiveness is the Minister’s report on transformation and social cohesion that deals with issues of racism, sexism and other prejudices in order to transform the sector (Department of Education, 2008). The report intended to illuminate the ways in which racism and other prejudices played out in the sector and provide some recommendations for dealing with it.

Another form of responsiveness referred to in the policy documents is that of economic responsiveness. This is more accurately understood in the context of the development discourse. Thus higher education policy is overwhelmingly concerned with economic growth and development. In curriculum terms this calls for high skills and high knowledge to ensure a thriving and competitive economy:

Meet through well planned and coordinated teaching, learning and research programmes ... the high skilled employment needs presented by a growing economy operating in a global environment (Department of Education, 1997:6).

Successful policy must restructure the higher education system and its institutions to meet the needs of an increasingly technologically-oriented economy. It must also deliver the requisite research, the highly trained people and the knowledge to equip a developing society with the capacity to address national needs and to participate in a rapidly changing and competitive global context (Department of Education, 1997:6).

However, the ‘development discourse’ is not only focused on global competitiveness but is also linked to solving local problems and meeting people’s basic needs:

... many parts of the system observe teaching and research policies which favour academic insularity ... Although much is being done, there is still insufficient attention to the pressing local, regional and national needs of the South African society and to the problems and challenges of the broader African context (Department of Education, 1997:4).

The White paper speaks to a broad sense of usefulness which goes beyond economic competitiveness or markets. However, the economic development agenda dominates

policy debates and undermines the importance of both socio-political and non utilitarian curriculum:

The White Paper, clearly, advances an extensive, broad and 'thick' notion of the social responsiveness of higher education. However, as Singh warns, 'social responsiveness in the discourse on higher education is being thinned down and reduced to terms of market responsiveness' (Badat, 2003:24).

While the White Paper promotes a broad notion of usefulness, this has been interpreted through narrow lenses. This includes the Department of Science and Technology, the Department of Labour and the business sector, which focus on the skills for economic development. For example, the Department of Science and Technology focuses on 'high skills high knowledge' to ensure competitiveness in the economy:

To develop, coordinate and manage a national system of innovation that will bring about maximum human capital, sustainable economic growth and improved quality of life.⁶⁷

Similarly the Department of Labour has a strong focus on skills development and has had running battles with the Department of Education in its attempt to propagate closer alignment between education and training. The Department of Labour focused on the development of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) which gave form, structure and credence to its skills development strategy and aims:

To provide an institutional framework to devise and implement national, sector and workplace strategies to develop and improve the skills of the South African workforce... to provide for learnerships that lead to recognised occupational qualifications; to provide for the financing of skills development by means of a levy-grant scheme and a National Skills Fund; to provide for and regulate employment services; and to provide for matters connected therewith.⁶⁸

The skills and development focus is also strongly supported by the corporate sector. A study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) showed that the

⁶⁷ Department of Science and Technology website – www.dst.gov.za/about.us.

⁶⁸ Skills Development Act, Department of Labour Website – www.Labour.gov.za/downloads/legislation/acts/skills-development-act.

business sector is calling for higher education that integrates more directly with workplace skills (Kruss, 2002).

Clearly policy on curriculum is broad in its attempt to be inclusive, making it open to a wide variety of interpretations at the implementation level. Badat (2003:28) suggests that “achieving a workable balance between institutional self-regulation and central prescription is critical to the survival of the institution in this period” (Badat, 2003:28). As a result, this broad policy framework has resulted in the emergence of competing curriculum discourses in the South African implementation environment,⁶⁹ as South African institutions (Ensor, 2004) interpret policy in the context of political, economic and institutional constraints (Ensor, 2004; Kraak, 2004).

5.5 Wits Policy Framework: Between the Traditional and the Contemporary

5.5.1 Tensions between new and old curriculum discourses

The university’s response to the policy environment mirrors the tensions between the economic, political and performance imperatives evident at the national policy level, but is even further complicated by the institution’s liberal legacy.

Since its inception Wits has prided itself on the fact that it operated within a liberal education tradition that promoted the search for knowledge in an environment that was relatively free from the influences of outside forces (Murray, 1997). This is based on the assumption that academic work is an end in itself and requires no further justification (Ulliyatt, 2004). This approach is substantially different to the new context, which places significant pressure on the institution to become responsive to the changing political, social and economic environment.

In response, the institution indicated that it could no longer operate as it had in the past and that the new context requires it to “read the signs of change and adjust accordingly”.⁷⁰ Wits therefore acknowledged that “transformation is a national

⁶⁹ These discourses are listed below; however, for detailed descriptions of these refer to Chapter Two.

⁷⁰ Framework for academic restructuring, 2000, University of the Witwatersrand. S2000/125. p. 1.

imperative and is essential if we are to achieve excellence”.⁷¹ In accordance with this acknowledgement of the need to change, the institution embarked on an extensive reform process. This began with efforts to develop new mission and vision statements as well as overall organisational strategies to respond to the changing environment. The first step was drafting the *Shaping the Future* document under the leadership of Vice Chancellor Prof Colin Bundy, to *Shaping the Future II* under Prof Norma Reid, and the *Into the Future* document which was premised on transformation.⁷² This was followed by *Wits 2010: A University to Call Our Own* and its associated strategic plan known as *Wits 2010*, aimed at guiding Wits through this decade. In addition a range of documents which explicitly state the academic aims and values, principles of teaching and learning, and quality assurance principles were developed.⁷³

The key transformation thrust is about being responsible and accountable to society and society’s needs:

Engagement,⁷⁴ for the University of the Witwatersrand, means an active, committed, co-operative, creative, innovative and mutually beneficial interaction that advances public good, with individuals, groups and entities outside⁷⁵ of the University, in any sector of society.⁷⁶

Furthermore:

... Sustaining the transformation of the country and ensuring the development of the democracy and economy requires active, engaged intellectual leadership from the higher education sector. Successful democracies are characterised by strong higher education systems.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Into the future: transforming Wits, 2004, University of the Witwatersrand. p. 1.

⁷² HEQC, draft self-evaluation report, 2006.

⁷³ [www.wits.ac.za/registrars desk](http://www.wits.ac.za/registrars%20desk), 2006.

⁷⁴ A workshop held in March of this year has sought to articulate this position in much more detail. A document will emerge shortly and will form part of the overall pack of commitments of the university. This section is thus unavoidably vague at this stage but is indisputably central to the vision being described.

⁷⁵ Commitment to these kinds of relationships within the university is equally important; it is not possible to be externally engaged unless internal relationships are well managed.

⁷⁶ Wits 2010. A university to call our own, 2005, University of the Witwatersrand. FJC/2005.

⁷⁷ Wits 2010. A university to call our own, 2005, University of the Witwatersrand. FJC/2005. p. 1.

Wits goes on to specify that this means responding “to a wider range of developmental priorities and intellectual traditions, to achieve greater equity and transform the culture of the institution to support student success and to ensure that the institution becomes efficient in order to locate competitively within the global context”.⁷⁸ Therefore, Wits advocates the strengthening of its relationship with society, underpinned by conceptions of responsiveness.

Despite Wits’ commitment to transform, however, there is an acknowledgement that this cannot be done in isolation of its own history and legacies. Therefore, it supports a transformation strategy that takes cognisance of its own values and principles and does not merely succumb to external pressures. It also acknowledges that in some instances traditional liberal ethos⁷⁹ associated with the university makes it difficult to adjust to this changing environment.⁸⁰ Thus the key academic values that underpin its policies include:

- academic freedom;
- independent enquiry and trust;
- depth of knowledge and value of thought;
- national and internal comparability;
- community engagement and social responsiveness;
- inclusivity and responsiveness;
- intellectual integrity.⁸¹

These values reflect the complexity of trying to balance the demands of society with institutional culture.

⁷⁸ Wits 2010. A university to call our own, 2005, University of the Witwatersrand. FJC/2005.

⁷⁹ Ulliyatt (2004) indicates that two assumptions underpin this liberal ethos: knowledge is an end in itself, and higher education should not be judged against business models.

⁸⁰ Into the future: transforming Wits, 2004, University of the Witwatersrand. Document 2. p.16.

⁸¹ The university’s academic aims and values, 2005, University of the Witwatersrand. S2005. p. 2.

The following sections discuss these complexities through three key thrusts that underpin the Wits policy framework – access and equity, responsiveness, and efficiency.

5.5.2 Access and equity: a high priority

Wits policies suggest that that issues of access and redress form the core of its transformation programme.

Although transformation is multi-dimensional, its primary aim, in the South African context, is to seek to redress, consciously and proactively, centuries of colonialism followed by decades of apartheid.⁸²

It recognises that university education in South Africa was premised on unequal opportunity, exclusion and preferential treatment based on race and gender divisions. On this basis it suggests that it has a moral as well as an ethical obligation to proactively and systematically address the legacy of apartheid.⁸³

In order to achieve this, Wits developed a wide range of policies and strategies to “break decisively with past discriminatory practices”.⁸⁴ First, the Wits mission statement strongly advocates an inclusive institutional culture with which all students and staff can identify. It promotes social inclusion, anti-racism, anti-sexism, tolerance and diversity. It also promotes the active participation of students and staff in all aspects of the institution and aims to create “an enabling environment through the provision of well resourced, well-maintained and friendly campuses”.⁸⁵ It acknowledges that the institution has not always represented a home for diverse communities who felt marginalised at Wits and that such an exclusionary culture will no longer be tolerated.

⁸² Into the future: transforming Wits, 2004, University of the Witwatersrand. Document 2. p. 1.

⁸³ Into the future: transforming Wits, 2004, University of the Witwatersrand. Document 2. p. 1.

⁸⁴ Into the future: transforming Wits, 2004, University of the Witwatersrand. Document 2. p. 1.

⁸⁵ Mission statement, 2006, Online: www.wits.ac.za.

A number of studies have shown that black people and women, particularly amongst our staff, still feel a sense of alienation on this campus. This is because the institutional culture at Wits is still predominantly white male and Eurocentric. If we do not address the fact that so many people have negative perceptions of and experiences at Wits, we may achieve structural transformation but this will be superficial and unsustainable.⁸⁶

In response, several institutional culture surveys were commissioned to inform the development of an inclusive institutional culture “to which all could belong”.⁸⁷ The cultural project, one of the key transformation projects, is focused on celebrating diversity through promoting a ‘one campus, many cultures’ campaign and focusing on the educational value of diversity.⁸⁸

Second, the institution developed several key documents to take forward its mission statement. This included the Wits 2010 document, the new admissions policy, the employment equity policies, the language policy, the policy on sexual and racial discrimination, the policy on disability and on HIV/AIDS.⁸⁹ This is supported by a wide range of structures set up to oversee change, including the Throughput Committee, the Transformation Task Team and the Transformation Office. To support the realisation of policy, Wits has initiated several key programmes and projects.

In terms of support in the teaching and learning arena, Wits acknowledged that it needed to improve its success rates by transforming its curriculum and teaching practices. In terms of curriculum, Wits calls for a curriculum that is relevant to student interests and also links to local, national and African concerns. Furthermore, it calls for pedagogy that is innovative and supportive of the diversity of student needs and for a range of assessment tools that go beyond once-off examinations. Wits has instituted a range of formal and non-formal programmes to provide access. It has introduced academic development and support programmes, which have taken various forms over

⁸⁶ Into the future: transforming Wits, 2004, University of the Witwatersrand. p. 3.

⁸⁷ Report of the institutional culture survey, 2002, University of the Witwatersrand; institutional surveys, 1986 and 1998.

⁸⁸ Into the future: transforming Wits, 2004, University of the Witwatersrand.

⁸⁹ Report of the institutional culture survey, 2002, University of the Witwatersrand.

time.⁹⁰ This included formal programmes based in the faculties as well as less formal skills development opportunities.

While Wits Policies suggest that it has made significant strides to provide access to historically disadvantaged communities, there is disagreement about the extent to which new efficiency imperatives hinder student access. Central to the access debate is pressure to increase access as well as success. As is well known, the throughput rate in South African higher education is extremely low and has declined even more over the past decade. This is further complicated by the fact that throughput rates are lower for black students. The quality audit report indicated that while Wits has a good track record in admitting black students, currently disproportionate numbers of Black (especially African) students do not complete their studies. Therefore,

... while Africans make up some 48% of enrolments, they account for some 64% of exclusions. There is a distressing gap in the academic performance of students that reflects the racial fault lines of our society... reflecting as it does the inheritance of broader social inequalities, but pointing also to inadequate strategies within the University to remedy this trend.⁹¹

This is further complicated by the fact that while Wits promotes access it also promotes high performance or excellence. Therefore, while Wits policies advocate for a social justice agenda to redress the past imbalances, it also continues to promote the high performance approach which is linked to its traditional liberal ethos. In fact, a study on institutional culture and throughput found that while Wits has both performance-driven as well as competence-driven curriculum approaches, performance-based approaches are dominant.⁹²

5.5.3 A multifaceted conception of societal responsiveness

While Wits policies show that it is heavily invested in becoming more economically and socio-politically responsive, there is also an attempt to balance this with a

⁹⁰ Draft academic development programme, 1992, University of the Witwatersrand. These faculty-based programmes are extended programmes – for example, four years for a three-year degree and five years for a four-year degree. These programmes are being phased out.

⁹¹ Wits HEQC quality audit, 2006. Self-evaluation report.

⁹² Performance-based approaches are informed by individual academic achievement, and high-achieving and highly competitive learning environments, while competence pedagogies are informed by providing a supportive environment, recognising different learning styles, and so on. This is drawn from Bernstein's (2000) notion of pedagogy.

traditional academic approach. Much like national policy, Wits policy foregrounds a broad notion of societal responsiveness within the context of its traditional liberal practices.

A university operates in the context of what is often termed a 'knowledge society'. The knowledge economy requires high-level intellectual, industrial, technical, business and management skills, and universities are expected to train for this economy. In the South African context, universities are further expected to train for the particular challenges presented by our development needs and to overcome the legacies of apartheid. These demands shape our curricula in particular ways.⁹³

However, it is evident that the notion of responsiveness is more intricately linked to the skills discourse.

'Wits must take account of patterns of student enrolment, the job market and competition within higher education.'⁹⁴

As with national policy, Wits Policies also privilege science, technology and professional programmes. This is reinforced in several key documents such as *A Wits to call our own*, the strategic plan and the audit. For instance, Wits refers to five strategic priorities which include the commitment to high level and scarce skills, referring to science engineering and technology.⁹⁵ The audit indicates that close to 50% of Wits graduates are in the science, engineering and technology disciplines, with a strong focus on the professional disciplines.⁹⁶ In fact, a policy document suggests that "Wits should now build upon areas of distinctive quality. Especially when national priorities are taken into account, this implies strengthening engineering, natural sciences, health sciences and commercial and management sciences".⁹⁷ To this effect Wits set aside R351 million to upgrade facilities mainly dedicated to science and technology, which

⁹³ Wits HEQC quality audit, 2006. Self-evaluation report. p. 268.

⁹⁴ Framework for academic restructuring, 2000, University of the Witwatersrand. S2000/125. p. 8.

⁹⁵ Wits 2010. *A university to call our own*, 2005, University of the Witwatersrand. S2005/204A.

⁹⁶ Wits HEQC quality audit, 2006. Self-evaluation report. p. 81.

⁹⁷ Framework for academic restructuring, 2000, University of the Witwatersrand. S2000/125.

includes upgrading teaching, laboratory and computer facilities.⁹⁸ This clearly reflects the strong leaning toward professional and skills-based discourses.

Furthermore, even though the skills-based discourse is focused largely on economic concerns, it also links the economic development discourse to the social justice discourse by suggesting that economic development will provide access and equity:

In the South African context, universities are further expected to train for the particular challenges presented by our development needs and to overcome the legacies of apartheid.⁹⁹

The need for the intellectual priorities of the University to be responsive to a wider range of developmental priorities and intellectual traditions. The research agendas and curricula of institutions like Wits need to take advantage of the new funding opportunities afforded by the state, and be responsive to the development imperatives of the country and the developing world more broadly....¹⁰⁰

In addition to the labour market and development agenda, the policies also refer to socio-political responsiveness and make mention of the need for playing a role in developing citizenship¹⁰¹ and participating in public intellectual discourse by “making available academic expertise in the public domain; the practice of public scholarship, notably in the media, humanities and arts, but also in other fields of study....”¹⁰²

Clearly Wits foregrounds responsiveness as a curriculum reform imperative. However, this is occurring in the context of its traditional liberal legacy which supports non-utilitarian discourses, particularly in the Humanities. As a result the Wits policies also refer to the need to continue non-utilitarian curriculum practices. To this effect Wits refers to ensuring support for basic research and a focus on educating and not training.

⁹⁸ Vuvuzela, 2007. Weekly publication by Wits University Journalism and Media Studies students. 12 October 2007.

⁹⁹ Wits HEQC quality audit, 2006. Self-evaluation report. p. 268.

¹⁰⁰ Wits HEQC quality audit, 2006. Self-evaluation report, p. 22.

¹⁰¹ Into the future: transforming Wits, 2004, University of the Witwatersrand, p. 5.

¹⁰² Wits HEQC quality audit, 2006. Self-evaluation report, p. 269.

A Wits education thus seeks to develop students' ... love of learning which in turn should equip them for the long term engagement with society ... beyond the provision of skills and immediate employment... Staff and students are expected to value thought and knowledge....¹⁰³

Even though Wits policies are very similar to national policy, unlike like national policy Wits has little or no explicit focus on conceptions of citizenship and nation building. Perhaps this is because that is implied within there policies. For instance, efforts to promote public scholarship will certainly promote democracy and citizenship. At another level, Wits strongly supports the development of independent and critical thinking which is central to effective participation in and consolidation of democratic practices. It must be noted that while national policy calls for the promotion of critical thinking to deepen democracy, Wits' support for critical thinking has more to do with its liberal education tradition.

In its effort to balance the needs of society and respond appropriately to national imperatives for change, the institution is torn between its liberal past and its utilitarian future,¹⁰⁴ which results in tensions as faculties try to grapple with what this means for curriculum. This is particularly difficult for some sectors of the Faculty of Humanities as the skills and vocationally-based approach is not easily integrated with its traditional theoretical and disciplinary-based approaches.

5.5.4 Efficiency and performance

As stated earlier, government has tightened its control over universities through introducing instruments to steer them toward performativity. Wits' response indicates that in general there is an alignment between the national efficiency agenda and that of the university.

Wits has accepted the need to develop a more efficient and cost-effective way of operating and has introduced a range of policies to assist in this regard. This is partly the result of the new control strategy by government which leaves institutions with less

¹⁰³ The university's academic aims and values: a commitment to scholarship, 2005. University of the Witwatersrand, S2005. p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with R Bagus, Department of Psychology, Wits, 30 August 2006. Institutional culture survey. CHE research study.

space to make their own decisions, resulting in their compliance. However, this is also the result of Wits' need to survive and succeed in the new socio-political and economic climate. Wits policies, therefore, reflect a willing accommodation of efficiency and performativity discourses evident in their new planning, financial and quality assurance approaches.

First, Wits University has increased its focus on planning over the past ten years, which is evident through the increased resources allocated to these issues as well as the planning and quality assurance policies and processes that have been developed during this period. The planning regime was introduced to support a more streamlined and efficient operation and was also a response to the external policy environment – for example, the Department of Education's requirement of a three-year rolling plan.¹⁰⁵ Previously Wits' approach to planning was based on a more loosely structured style which gave significant autonomy to academic units to decide on key curriculum and research strategies – that is, what and how to teach. However, more structured planning efforts began as far back as the 1980s, but failed because the Wits community did not support them. Attempts to write a strategic plan were met with significant opposition and did not 'get off the ground'. Furthermore, the mission project developed in the 1990s as well as a major planning exercise conducted in 1994-1995 was not implemented due to tensions within the institution¹⁰⁶ and what may be perceived as an anti-planning culture¹⁰⁷ associated with liberal education traditions. Despite these setbacks, the institution continued to place significant efforts and resources toward the development of an institutional plan. The first director of strategic planning was appointed in 1998 and the first ever university strategic plan was approved by the Senate in 1999.¹⁰⁸ This period marked a shift toward an increased

¹⁰⁵ The planning regime coincided with the requirement to develop the first three-year rolling plan, 1999-2001. University of the Witwatersrand. S98/1825A.

¹⁰⁶ Framework for academic restructuring, 2000, University of the Witwatersrand. S2000/125.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with F. Coughlan, Head of strategic planning, Wits, 1 June 2005.

¹⁰⁸ Proposal for a review of the Wits 2001 academic and support restructuring project, 2004, University of Witwatersrand. C2004/602.

focus on more tightly knit co-ordination and planning, which culminated in several strategic and academic plans.¹⁰⁹

Second, Wits committed to the development of quality assurance policies. The new academic planning requirements led to the setting up of the Academic Planning and Development Unit that was established in 2003. This unit was set up to drive the implementation of the quality assurance policy set out by the South African Qualifications Authority. The level of structure and prescription in this approach situates academic planning within a performance-based approach to higher education. Whereas previously the institution implemented quality assurance measures through research output, peer review mechanisms and external examination processes, the new approach is more tightly structured with specific requirements such as programme goals and outcomes, number of notional hours assigned for courses and length of face-to-face components. The institution believes that this approach is more systematised and allows for Wits to articulate and measure its performance more effectively.¹¹⁰

Third, Wits instituted a financial policy which is reflective of a performativity agenda and instrumental discourse. With the reduction of state funding of higher education, institutions across the globe are finding new ways of dealing with their budget shortfalls. Strategies include seeking a higher level of third-stream income generation, outsourcing and the use of market-based efficiency approaches to assess viability of programmes.

In keeping with global trends, South African universities are experiencing a diminishing contribution from the state as a proportion of their revenues, and are needing to strengthen third-stream and fund-raising revenues, both to sustain recurrent operations as well as to enable discretionary spending for strategic purposes. This serves to emphasize the increasingly competitive higher education environment within the country, a situation exacerbated by South Africa's re-entry into the global higher education market, the internationalization of higher education, the emergence of quality assurance regimes, and the growth of the private higher education sector.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ See section 4, Wits policy framework, for details.

¹¹⁰ Improving quality, 2005, University of the Witwatersrand. S2005.

¹¹¹ Wits HEQC quality audit. Self-evaluation report. 2006. University of the Witwatersrand. p. 22.

It is clear that Wits has undergone a significant transformation process to create financial stability and respond to efficiency pressures located in national policy frameworks.¹¹² A key element of this strategy is to introduce a cost benefit analysis model to assess divisions, courses or programme viability.¹¹³ The implementation of the Budgeting and Resource Allocation model (BARAT) is one of the key instruments used in this process. This model is based on an expenditure and income allocation for each faculty as a separate business unit, a common practice in most corporate institutions.

.. Amongst other influences were the trends towards outsourcing non-core functions such as services, and of greater de-centralisation to (in Wits' case) faculties and schools with a model, named the BARAT model (Budgeting And Resource Allocation Model), proposed as a way to distribute the income of the University to Faculties and then from Faculties to Schools.¹¹⁴

This provides a basis for making curriculum decisions that are financially viable. Thus staff-student ratios as well as financial viability of schools, departments and programmes become increasingly important in making curriculum decisions. For example, the pressure to ensure that programmes break even financially can result in pressure to increase class sizes which in turn affects curriculum trends.

The technical data should inform (but not dictate) every decision: the implications of sustaining programmes and departments which cannot be justified in terms of income/costs must be squarely faced.¹¹⁵

This approach is underpinned by principles of managerialism:

¹¹² Wits HEQC quality audit. Self-evaluation report. 2006. University of the Witwatersrand.

¹¹³ Wits HEQC audit and shaping the future.

¹¹⁴ HEQC quality audit. Self-evaluation report. 2006. University of the Witwatersrand. p. 14.

¹¹⁵ Framework for academic restructuring, 2000, University of the Witwatersrand. S 2000/125.

The university's approach to funding is that of devolved cost centres, where all faculties pay the centre for services rendered. A general trend in this regard reflects the rise of managerialism, increasing centralisation of the budget, increasing dissemination of cost downwards to cost centres and absorption of profits to the centre, and the pressure to garner third stream income to the university deficit.¹¹⁶

This model has met with significant opposition from faculties, which has hampered its implementation; the Senior Executive Team is currently reassessing it against the 'taxation' model (although there is nothing as formal as a review in place).¹¹⁷

Despite the fact that Wits developed a cost benefit analysis approach to funding faculties, it continued to support cross-subsidisation in an attempt to ensure that financially vulnerable divisions and programmes survive.

How do these policies affect curriculum? : Implementing efficiency and performance-driven policies affects the ways in which curriculum decisions are made. Thus cost effectiveness can become an increasingly important criterion in determining the worth of curriculum. Furthermore, the planning and quality assurance culture encourages technical and technicist approaches to curriculum by focusing on measurable aspects of curriculum such as notional hours. In addition, quality assurance mechanisms can affect the extent to which academics have control over what they teach and how they teach. On the other hand, these measures can also improve accountability and make explicit what constitutes quality curriculum.

5.6 Conclusion

Both the national and Wits policy context are underpinned by struggles of contestation between competing curriculum change discourses. National policy reflects an attempt to combine access, responsiveness and efficiency, which results in tensions between neo-liberal (emphasis on efficiency and utility) and social justice curriculum discourses (emphasis on access and equity). The Wits policy framework is an attempt to reconcile the demands of society with those of its own institutional culture. Thus in the case of Wits there is an attempt to reconcile the demands of social justice, neo-liberal as well

¹¹⁶ Interview, Prof. Bunn, Head of School of Arts, interviewed at Wits on 29 March 2006.

¹¹⁷ Wits HEQC quality audit. Self-evaluation report. 2006. University of the Witwatersrand.

liberal curriculum discourses. On the one hand policy documents refer to issues of access and equity, societal responsiveness and efficiency. In general, these all focus on strengthening the relationship between Wits and society, propagating both economic and social justice discourses. On the other hand the policy focuses on those values that are integral to the institutional culture, which includes a focus on the value of knowledge and love for learning, propagating its traditional liberal curriculum discourse.

Wits' interpretation of policy has several possible implications for curriculum. First, it must be noted that in an attempt to respond to a range of external pressures, Wits policies do not reflect one clear direction. This makes interpretation at the implementation level complex and challenging. For instance, Wits advocates a high-performance models as well as a competence or support-driven model of teaching and learning, which results in struggles at the site of curriculum development. Similarly, while Wits strongly advocates societal responsiveness, it also supports basic disciplinary curriculum and research approaches, which creates challenges at the implementation level. Second, its programmes are subjected to stringent financial analysis and this places pressure on programmes with low enrolments to change their curriculum and attract more students in order to break even. Third, the nature of curriculum is affected by the introduction of efficiency and technical approaches which could result in complexities as this approach is not always compatible with its traditional liberal approach.

The next chapter explores the drivers of curriculum change in the Faculty of Humanities.

CHAPTER SIX

STEERING AND CONTROL: NEW MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND CURRICULUM REFORM

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between emerging management practices and curriculum reform at the University of the Witwatersrand. In particular, this chapter explores ways in which new management practices at the institution affect conceptions of knowledge in the Faculty of Humanities. The discussion focuses on two key questions: What are the new management practices at Wits? What is the relationship between these new management practices and curriculum reform in the Faculty of Humanities?

This chapter argues that Wits has embraced new managerialist practices which have implications for academic identity and curriculum reform. New management practices have resulted in an increased focus on performance-based management of academic entities, through the use of key efficiency and productivity instruments. These practices are facilitated through new and existing layers of administrators and managers, and have a significant effect on the academic culture of the institution. Managerialism can also be linked to pressures to transform the curriculum and often favour technicist discourses. This chapter focuses on the notion of institutional steering and interference in the context of academic identity and curriculum change.

6.2 Conceptual Framework: Steering and Interference

The discussion in this chapter draws on models of state co-ordination and control of higher education institutions as well as resource dependency theories. These concepts are critical manifestations of new managerialist practices in the sector and are therefore pertinent to a discussion on the relationship between new management practices and curriculum reform.

Managerialism is rapidly becoming the dominant management practice in both public and private higher education institutions across the globe. It is occupied with concerns of economic rationalism and “unrelenting faith in market economies” to serve all aspects of our lives (Johnson, 2005:41). It is this faith in the market approach that has resulted in its permeation into the higher education sector (Deem, 2001:7). Initially managerialism served as a short-term response to financial challenges experienced by universities (Neave, 1988:7); however, it has now assumed a long term strategic thrust. This is the result of society making increasing demands on higher education, while governments continue to reduce their investment in the sector (Deem, 2001:9). This is associated with significant financial strain on institutions, which in turn respond to reduce this strain (Moore, 2003). As a result, public institutions have adopted the practices and values of private sector companies in the hope of becoming sustainable (Deem, 2001:9). This includes an emphasis on efficiency, accountability and performativity in tertiary systems (Larner & Le Horn, 2005, Maassen, 2000). This not only affects the management and financial strategies of institutions but also their organisational cultures (Neave, 1988:16), disrupting “established patterns of institutional organisation and behaviour” (Larner & Horn, 2005:12). Key features of managerialism include steering through finance and performativity measures, down-sizing, decentralisation, customer focus, performance management and results orientation (Bleiklie & 2004).

One of the key manifestations of new managerialist practices is the changing mode of co-ordination and control of higher education. While these concepts were initially developed to explore state-institution relationships, in this chapter they are used to explore relationships between the institution and academic units (academic identity and curriculum). There are generally three key models that define the relationship between the State and higher education: control, interference and steering (CHE, 2008, Gornitzka, 1999) Control refers to states that tightly manage and determine the direction, strategies and agendas of higher education institutions (Maassen & Cloete, 2002:19). Steering focuses on managing institutions from a distance through the use of a range of performance-based instruments (Maassen & Cloete, 2002:20). This means that governments do not micro manage universities; instead their role is one of oversight (Kickert, 2005). Steering generally entails the use of explicit and visible

performance measurement requirements which institutions have to meet. This approach is embedded in surveillance and self-monitoring strategies. The nature and extent of steering can vary from weak to strong. Interference refers to states that meddle in the everyday affairs of institutions as and when they deem it necessary (CHE, 2008:18). It must be noted that the boundaries between these categories are not always clearly demarcated. For instance, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between strong steering and interference.

For the purposes of this chapter, the concepts of steering and interference will be used to explore the relationship between managerialism and the academic endeavour in the Faculty of Humanities at Wits. Steering refers to the institution's use of performance instruments to manage its entities. This approach is underpinned by some level of distance from the curriculum decision-making process, while using performance as a means of strong persuasion to transform. Interference refers to the institution's direct involvement in curriculum decision making.

In addition to the concepts of steering and interference, the notion of resource dependency is also used to locate the discussion in this chapter. Resource dependency theories suggest that institutions use resources as a means of steering higher education into new directions (Boyd, 1990). As stated previously, in a situation of resource scarcity, institutions or entities will shift in the direction that will alleviate the resource scarcity problem. Again, the notion of resource dependency theory used is not the traditional approach, which suggests that institutional action is determined only by its dependence on resources. This is too behaviouristic and does not take cognisance of the interplay between institutional values in such decision-making processes (Gornitzka, 1999). Therefore, a modified resource dependency theory will be used in this chapter, in which there is an interplay between resource dependency and institutional culture. Thus, for the purpose of this chapter, resource dependency will be used to examine the relationship between resource scarcity and institutional steering versus institutional interference.

6.3 Wits Embraces a New Management Regime

In line with practices everywhere, in the 2000s the University of the Witwatersrand acknowledged that it could no longer operate as it did a decade ago and that it needed to transform itself in order to compete within a global context. Previously, academic concerns took precedence over all other issues. In this traditional way of operating, it was assumed that the best people to run universities were academics who used academic criteria to guide their curriculum decisions (Larner & Horn, 2005:3). Therefore, academics controlled the curriculum and did not concern themselves with societal pressures until recently.

However, this situation has changed. Decisions about curriculum are no longer only the concern of academics but are affected by an array of non-academic factors.

[Universities] have been asked to look at ways to make themselves more financially viable and that is a huge pressure on academics that never had to think about that before. They never had to justify their existence, why am I teaching Philosophy, and now they have to think about what are the usable skills, what are the marketable skills. Why do I have to justify my costs, this is very unwelcoming for people who have always had the luxury to pursue academic study without these pressures. They never had to think about whether the marketplace wants graduates of Sociology¹¹⁸

This is informed by Wits' strategy to become more responsive to society, which is underpinned by an efficiency and productivity framework.¹¹⁹ Wits embarked on a three-pronged strategy to steer the institution toward greater efficiency and effectiveness, which has implications for curriculum reform practices. This strategy comprises three pillars: devolution, financial stringency and performance measurement.

First, Wits embarked on a major organisational restructuring exercise¹²⁰ between 1999 and 2001 that was underpinned by principles of cost effectiveness, service delivery, efficiency and usefulness. The key thrust of the restructuring process was to ensure the efficiency of the institution as a whole, to devolve powers and responsibilities to the

¹¹⁸ UCS2, 12 May 2005.

¹¹⁹ Shaping the future-strategic plan, 1999, University of the Witwatersrand. Also see Chapter Five, on policy.

¹²⁰ For details of the restructuring, see Chapter Five.

academic units, and to enhance academic innovation.¹²¹ This involved an extensive process to rationalise, and the number of faculties was reduced from nine to five; a total of 34 schools were clustered into these five faculties. The five faculties are Humanities, Science, Health Sciences, Engineering and the Built Environment, and Commerce, Law and Management. The Faculty of Humanities is divided into five schools – Social Sciences; Language and Literature; Human and Community Development; Arts; Education.

One of the key implications of restructuring the organisation was the transformation of the institution's management model. The rationalisation of faculties led to the establishment of new management structures in order to devolve powers and responsibilities to academic units.¹²² Wits not only increased its layers of management, it also redesigned the role of managers within the faculty. Previously, deans performed a caretaker role on a rotational basis and viewed themselves as more intricately linked to the academic project. Presently, deans are formally appointed and are required to perform an increasing number of administrative, financial and monitoring tasks, accounting to the Senior Executive Team and not merely to their academic colleagues (Johnson, 2005:21). Similarly, head of school is a newly established management position, introduced to manage the newly established entities called schools.¹²³ (Johnson, 2005:238). Heads of schools perform a largely administrative role and are also accountable to the Senior Management Team (executive plus deans). Under these circumstances both heads of schools and deans no longer provide academic leadership, but rather concentrate their efforts on filtering down the managerialist agenda (Johnson, 2005:236). This alters the nature of work of academic managers, which has implications for their identities.

This is no different to trends in universities throughout the world where managers are receiving increasing prominence within new organisational forms (Deem, 2001, Larner & Le Horn, 2005:1, Neave, 1988:48). For instance, trends in the USA and Europe show that professor and associate professor numbers have declined and that the

¹²¹ Framework for academic restructuring, 2005, University of the Witwatersrand. S 2005/125.

¹²² Into the future: transforming Wits, 2004, University of Witwatersrand. Document 2. p.16.

¹²³ This was aimed at creating a smaller number of larger entities instead of many small entities, and also at devolving responsibility to academic units.

numbers of administrative staff have increased since the 1990s (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002:9). Thus while traditionally universities had strong top and bottom structures, recently there has been an increase in the middle layer (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002:5). The new system of steering demands “new information from institutions, giving rise to new structures and patterns of authority” (Kogan, 2004, Neave, 1988:16). The explicit management of academic staff by administrative staff is becoming a common practice (Deem, 1998), with an increasing focus on leadership as a profession in itself.(Bleiklie & 2004).

Second, Wits introduced a more stringent financial model to ensure a more cost-effective and efficient organisation. This included setting financial targets, adopting a cost and income distribution model and limiting cross-subsidisation of faculties; it is supported by a strategy for achieving “operational efficiency and efficacy”.¹²⁴ This is in line with worldwide trends to steer institutions using fiscal and financial strategies. These strategies have become central to academic decision making by both government and the institutions themselves (Anderson, 2006:1). According to resource dependency theories, in challenging financial times institutions use financial instruments to steer the organisation toward financial sustainability. This fundamentally alters the way in which curriculum decisions are made and has implications for academic identity and curriculum reform practices.

Third, Wits introduced a performance management strategy which is driven by measurable outputs and outcomes.¹²⁵ The strategy is “broadly to improve research productivity, to improve postgraduate registration productivity, to improve student success. So this time around they are very much productivity driven....”¹²⁶

An integral component of the performance management strategy is the quality assurance process through which qualifications are approved and courses and departments are evaluated. In 2003, the Academic Planning Unit was set up to oversee and manage a quality assurance strategy for the university. This included conducting systematic evaluations of faculty activities through quinquennial reviews of schools

¹²⁴ Wits HEQC quality audit, self-evaluation report, 2006. p. 33.

¹²⁵ Wits HEQC quality audit, self-evaluation report, 2006. p. 301.

¹²⁶ UCS4, 1 June 2005.

already in existence in 2003, commissioning *ad hoc* reviews when required, and setting up and overseeing a process of course development.¹²⁷ This resulted in a new curriculum approval process which is significantly more technical than previously.¹²⁸ Firstly, the process has been extended and now requires the completion of several detailed forms, unlike previously where the paperwork was less intricate and relatively unimportant. Secondly, submissions have to be made for courses as well as programmes, and these have to pass through several bodies such as the Faculty Committee and the Academic Planning Unit. Thirdly, there are additional requirements for course and programme approvals. For instance, the inclusion of substantial technical details such as outcomes, contact hours, notional hours and estimated costs that were not associated with traditional curriculum approaches, have become part of the course and programme development process.¹²⁹

The Wits managerialist approach combines financial and performance management strategies ‘intended’ to transform the university into a high performing, globally competitive institution. This approach is facilitated by new management structures and is underpinned by technicist discourses. Performance measurement represents a key managerialist strategy for steering higher education toward a more efficient and effective operating model. This is informed by notions of visibility in performance measurement, often referred to as calculative practices (Larner and Le Horn, 2005:843-863). This includes a focus on the explicit and quantitative nature of the evaluative approach and encouraging the ranking of individuals, departments and institutions, which is fairly technicist in nature (Henkel, 2004). This has implications for academic identity and curriculum reform, and is highly contested within the institution.

¹²⁷ Wits HEQC quality audit, self-evaluation report, 2006.

¹²⁸ This is not only the result of university changes but is also informed by changes in the state’s qualifications framework.

¹²⁹ Approval process for a course and guidelines for completing the proposal, Wits intranet site: <http://intranet.wits.ac.za/Academic/APO/AcademicDevelopments.htm>.

6.4 Managerialism and the Academic Project

6.4.1 *New management trends at Wits*

As stated above, new management practices adopted at Wits have implications for both academic identity and curriculum reform. In terms of academic identity, they alter the ways in which academics operate, which in turn affects their focus on academic work. In terms of curriculum, it encourages curriculum decisions that are based on finances, efficiency and measurable performance, which engenders a technicist curriculum discourse that is antithesis to traditional practices in universities. The two quotations below epitomise the opposing perspectives on curriculum reform and managerialist practices within the institution:

I think that a progressive institution with all the right values should also care about accountability, efficiency and whatever. So people aren't going to box me into some managerialist's thing because I am anxious about whether our masters courses have enough students.¹³⁰

I think that to a large extent the restructuring has been underpinned by an important shift in mindset, underpinned, to put it bluntly, by neo-liberal ideas, that has turned students into clients and has turned us into part of a conveyor belt, which I think has internationally, and here, seriously imperilled the intellectual endeavours.¹³¹

6.4.2 *Managerialism and academic identity*

This section argues that managerialism has far-reaching consequences for traditional academic cultures and academic identities because it reconstitutes the roles of academics. While there are many theories of identity (essentialists or liberal individualist), social theories of identity are best suited to an understanding of academic identity. Social theories of identity are characterised by the relationship between the individual and the community (Henkel, 2005:156), which offers a comprehensive lens through which to locate conceptions of academic identity. For the purposes of this study, community refers to the disciplinary community, the institution and society. Traditionally, academic identities were defined largely by the practices, cultures and values of the disciplines in which they operated. Today, however, academics are defined by a complex interplay between their disciplines, institutions and society. These

¹³⁰ HM4, 14 March 2006.

¹³¹ HSS1, 8 March 2007.

identities are “reinforced and shaped by strong and stable communities and the social processes generated within them” (Henkel, 2005:137). Academic identity is strongest within the “context of strong classification and the maintenance of strong boundaries” that “protect spaces between groups...” (Henkel, 2005:158).¹³² This situation changes when boundaries between communities are weakened. For centuries the roles and responsibilities of academics were clearly differentiated from the roles of others within the institution. Academic behaviour and practices were informed by their disciplines. They were also viewed as experts in their field and had strong control over their research and teaching agendas and spent all their time on their core business. This is no longer the case as the roles of academics have recently become more ill-defined. This is the result of globalisation, which brought with it fragmentation and dislocation that challenge existing notions of identity (Henkel, 2005:167). It is also informed by postmodern conceptions of identity that are complex and multi-layered. Today academics are associated with management, administration and fund-raising functions and also have associations with industry as well as other disciplines. All of this has reconstituted their identities.

6.4.3 The rise of the administrative academic

Managerialism affects both the workload and the nature of academic work, which has a bearing on notions of academic identity. Increased administrative workload is one of the key effects of new performativity-driven managerial approaches in higher education. This has implications for academics, who must now serve as managers as well as academics in non-managerial positions.

Previously, academic managers viewed themselves primarily as academics; however, with the emergence of managerialist strategies, academic managers are reconstituting their identities (Henkel, 2004). They are consolidating their power in managing entities rather than in academic work. Bourdieu argues that actors are positioned within society as a result of different forms of symbolic capital. Portes (1998) and Deem (2006) suggest that managers are investing social rather than intellectual capital as they did previously.

¹³² Henkel refers to Bernstein's (1971) notion of classification.

Now, because of the way in which their role is structured, they are accountable to the management of the university and not to their academic peers. Therefore, their aspirations are going to be in line with managerial aspirations and not an academic aspiration. So the roles are – it's about how the roles are constructed as well. Over and above, I suppose, the sentiments and aspirations and the socialisation.... Just the way in which the role is constructed....¹³³

I think that university has too many senior academics in managerial positions who are not playing an academic role any longer and I think that's both unaffordable (part of why we are under a financial squeeze), but I think it's also a very bad usage of academic resources and would like to see it return to the situation it was previously where academics, even managerial situations, played a dual role.... Whereas I think that not only do they no longer have much of an academic profile, but deans no longer have much of an academic profile, heads of schools no longer have much of a profile and I think that's all wrong. There are too many academics playing a managerial role.¹³⁴

¹³³ HM5, 22 March 2006.

¹³⁴ HM3, 15 February 2006.

This new management approach does not only affect managers who are academics, but it also affects the entire academic community. Research indicates that the increased workload and the nature of work are the most important factors contributing to academic dissatisfaction (Anderson, 2006:580). This situation is no different at Wits, where academics are extremely unhappy about the fact that their workload has increased substantially. The Wits case suggests that the increased student numbers and reduced financial support result in staff being stretched too far, which compromises the quality of their academic work:

... I co-ordinate Development Studies which is supposed to be a 50% post but actually is a 150% post... the other 50% is in History. And then of course, I mean, History Workshop work doesn't count as part of my work load. But I do quite a lot of History Workshop stuff as well.¹³⁵

My wife has a management position... and she is willing to give it up because the bureaucratic and administrative pressures on her are so profound that she is unable to do research any more.... It's inconceivable that I could carry on with the level of administrative and reporting demand. It's not possible to do research under these circumstances....¹³⁶

The shift toward managerialist strategies has not only affected the workload of academics but also the nature of their work. Not only is there an increased workload as a result of efficiency measures, there is also an increase in particular kinds of work:

... this new system has altered the role of academic vis-a-vis administration, ...during this process of the alteration of roles administration has been able to push off all their work, devolve all the administration work (I suppose because they don't want to employ more people to do administrative work) to the schools. So you have people in disciplines being continually overloaded with work and [they] have less and less time for academic endeavour and still they are pressurised into doing research.¹³⁷

This administrative workload is inextricably linked to the performativity strategy adopted at Wits:

¹³⁵ HSS1, 8 March 2007.

¹³⁶ HM6, 29 March 2006.

¹³⁷ HM5, 22 March 2006.

We have also been audited three times in the last year on three of our courses. We've had reviews ... we've had integration ... you name it. We were going to combine with the Commerce faculty, we were going to combine with management, we were part of the faculty, we weren't,... I just think that leadership in general is absolutely being bombarded. So you just find your feet, you're absolutely under pressure, and then you've got to spend three months preparing an audit.¹³⁸

In addition to departmental and faculty audits, academics are constantly being bombarded with some kind of review. The Faculty of Humanities has undergone several reviews and audits since 2001. This included the restructuring process, a review of the faculty, a review of Social Work, a review of the College and School of Education, a review of the Music Department, and the 2005 budget review process.¹³⁹

This includes an over-bureaucratized quality assurance process that has been put in place within the institution:

We find the academic planning process and the production of new academic development completely exhausting. Just in terms of institutional culture, I would say, I spent quite a few years at UWC [University of the Western Cape] and I would say that it is twice as difficult to get through an innovative curriculum reform at the University at Witwatersrand than at UWC. A good example would be the introduction of a new course at postgraduate level. I teach at the University of Chicago every second year.... They let me teach whatever I want. ... There's far less trust at most South African universities.¹⁴⁰

This is viewed with resentment by academics who believe that this shift has resulted in academics performing trivial and meaningless work which undermines the academic project:

... They are looking for outputs that are not necessarily in line and in synchrony with what academics have always strived for. So I've got to check here that people do x number of hours of teaching in proportion to x number of hours of committee work and stuff like that. I trained in Psychology, I spent eight to nine years training, and I am doing work that some Standard Six child can do.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ HED7, 22 February 2006.

¹³⁹ Report on the Faculty of Humanities review, 2006, University of the Witwatersrand. S2006/2573. p. 13.

¹⁴⁰ HM6, 29 March 2006.

¹⁴¹ HM5, 22 March 2006.

But I think they are often penny wise but pound foolish. Either they're trying to regulate ... for us to rent a car, there's this massive paperwork ... so that they can control it and save R150 maybe....¹⁴²

... around the relative importance that is accorded to the academic programmes versus to the administrative programmes of the university. And that is having an impact everywhere, in our disciplines, what its meaning is ... It's inconceivable that I could carry on with the level of administrative and reporting demand ... these kinds of things have had an impact on the way people perceive the academic project¹⁴³

A lot of the issues were issues to do with ... record keeping, meetings.... Very few of them were to do with the academic project at all.¹⁴⁴

In addition to the fact that academics are unhappy about unrealistic workloads and the changing nature of work, they are constantly under pressure to deliver in this situation and are made to feel as if they are not performing. This is quite a blow for academics who have worked independently and without the need for coercion and surveillance for decades (Ashcroft, 2003:1). The literature suggests that academics are reporting high levels of dissatisfaction and exhaustion with the increased levels of accountability and quality assurance approaches (Anderson, 2006: 582).

Clearly managerialist practices have implications for academic identity, which in turn affects curriculum. First, academics have been obliged to justify their existence by externally verifying means. Thus they have to justify their curricula and research in terms of their value to the external world. This is very different to traditional academic practices which gave academics the autonomy to operate in their expert areas and within their disciplinary communities.

¹⁴² HSS4, 31 January 2007.

¹⁴³ HM6, 29 March 2006.

¹⁴⁴ HED5, 20 February 2007.

They never had to justify their existence, why am I teaching Philosophy, and now they have to think about what are the usable skills, what are the marketable skills. Why do I have to justify my costs, this is very unwelcoming for people who have always had the luxury to pursue academic study without these pressures. They never had to think about whether the marketplace wants graduates of Sociology and they have not changed their courses to suit what employers need.¹⁴⁵

Academics operated with a conception of autonomy that has “both a collective dimension as well as an individual one” (Henkel, 2004:168). This gave them the freedom to govern themselves without interference from the outside. Individual and institutional autonomy were supposed to sustain one another, and the traditional organisational form through which the “potential conflict between collective and individual autonomy has been handled through the notion of collegiality” (Bleiklie & 2004:42). This tension between managerialism and collegiality results in what Johnson (2005) refers to as “contrived collegiality”.

Second, there is a shift from academics as those who spend most of their time reading, writing and thinking to those who are focused on meeting targets, securing budgets and completing paperwork. This is informed by the blurring of boundaries between academic and administrative work (Bernstein, 2000) and contributes to the thinning of scholarly work (Westerhuizen *et al.*, 2007).

But I would say there has been a sharp rise in managerialism and catastrophic impact on research productivity at the university because of that and the inability of the research to feed back into curriculum planning. The university has declined in research productivity substantially over the past five years; they’ve dropped out of the top five.¹⁴⁶

Third, academics now have to concern themselves with number crunching exercises rather than knowledge production:

And I am saying, and the HEQC team said to the Masters group, please ask the lecturers to go back and track their throughput, and I said to them that it’s not their job, they must teach. ... Imagine lecturers spending time on such a things....¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ UCS2, 12 May 2005.

¹⁴⁶ HM6, 29 March 2006.

¹⁴⁷ HM4, 14 March 2006.

This is further propagated through the National Research Foundation (NRF) system, which rates individual research outputs in simplistic and quantitative ways. This approach equates quality with quantity and does not account for disciplinary differences. NRF rating. We're all encouraged to apply for NRF rating ... but we're all very suspicious, especially those who haven't applied. It's the idea that something has to quantify someone's research and put it into numbers, quantify their quality.¹⁴⁸

This number crunching approach to quality threatens the essence of academic practices in the Humanities and is in direct contrast to the faculty's ethos, which is not underpinned by "empiricist number crunching notions of quality assurance ..."¹⁴⁹

Efficiency and cost imperatives have also resulted in Wits employing a larger number of contract and part-time academic staff because it is cost effective. This diminishes the intellectual culture within the institution:

But there's a big difference between that and having people in that community, infusing and embedded in the culture and, yes ... yes, it is outsourcing....¹⁵⁰

This suggests that financial pressures have led to managerialist practices which in turn affect academic experiences of time and space (Anderson, 2006). The literature suggests that new managerial approaches place unreasonable workloads on academics. This is the result of the proliferation of quality assurance mechanisms, increased accountability requirements, the devolving of administrative and secretarial tasks to academics, and placing pressure on academics to secure funds (Anderson, 2006). This undermines the freedom that academics had to determine their own programme and working hours, which were one of the key features and a strong attraction of traditional academic work (Anderson, 2006:580 , Clark, 1987:72-75). This is further complicated by the fact that the overload leaves little time for academics to focus on academic endeavours. It is not merely the overload that is resulting in shifting identities but rather the nature of academic work that is heavily contested. Academics are now required to spend a considerable amount of their time on non-academic, administrative

¹⁴⁸ HSS8, 22 January 2007.

¹⁴⁹ HM2, 20 May 2005.

¹⁵⁰ HED 7, 22 February 2007.

work. These “routine administrative tasks are not endowed with meaning” and are viewed with contempt by academics (Anderson, 2006:581).

Furthermore, managerialism affects traditional notions of ‘the academic’ as the self-driven and self-regulated person as opposed to workers who are monitored and measured. The role of academics as expert professionals who are free to choose their own academic and research pursuits becomes increasingly undermined in the process. Thus the traditional academic role concerned with the disinterested search for truth is now undermined by the shift to academic as production-line worker (Kogan, 2004). For decades the work of academics has been centred on the discipline, the space through which they understand and identify themselves. This provided them with the intellectual and moral basis to operate (Henkel, 2004) .

6.4.4 Low-key resistance to managerialism

Academics are faced with a complex and ever-changing environment in which their traditional role and core purpose is in question. While there are certainly various perspectives on the effects of managerialism on academic work and academic identity, most academics believe that it is detrimental to the academic project.

Under these circumstances academics have carved out spaces and opportunities through resistance, adaptation or token compliance. While a powerful minority has been able to ignore the policy changes, more common strategies have been to distort or subvert the policies or to comply at a rhetorical level with minimal actual change (Anderson, 2006:583). In fact, evidence from the literature suggests that academics have the capacity to “confound the intent of managerial or policy initiatives and retain significant levels of autonomy. As a consequence of this and other factors, higher education institutions are notoriously difficult to ‘steer’, either from the vantage point of the state, or from that of institutional management”(Moore, 2003:8).

How do academics at Wits respond? In general, they are disillusioned by the emerging managerialist strategies as they believe that these have implications for their academic work:

It's engendering a uniformity that is so stultifying. I think it's really at odds with what academia has always stood for. The multiplicity of ideas, different perspectives, and now it's part of the commercialisation and commodification of academia. We are trying to produce standardised little products we call degrees much the same as the EU trying to produce a standard pot of wine and ... etc. We were socialised into an understanding of academia as a place where you explore, you look at other options, where you don't go for uniformity, where you go for a whole lot of other things that are diametrically opposed to uniformity....¹⁵¹

I think there's a second more important set of factors and I think those are related to financial matters. I think increasingly, and this is really unfortunate, the academy is being converted to a place where everything is commodified, where students have to buy services and they leave the university with a certain product, namely a degree. Now that to my mind is affecting enormously what we teach and how we teach. ... One could speak of a certain level of impoverishment of the academy simply because they are driven by what is accountable, what is measurable.¹⁵²

In an attempt to deal with the rise of managerialist practices, the faculty reflects several responses, depending on the financial vulnerability of programmes as well as the perspectives of academics. Some try to create spaces within the existing managerialist framework. For instance, the course approval process is tedious and bureaucratic and requires substantial detail about course content, reducing the flexibility that academics have to change the curriculum to suit their student profile or a changing context. In response, some academics create flexibility by submitting broad course outlines when they apply for approval of new academic programmes/courses. In this way they can alter the curriculum when it suits them, without reinstituting tedious curriculum development processes:

When it first started, I remember when I first was in the Chemistry Department. I'd say, let's have a course on science education in developing countries. That's great. I'll quickly knock something together. That's fantastic, we'll do it. And it seemed so easy. Now of course there are all the things, like, but we do have, like, a back door in the sense that we've registered two broad courses, which are called Issues in Science Education and Issues in Maths Education.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ HM5, 22 March 2006.

¹⁵² HM5, 22 March 2006.

¹⁵³ HED4, 20 February 2007.

Some academics prefer technical or tokenistic compliance, which could be considered a means of fighting back for their valuable time:

My problem is that they regard it as a bureaucratic exercise. One of the problems is that many faculties have teaching and learning committees and course approval committees. Why are they different? It's because they regard the process of getting their course approved as a bureaucratic exercise.¹⁵⁴

That's because they see it as exceedingly bureaucratic at its best. Otherwise it's going to be a kind of interference which is not appropriate. If they are really interested in quality standards ... there are other ways of ensuring quality....¹⁵⁵

In some instances, academics resist in more direct ways. For example they refused to accept recommendations from management to trim down African Languages:

Change in the university is negotiated and mediated in much more complex ways than probably any other social setting. You cannot make any, ya, we had a whole process about looking at our faculty budget and what we should do and how we should cut back etc. Then it goes to Faculty Board.... They just rejected the proposals. We said trim down African languages but they said you must be dreaming. So we didn't do anything about African languages.¹⁵⁶

It is interesting to note that while most academics within the faculty are unhappy with those aspects of managerialism that affect their roles and responsibilities as academics, and many have rejected it or found their way around it, they have not responded in a systematic and organised way as an academic community. Thus their responses have been at an individual or course level. One can speculate about why this is the case. In the first instance, efforts to challenge some of the new curriculum and quality assurance approaches may result in additional time being lost from an already squeezed time and space context. In other words, academics are already too busy to engage with yet another initiative that may not improve their research output rates. Second, academics may still have some space within which to operate in terms of academic issues and may focus on exploiting these spaces as much as they can, without tackling

¹⁵⁴ UCS3, 18 May 2005.

¹⁵⁵ HM3, 15 February 2006.

¹⁵⁶ HM4, 14 March 2006.

larger system-wide macro issues. Third, academics feel powerless to take on the university management, particularly in the light of the fact that many of the trends they are experiencing appear to be propagated throughout the world. This leaves one with the sense that the problem is too big to tackle and a feeling of hopelessness and helplessness sets in. Fourth, academics are very dispersed within the institution, making it very difficult to mobilise them as a united body. Linked to this is the fact they may have different perspectives on the different aspects of managerialism that affect their academic space. For instance, some may be concerned with the effects of finances on curriculum while others are far more concerned with their new-found administrative burden on their research agenda. Fifth, since academics have always operated in individualistic ways, it is very difficult for them to constitute themselves as a unit or body with one voice. Clearly academics cannot be viewed as a homogeneous entity. In fact, academics have always prided themselves on having a diversity of opinions and voices, which is part of the integrity of the institution. Sixth, since there is competition between faculties and even schools for resources, academics are not necessarily on the same side regarding some efficiency and cost issues (for example, the cross-subsidisation policy) and jealously guard the spaces which they still have. This seems to suggest that the responses of academics are directly linked to managerialism as it affects their individual academic mission and are not focused on opposing managerialism in general.

6.5 Implications for Curriculum Reform

The previous section shows that managerialism affects academic culture and conceptions of identity in the faculty. This section tries to understand what this means for curriculum. It argues that there is a relationship between curriculum reform and managerialism but that the nature of this relationship differs depending on the vulnerability of the particular course or programme.¹⁵⁷ Thus more vulnerable courses or programmes experience more interference in curriculum matters than less vulnerable ones. It is clear that Wits implements managerialism by combining steering and interference strategies which affect curriculum in different ways.

¹⁵⁷ This includes student enrolment numbers, research outputs and financial well-being.

Steering comprises managing by outcomes and has an indirect effect on curriculum. This represents post-bureaucratic management practices that utilise key instruments to steer institutions from a distance. It does not constitute micro-management of processes but rather creating a system for self-evaluation of products and outcomes. Wits employs a steering strategy which grants relative independence to academics in the curriculum development arena. Therefore, academic entities have the space to make their own choices within the constraints of efficiency and performance parameters. This approach infringes on autonomy but does not totally eradicate it in the sphere of curriculum decision making.

If courses meet the efficiency and performativity criteria, the institution adopts a steering stance and academics generally have some control over how they construct their curriculum, within the confines of existing managerial guidelines. Under these conditions managers argue that academics are in a position to determine their own curriculum:

So where it does come through, would be in a sense absolute freedom to manage and design and teach in any way they wish within the limits of that cross-subsidisation, which is at the moment at 15%.¹⁵⁸

The curricula are entirely within the control of the faculty, including the curriculum renewal kind of thing. Because Wits has a devolved model of authority the curriculum is very, very much in the control of the faculty....¹⁵⁹

Academics concur with management on this matter – that is, they do have room to make curriculum decisions:

... and then probably in the Social Sciences and Humanities more than elsewhere in the university, there's this kind of strong sense of our individual autonomy. So if someone comes along and says you shouldn't be teaching that, you should be teaching that, then we get quite offended. A we're the experts, and B, it's our right to do this.... Because this is academic freedom. [An] imperative which we still attach some values to is the concept of academic freedom.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ UCS4, 1 June 2005.

¹⁵⁹ UCS4, 1 June 2005.

¹⁶⁰ HSS2, 23 January 2007.

I mean, the thing about, I suppose, our excitement on the school at large, there was quite a lot of autonomy. You can decide what you want to do. So long as you fulfil basic requirements there hasn't been, until very recently, very much of a check on what you decided to do.¹⁶¹

In universities I suppose we still have a lot of space, academics generally... How long the liberty will last is another question. But one hopes that, as elsewhere in the world, people will come to the realisation that you need a fair measure of academic liberty in a broader sense of the word....¹⁶²

This claim is further supported by the fact that the faculty maintained the BA degree format at undergraduate level, despite strong advice from university management to change it toward an applied and inter-disciplinary approach. In this instance, the academic project as defined by the academic community remained somewhat intact:

The faculty as a whole had review of this particular issue about four or five years ago, in fact in was in 2000, and we decided then, unlike other institutions, that we going to retain the course structure and curriculum – i.e. keep the BA.¹⁶³

This sense of freedom to make curriculum decisions is particularly strong at the course design and delivery level:

I have almost total leeway in fusing the subject matter in to teaching methodology, content of the course.¹⁶⁴

To me and what I bring to it is based on my PhD and that is a research study of territory controls in Europe. And the reason why we chose the specific subject areas that we have, is that it links up with Landau's own more contemporary African focus and my work. It was an attempt to bind those two things together.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ HSS3, 28 February 2007.

¹⁶² HM5, 22 March 2006.

¹⁶³ HM3, 15 February 2006.

¹⁶⁴ HSS5, 26 January 2007.

¹⁶⁵ HSS5, 26 January 2007.

It must be noted that while there is room for manoeuvre by academics regarding curriculum decisions, this does not mean that academics do not feel the infringement on their autonomy:

Firstly, I don't think the autonomy that academics have has been extinguished, but ... but, there was definitely a sense of a mounting burden that was being imposed from the top....¹⁶⁶

Clearly this 'relative' freedom to determine one's curriculum is conditional upon meeting the efficiency and productivity parameters set out by the institution. If these conditions are met, curriculum decision making is underpinned by relative autonomy:

As long as we get our paperwork in on time. It's unfortunate but they never, as far as I know... since we've started I don't think they've really reviewed our curriculum or teaching methods. I don't think we're doing badly but in terms of accountability ... basically as long as the paperwork is in on time and the students pay their fees.¹⁶⁷

However, if these financial and efficiency criteria are not met, the institution puts pressure on the department or discipline to conform:

In the Humanities in my experience, curriculum reform pressures that I've seen have mostly to do with concepts of efficiency and streamlining. So the pressures are what people loosely call managerialism, which maybe you'll come to but I would say that if you look at South Africa as a whole and then Wits in particular, there's particular tensions around particular subject areas, which ... are probably not breaking even in financial terms....¹⁶⁸

In the first instance, this pressure can manifest in ways that affect curriculum indirectly. For instance, in the case of Adult Education, the rationalisation of the department

¹⁶⁶ HSS11, 7 March 2007.

¹⁶⁷ HSS4, 31 January 2007.

¹⁶⁸ HM4, 14 March 2006.

resulted in the retrenchment of seven of the ten staff in the division, which affected the curriculum package.¹⁶⁹

However, this was not the result of direct interference in curriculum matters but rather strategies to ensure that the department abided by the institution's efficiency principles. This constitutes steering as it does not directly determine curriculum but uses managerialist instruments to steer the organisation or department in a particular direction.

In the second instance, this pressure can result in direct interference by institutional managers in curriculum affairs. Under these circumstances the management style shifts from steering to interference. In 2006, for instance, the senior management team commissioned a review of the faculty in order to improve its efficiency and productivity targets.¹⁷⁰ The review was conducted because some schools and departments were not meeting the performance-driven outputs and targets set out by the university. Those departments or disciplines that did not meet the efficiency requirements underwent scrutiny at all levels, including their curriculum. Management stepped in to instruct academics about how they should change their curricula, and as a result several courses with low student enrolments were closed down:

They still had too little students. They closed the under-subscribed divisions such as Classics, Afrikaans and Religious Studies.¹⁷¹

In other instances courses were pressured into changing their curricula in order to attract more students. The Department of Music is one such case. Wits School of the Arts generally has good student enrolment numbers and also receives higher student

¹⁶⁹ Traditionally the Adult Education package was offered to professionals located in community-based training organisations, corporate trainers and more recently trainers focused on the SETAs, and therefore provided a package suitable to its student profile. However, now that the department is smaller, it is unable to offer its previous variety of packages, and Adult Education students have to take courses from other education units, which focus primarily on the schooling sector. It must also be noted that the retrenchments of academic staff occurred at the same time as the university increased its management and administrative staff. It is estimated that at least 35 new management posts were created to support the devolution, while History, African Languages, Modern Languages and Literature were faced with staff cuts (Johnson, 2005).

¹⁷⁰ Report on the Faculty of Humanities review, 2006, University of the Witwatersrand. S2006/2573. p. 1.

¹⁷¹ UCS1, 11 March 2005.

subsidies from the state than all other Humanities disciplines and courses. Therefore, in general, the Arts are performing well when measured in financial and efficiency terms. However, the Music Department stands out as a weak department, where the student numbers are extremely low and as a result it was not meeting its efficiency targets. This prompted a review by senior management after which it was recommended that Music transform its curricula in order to attract more students into the programme.

We've just done an extensive review of the division of Music in the School of the Arts... It was recommended that the curricula shift toward more popular and contemporary music and African jazz instead of the classical European focus to which it was traditionally aligned.¹⁷²

It must be noted that even though the imperative for transforming the Music curriculum was largely financial, it also coincided with socio-political debates about the future of Wits' Eurocentric traditions in music:

For one thing, the politics of it all are very difficult. We want to have a more representative student body. Now if you take the average black student at a high school, they are not doing the violin, you know.... That's the challenge of the adjustment of the curriculum.¹⁷³

Another example is that of Social Work, which did not meet the cost and efficiency parameters set out by Wits. First, the throughput and pass rates in the school were extremely low. This was attributed to the low entrance requirements. Before 1999 students required 23 matriculation points to be accepted into the programme; however, this was dropped to 18 and then raised to 22 in 2005. Of the 24 students entering the programme in 2002, only three graduated in 2005, with only one student registered at postgraduate level at that stage. This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that the research output of the Social Work Department is lower than the average for the School of Human and Community Development. This does not fit with the university's 2010 vision which includes increasing throughput rates and postgraduate enrolment and improving the efficiency of programmes. The review committee

¹⁷² HM6, 29th March 2006

¹⁷³ HM6, 29th March 2006

recommended that an independent evaluation be commissioned to advise management on curriculum and research issues. The university has indicated that while there is a strong case for closing down the department, the decision will await advice regarding curriculum and other issues.¹⁷⁴

There is an overwhelming sense that faculties, disciplines and departments that are financially well off or meet the performance-based requirements have more space to influence curriculum and are not at the mercy of interfering managers. Those that have financial and efficiency concerns, however, increasingly lose their space to make curriculum decisions. This is no different to trends across the globe, where student numbers equals money and where management places pressure on programmes that are not efficient (Neave, 1988). Research conducted by Manns and March (1978) confirms that there is a correlation between curriculum change and financial difficulties. Even in the highly resourced Oxford University, the head of the institution advocated for a “less cerebral approach to academic life” in order to become globally competitive “like American universities”, which he refers to as “weapons of mass attraction” (Churchman, 2006:4).

This section points to the fact that Wits employs managerialist instruments to steer the institution, allowing academic units to make curriculum choices within the constraints of efficiency and productivity targets. Ashcroft (2003: 1) suggests that these techniques of steering provide individuals with a sense of opportunism if they comply. However, if these targets are not met, the institution resorts to interference. While steering in general has an indirect effect on curriculum, it does encourage an instrumentalist curriculum approach by focusing on costs and quantitative performativity models. Interference, on the other hand, has more devastating and direct effects on departments and curriculum as institutional managers take matters into their own hands. This further diminishes the space within which academics can make curriculum decisions.

Clearly both steering and interference have a significant impact on curriculum reform practices. Both steering and interference promote technical and instrumental notions

¹⁷⁴ Report on the Faculty of Humanities review, 2006, University of the Witwatersrand. S2006/2573.

of knowledge. The Wits case suggests that there is a relationship between steering and interference. Steering provides the framework within which managerialist strategies are propagated. This serves as the managerialist laws or policies to which academics must adhere in order to secure the space to make curriculum decisions. Interference constitutes the response in the event of academics 'breaking the rules' or policy and represents the punitive measure for not operating within the efficiency framework. Jansen (2005:10) asks whether the approach used by government is one of steering or interference. This study suggests that these concepts are intricately woven together to create a conducive environment in which to implement these new management approaches within the university.

6.6 Conclusion

The Wits case suggests that there is a relationship between managerialism, academic identity and curriculum reform. The institution combines a steering and interference approach to managing academic entities in order to ensure that these entities adhere to stipulated efficiency and performativity guidelines. This affects the academic project in a number of ways. It promotes instrumental notions of knowledge and shifts the university's focus to more technical and administrative concerns. In addition, it affects conceptions of academic identity by shifting academic work to administrative work, changing the ways in which academic entities are assessed and by introducing management stakeholders into curriculum decision making. Furthermore, this chapter suggests that there is a correlation between financial viability and autonomy. Thus programmes and courses that are more financially viable bestow greater autonomy upon their academics to influence curriculum. Similarly, the financially vulnerable programmes have less autonomy and reduced spaces within which to determine their own curriculum. This is not a causal relationship, as academics continue to resist these practices in different ways, resulting in a variety of outcomes.

This chapter has established the relationship between managerialism and curriculum change. The next chapter explores the range of other drives of curriculum change in the Faculty of Humanities.

CHAPTER 7

DRIVERS OF CURRICULUM CHANGE: SYMPHONY AND CACOPHONY

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the key drivers of curriculum change in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand. In particular, it explores a range of external (socio-economic and political) as well as internal drivers of curriculum reform. This is achieved through the following key questions: i) What are the key drivers of curriculum change in the faculty? ii) How do different schools and disciplines respond to the changing environment and what influences these responses?

This chapter discusses the interplay between several factors – survival factors, the strength of academic identity and scholarship, disciplinary boundaries and the nature of leadership within schools and departments – that may have a bearing on curriculum reform efforts. The argument advanced here is that curriculum change is an outcome of the interplay between socio-economic and political pressures to transform and the different curriculum discourses that are embedded within different disciplinary communities. This gives rise to a variety of different responses in the faculty that can be located on a continuum from reactive market approaches to more traditional academic approaches. This study suggests that curriculum change is the result of a complex interplay between exogenous and endogenous drivers of change.

7.2 Conceptual Framework: Key Drivers of Curriculum Change

This chapter draws on the study's conceptual framework which locates curriculum reform in the context of responsiveness as well as the inner characteristics of knowledge within the discipline. Thus it assumes that the internal structure of knowledge and academic identity also influence disciplinary responses to the external environment and must therefore be taken into account in any analysis of curriculum reform (Moore, 2004, Muller, 1996: 297). Thus curriculum reform must take

cognisance of both exogenous and endogenous factors. Exogenous factors include policy and market influences while endogenous factors include the structure of knowledge and academic identity. Curriculum reform is the outcome of both endogenous and exogenous factors within the context of power relations.

This chapter also draws on Gornitzka's (1999:297) concept of resource dependency adapted by Moore (2003:33). Resource dependency theory suggests that when resources in an organisation are threatened, the entity will adapt to mitigate this resource scarcity. However, Moore does not use a simple deterministic version of the theory but locates it in the context of the relative power of players to affect choices. In so doing he uses the concept of 'neo-institutional theory' which takes cognisance of the values of the entity and how this affects its adaptive responses. To strengthen the theory further, Moore (2003:33) adds the notion of intellectual capital, adapted from Muller(2001:12).

This suggests that entities adapt either from a position of intellectual weakness or intellectual strength, which has an effect on the chosen adaptive responses.¹⁷⁵ Thus this chapter will utilise the concept of resource dependency and combine it with entity values and intellectual capital to understand what informs curriculum change in the Faculty of Humanities.

7.3 Faculty Trends: Chalk and Cheese

There is no doubt that most university faculties and departments are under pressure to transform in order to meet the socio-economic and political needs of society. It is also evident that different schools and even different disciplines experience curriculum pressures in different ways depending on their context, the discipline and the sense of identity that is associated with their field (Muller, 2003).

The research for this thesis shows that in the Faculty of Humanities there are multiple drivers of curriculum change and that these drivers intersect with specific disciplinary identities, resulting in an array of different curriculum outcomes.

¹⁷⁵ See Chapter Two for details.

... as I said to you, there was a policy on programmes to which we responded differently from [the University of Cape Town]. The NQF [National Qualifications Framework], that whole quality assurance that was an instruction, so one had to comply with that. So to some extent this is an environment where your money comes from government, you do what government says. But there are other respects in which there's much greater scope for interpretation, and I think there's huge heterogeneity across the faculty.¹⁷⁶

This suggests that curriculum transformation is a dynamic, volatile and not easily predictable process. It also suggests that different disciplines and departments experience and respond to pressures to change in different ways:

I would want to problematise your question. I think that the curriculum reform pressure is very uneven in different disciplines. ... there were major reform periods locally in certain disciplines, like in English several years ago, a decade ago, whereas in other disciplines like Musicology or Music those pressures are being felt only now. ... That in other disciplines were not felt to the same extent....¹⁷⁷

Again, you can't look at the school as a unitary grouping.¹⁷⁸

These curriculum responses can be located on a continuum from high external influence to low external influence. These include disciplines and departments that focus on usefulness and responsiveness, those that attempt to combine utility approaches with the traditional academic approach, and those that have generally maintained their 'old' traditional approach (see Diagram 7.1). Each of these will be discussed below.

¹⁷⁶ HSS9, 7 February 2007.

¹⁷⁷ HM6, 29 March 2006.

¹⁷⁸ HM3, 15 February 2006.

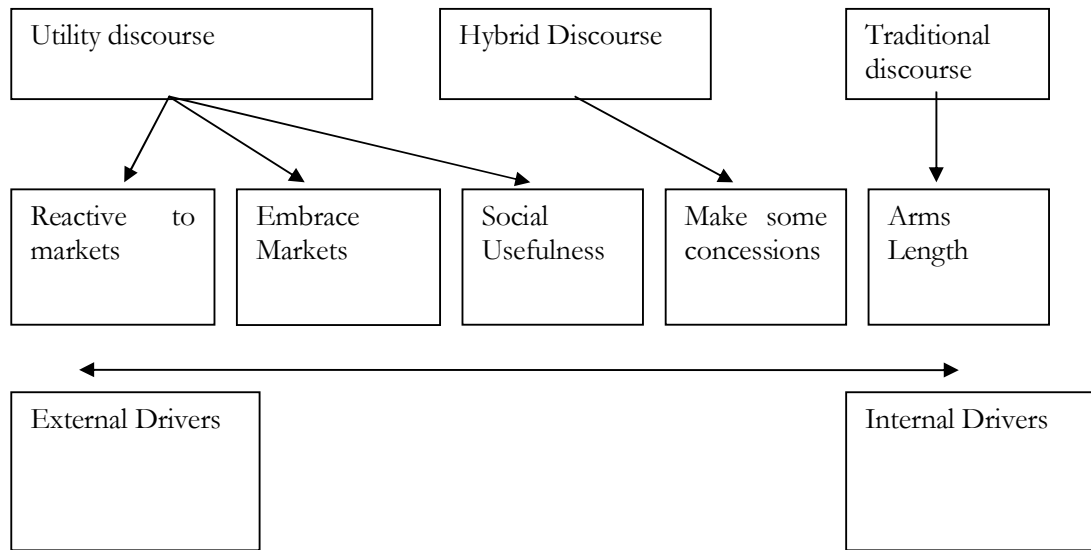


Diagram 7.1: A continuum of responses by departments and disciplines

7.4 Responsiveness to Markets and Society: The Growing Utility Discourse

As explained in the conceptual framework in Chapter Two, the utility discourse is focused on serving the social and economic needs of society, referred to as responsiveness in the South African literature. Usefulness or responsiveness is indicated as one of the key drivers of curriculum change in universities across the globe. The characteristics of the utility discourse include a focus on meeting the needs of the markets and citizenship, and curriculum tends to focus on skills and application-based approaches.

While Muller (2003:113) believes that there are no significant differences between social and economic responsiveness, since they are both driven by the concept of usefulness, Subotzky (2000:111) views these as different because of their intentions – that is, education for social good versus education to serve market needs. For the purposes of this study a broad notion of utility will be used i.e. one that comprises

both socio-cultural and economic responsiveness. However, these will also be differentiated by locating them in the instrumentalist versus social justice discourses – that is, underpinned by different drivers of curriculum reform.

The study indicates that there are several utilitarian approaches in the Faculty of Humanities. These include two kinds of market responsiveness as well as socio-cultural responsiveness, which are discussed below.

First, responses in the faculty reflect two types of market approaches. Both are responsive to market needs but one is reactive to the markets while the other reflects a more proactive response. This is in line with the notion that some disciplines show a marked convergence with the market, while others do not (Muller, 2003:104).

The School of Education represents an example of a reactive market approach. The key drivers of change in the School of Education are financial pressure and pressure to increase student enrolment. In order to solve both these challenges, the school needed to make the curriculum more attractive to students. It was believed that this could be achieved through promoting a more practical and application-based approach to education. While I had assumed that the reason for the change was the college merger,¹⁷⁹ this was not viewed by one respondent as the primary influence over the curriculum:

No, it's got nothing to do with the merger. It's the way in which the university has been repositioned to serve the market, to serve the masses rather than to be a place for an elite, to be practical, to be applied, to be useful....¹⁸⁰

Also, since Education is a professional programme, students come with expectations that are more directly linked to labour market needs:

¹⁷⁹ The University of the Witwatersrand merged with the Johannesburg College of Education in line with government policy and legislation. This merger resulted in the coming together of two curriculum approaches – a practical one and an academic one.

¹⁸⁰ HED1, 7 February 2007.

I think that universities that basically serve people to the labour market are much more constraining choosing those kinds of things.... if people come to do curriculum and within curriculum they want to do learning, teaching and assessment, they're not interested in all those.... I could have a course on what social class is, debates on that and the implications to assessment. So assessment will take that much of the course, and the background of the production of knowledge about the social class would be much more... I can't do it. No one would be interested.¹⁸¹

As a result the school made a concerted effort to change the curriculum in order to suit students' perceived needs. This is in line with Donoghue's (2008:84) opinion that students have become one of the most important drivers of curriculum change in the twenty-first century.

However, while there is strong alignment between curriculum reform and students' perceived interests, there is poor alignment between the perspectives of some academics and the markets with regard to what constitutes valuable knowledge. This suggests that external imperatives have placed pressure on the discipline to transform and these have resulted in tensions between internal and external drivers of curriculum change. Thus there are tensions between the markets and academics with regard to what curriculum should be offered:

I'm saying, if you ask me, if you want a good course in assessment, you don't need all the text in assessment. You need to ask questions like, how do you make a judgement? You need to do philosophy. You need to do meta theory, you need to do epistemology. You don't need a course in assessment. But you think anyone, maybe my colleagues, will buy it, but I don't think students will buy it.

I think that we're basically producing a far more superficial kind of engagement with education, ... So it's not like ... people think in terms of what is useful and not what is interesting. So what is interesting would be any kind of layers of theory and any kind of level of theory.... Very few people would be interested in reading that.¹⁸²

The Education example can be referred to as 'contrived market responsiveness' because there is no alignment between academic and market notions of curriculum. There are several reasons that could explain why in Education external drivers of

¹⁸¹ HED1, 7 February 2007.

¹⁸² HED1, 7 February 2007.

curriculum change represents such a formidable force. One argument that could explain this is Bernstein's (1971) conception of classification, which suggests that disciplines that are "strongly bounded" from other disciplines are less likely to transform through external pressure. Thus boundaries between disciplines can be weak or strong, with strongly bounded disciplines being less penetrable to other 'knowledges', and "weakly bounded" disciplines being more susceptible to inclusion of other knowledge forms. Because education is regarded as weakly bounded in Bernsteinian terms, it is more susceptible to the inclusion of other knowledge forms and other disciplines, and therefore more easily influenced by a range of external pressures.

Another explanation for the reactive response to market needs is related to efficiency and financial issues, which have placed pressure on the School to increase its student numbers in order to become more financially viable. Thus, in order to attract students, it made the curriculum more relevant to the professional needs of teachers. This suggests that disciplines or programmes that are more vulnerable to external influences are those with financial, efficiency and enrolment challenges. In these instances, resource scarcities result in curriculum shifts that are intended to mitigate the resource crisis in which disciplines or programmes find themselves. Thus programmes and courses with lower levels of resources are more likely to respond in reactive ways to market needs than those with higher levels of resources. For instance, disciplines in the Sciences or even Philosophy, which has a higher subsidy and higher research output than Education, are in a less vulnerable position than Education.

The above example focuses on reactive market responses but does not capture the context of programmes that proactively embrace market approaches. An example of a proactive market approach is evident in the School of the Arts. The School of the Arts has adopted a keen interest in the employment and employability of their graduates. Furthermore, it has redesigned its curriculum to ensure that it is more closely aligned with the world of work:

In undergraduate ways...I think we are much more industry-focused than we used to be. ... If you want to get a job out there now you've got to be flexible....¹⁸³

The School has also incorporated a range of new programmes that were previously not regarded as worthy of academic studies. This includes the introduction of a range of new short courses, certificate programmes and courses linked to new developments in the media industry and internships:

What it means is that internships are very key to us across the board, undergraduates and postgraduates. For the past couple of years we've been running a certificate in broadcast television, a two-year certificate, with an internship programme attached.... They are very successful and they do in some cases bring us third-stream income.¹⁸⁴

The advent of information and communications technology (ICT) is a significant driver of curriculum change in the School of the Arts. Digitisation and the convergence of media and ICT have fundamentally transformed the environment in which the Arts are located.

And part of that double stream, that hybridity, has to be to think in interdisciplinary ways and to know something about other media.... So we think it's a strong idea and a good idea...¹⁸⁵

While curriculum reform in the School of the Arts is driven by external factors, it is clear that there is an alignment between these factors and the internal drivers of knowledge within the school.¹⁸⁶ Since the School of the Arts is not in a vulnerable position,¹⁸⁷ it is able to assert its own sense of what it considers to be valuable knowledge. The school is in a relatively strong financial situation because it receives a higher state subsidy than most other schools in the Faculty of Humanities and attracts a large number of applicants. This allows it to respond from a position of strength. However, there is some alignment between market needs and the perspectives of the

¹⁸³ HM6, 29 March 2006.

¹⁸⁴ HM6, 29 March 2006.

¹⁸⁵ HM6, 29 March 2006.

¹⁸⁶ With the exception of Music.

¹⁸⁷ With the exception of Music.

school about what constitutes a good curriculum in the Arts. This is referred to as a proactive market response rather than a reactive one. The School of the Arts case can also be explained using Frank and Gabler's (2006) conception that reality has changed and that this reading of reality informs the new curriculum. The advent of ICT in particular has had a fundamental effect on the conception of what constitutes the Arts.

In the case of the School of Education, the combined pressure of efficiency and enrolment numbers with the weakly bounded programme results in significant transformation of curriculum to accommodate pressures from outside the discipline. The fact that the School of the Arts is also weakly bounded suggests that boundary strengths are not the only drivers of curriculum change. However, the difference between the reactive and proactive market approach is informed by the disposition of the discipline in terms of its financial situation, its disciplinary character, and its perception of the market.

The second form of utility is informed by notions of socio-cultural usefulness. This is not focused on the job market or meeting student demands but is about the role that universities should play in socio-cultural development. This is informed by the university's responsibility to society and is underpinned by a social justice discourse.

We got the social space to do that and this space is offered to us as a result of the taxation of working-class people. So we are indebted to the entire community and thus we have to plough back. I know that at universities such as this nation building is frowned upon, not because of its ideological baggage of engendering a narrow-mindedness, but they frown upon it because they think that this is not the preserve of the university, this is not what universities should be and universities should be above it all. But in Psychology we believe very strongly that in order to be a good intellectual house, I am thinking in the Gramscian sense of this, one should be involved in communities; otherwise one produces useless information. So I am very passionate about it as well.¹⁸⁸

This form includes supporting the reconstruction of society through strengthening the democratic ethos:

¹⁸⁸ HM5, 22 March 2006.

I think in the South African context it's about contributing to the reconstruction of South African society, and you can do that in various ways. In the Humanities, certainly, by allowing for new visions of human integration and collaboration and interaction....¹⁸⁹

Curriculum reform in Psychology is a good example of socio-cultural responsiveness in the faculty. The Psychology curriculum was viewed as being too Western and therefore unable to respond to the specific needs of the local community. As a result the department redesigned its curriculum, informed by local socio-cultural conditions:

...contextually relevant psychology is of course of critical importance and it goes beyond any single institution, and it's something that black psychologists and women psychologists have worked on for several years, and that is to create a Psychology that tells a story that is more similar to the South African experience. Much of the Psychology until the 1980s has been a North America and European Psychology to which black students, I would want to argue, could relate much less to than white students because they had a very similar background and history. So that they could find the Psychology of then more useful to these students than, for argument's sake, a student from a working-class background. So there's a transformation of direction which is required in order to allow students from whatever background to access Psychology with equal facility....¹⁹⁰

Psychology is struggling so hard to find itself and to find what it is, that one cannot really say that there's one Psychology, that there is key foundations in Psychology that is applicable across the world. For instance, in the European ... there was a Freud, there was a Blaken – would always have been considered as being the basic building blocks, but then if you come to African contexts where people have not been studying Psychology, and you look at how certain, say for argument's sake, traditional healers engage with people, there are certain principles underlying that, the fact that it resonates with what happens in the European context but has not been influential, has been influenced by that and therefore emerged from something totally different. So what I am trying to say is that I think each context will have its specific must-haves and essentials.¹⁹¹

It is evident that in the case of Psychology, the social justice discourse is aligned with the academic identity of the leadership in the school. Furthermore, since Psychology is

¹⁸⁹ HM5, 22 March 2006.

¹⁹⁰ HM5, 22 March 2006.

¹⁹¹ HM5, 22 March 2006.

in a strong resource position,¹⁹² it is in a more favourable position to influence curriculum reform efforts. Clearly in this instance, resources, values and intellectual leadership as well as the structure of the discipline provided the opportunity to transform the discipline.

External drivers of curriculum change have become increasingly significant in the curriculum transformation context. The extent to which this affects curriculum reform trends is informed by a number of factors. This includes the financial disposition of the discipline but is not limited to this and is also informed by a range of external and internal drivers of knowledge.

7.5 Meeting the Markets Halfway: The Hybrid Discourse

Hybrid discourses reflect an attempt to combine notions of responsiveness and usefulness with traditional academic approaches. While the hybrid discourse makes concessions to the market, it does not do so at the expense of academic identity. The hybrid discourse aims to “preserve the existing academic model” but also responds to external pressures from society. This is different from the utility discourse which results in significant curriculum changes, generally proposed by external drivers. The hybrid approach is likened to Muller’s (2005b:12) notion of “strategicility”, which he uses to describe the new regime of academic research that combines both basic and applied approaches without destroying either.

This suggests that external and internal drivers of curriculum change interact in complex ways that result in several versions of the hybrid discourse in the faculty. These differ in terms of the extent to which they focus on the utility or skills discourse versus traditional academic discourses. In the hybrid discourse, changes do not jeopardise fundamental aspects of the curriculum with which programmes and courses are traditionally associated:

The Humanities could look at becoming more market driven at the postgraduate level but ensure that it preserves its academic integrity.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Psychology has a higher state subsidy than Education, and a relatively large number of students.

¹⁹³ UCS1, 11 March 2005.

... but in terms of the actual course content I don't think it's affected it negatively necessarily. ... There's a lot of reading and we require certain basic levels of articulateness and the ability to argue....¹⁹⁴

And I think that you see it as a combination of these approaches evolving. Sometimes, out of necessity for survival, sometimes because it makes intellectual sense to have these synergies ... As long as you know one doesn't go to the extreme where you sort of dilute the discipline into a sort of amorphous sort of sense of, like, you know, we're doing anything and everything....¹⁹⁵

Supporters of the hybrid approach acknowledge that society has changed and that this places demands on the curriculum to become more closely tied to society's needs:

Well we hope ... I don't think they're different so much; the context is different. The context and the demand of the globalised world are very different... And that's what we think we're offering here. It's not your usual liberal arts education at all, but it is a sense of grappling with the reality, understanding the context within which you live your life, and if you aren't able to think about those things, you'll never understand what happens to you. The vagaries of globalisation ... So as intellectuals and academics it's our duty, really, to locate what we do in this kind of context.... We're not living in an ivory tower.¹⁹⁶

The supporters of the hybrid approach argue that their approach results in a compromise between traditional academic approaches and notions of usefulness. This approach reflects an attempt to integrate skills and application within existing programmes without destroying the ethos of these programmes.

Thus while there are different levels of integration of skills approaches within traditional programmes, there is a strong sense that this does not fundamentally alter key principles underpinning the traditional curriculum approach:

¹⁹⁴ HSS2, 23 January 2007.

¹⁹⁵ HSS1, 8 March 2007.

¹⁹⁶ HSS9, 7 February 2007.

I think we probably are more conscious than we used to be. As related to the previous point, of the need to impart transferable skills of some kind or other... But we incorporate that concern in a very structured way to what we're doing... The previous university I was at in Britain, Strathclyde University, we used to be required for every course to give a list of the transferable skills that students would acquire from the course. Now that would be to me an example of where kind of globalised management-speak is coming all the way down to the immediate level, the ground level. It hasn't come down in quite that ... way here....¹⁹⁷

The hybrid approach has limits about how far it would go to include a skills component into the curriculum:

Yes, we don't do logistics. We don't know how to do nutrition surveys... We're political scientists, sociologists, psychologists. That's what we can teach, and we feel like it's up to the agencies to teach people how to...¹⁹⁸

While the hybrid curriculum approach takes cognisance of external drivers of change such as policy and the markets, they also engage with notions of academic relevance, values, norms and rules in their own terms. In this way, they manage to preserve some of the core traditional curriculum approaches that are linked to their identities and epistemologies:

Yes, it's the driven-ness. It's the responding to it. My sort of default sort of reaction to market pressures is to say no, let's not concede in any way to market pressures. But it's also set in reality, and you can either sort of sit back and be overcome by market pressures or one can be proactive and carve out spaces for yourself where you can shape and determine the agenda. I think that's what we've tried to do, and these are also the processes that had to be negotiated, and presumably we've succeeded in some places and have been less successful in other places....¹⁹⁹

Therefore, the hybrid curriculum approach does not shun usefulness; instead it has a very broad conception of useful that goes beyond instrumental or technicist conceptions of education:

¹⁹⁷ HSS8, 22nd Jan 2007

¹⁹⁸ HSS4, 31st Jan 2007

¹⁹⁹ HSS1, 8th March 2007.

And some of our conceptions of social progress differ with the government's, except probably in so far as we think that a good part in social sciences education is an important part in becoming a citizen of a democracy. Yes, some criterion of usefulness is at the back of all our minds, social usefulness. It's just a question of how you interpret social usefulness. ... but I would say that we have some tension between what we consider to be socially useful and what the government does. For example, we think that passing critical skills and independent mindedness is a good thing, whereas that may not be quite as much a priority for those who set national priorities..²⁰⁰

Thus they do not view education as primarily serving labour market needs:

You can see that everywhere. And you know we aren't giving a professional degree here; we're trying to teach people how to think critically. So the professional training must happen after they have been through us. So that's where we hope they go to PDM (Public and Development Management) or do some sort of [professional programme]... ²⁰¹

For one, I think we have a lot of students who come here with more of an idea that a university training at Masters level is going to teach them how to become the head of the UN sort of development programme, and that's not the type of training that we offer or tend to offer. That's one of the difficulties....²⁰²

Despite the pressures from students and employers to become more responsive, these programmes maintained some key aspects that are not directly linked to markets and society's needs.

The study shows that different disciplines and departments manifest the hybrid discourse in different forms. The examples of Forced Migration and History will be discussed as two slightly different approaches. Forced Migration was initially conceived and implemented as a training programme, but later became a more theoretically oriented programme which included application-based approaches. This was the result of both exogenous and endogenous factors. In this instance, donor funding and donor interests shifted from short-term practical needs to a broader socio-political perspective of migration (thus the shift from a focus on refugees to migration).

²⁰⁰ HSS8, 22 January 2007.

²⁰¹ HSS9, 7 February 2007.

²⁰² HSS5, 26 January 2007.

I think part of the reason of this shift in donor interests was because of the realisation that just focused on that which was very limited. I think we could still be getting money to focus on refugees, but then it's also very much a concentration on practical issues.... We felt that that was not entirely appropriate or shouldn't be the exclusive focus of an academic programme, ... and I think, more importantly for us, that it wouldn't sustain our interests and we didn't think that we had the expertise to deal with training.²⁰³

This is in tension with students' interests for shorter-term technical training, but is aligned with the values and academic identity of the new leadership in the programme. The fact that the programme was weakly bounded and that students were more interested in job training suggests that the curriculum is likely to be influenced by market forces. However, this was counterbalanced by the fact that the programme was in a strong resource position²⁰⁴ and was able to take account of its academic interests.

In the case of History, there are a number of exogenous factors driving curriculum change. This includes the influence of the changing schooling curriculum, the shift from apartheid to democracy, and the need to link studies in History to job opportunities. This situation resulted in substantially decreased student enrolments in History.

The reasons why numbers in History are declining are, I think, external to us....a much greater emphasis on our students' perceptions of workplace demand. I think they often get this wrong, of course, and they don't see History as being something as relevant as, for example ... even though it's a completely erroneous message....²⁰⁵

Despite the strong exogenous pressures, History did not become completely market driven but rather located in a position of compromise between exogenous drivers of curriculum change and internal factors influencing change. Thus the discipline accommodates the external pressures in ways that continue to protect its boundaries. The question is what makes History (which is as vulnerable as Education from a financial perspective) locate in the hybrid approach instead of the market approach?

²⁰³ HSS4, 31 January 2007.

²⁰⁴ The programme was heavily funded by donors.

²⁰⁵ HSS2, 23 January 2007.

This is probably due to the fact that History has a stronger research²⁰⁶ output and has a number of key scholars who were able to lobby for its existence:

So we were desperate and the university threatened us. We've been threatened with retrenchments and all these kind of things because we don't have enough students, although we're very good in terms of research output... So Bundy protected us because he said that History is strategic; you can't have a university without History. But then when he went away we went through a very rough time. And two years ago they were already threatening that they would take two people out of our department. So we thought, well; that's why we changed our programme; we didn't really change it so much as repackage it. To attract students.....²⁰⁷

Because Education is both a professional and an academic programme, it is more susceptible to the skills discourse than History. In addition, History is more strongly classified and bounded as a discipline than Education. Thus Education is characterised as interdisciplinary while History is characterised as a discipline. For example, a first-year History course which focused on History before 1880 was not very popular with first-year students. This was repackaged as a second-year course because the department felt that the course was of critical importance to students who would pursue History beyond their first year.²⁰⁸

Clearly, in the hybrid curriculum approach concessions were made to markets but this was not done at the expense of key principles underpinning traditional ways of learning. Instead the attempt was to strike a balance between the traditional and more market-driven approaches where possible.

7.6 Keeping the Markets at Arm's Length

In this approach market needs are kept at arm's length from the core curriculum. This strategy ensures that skills and application-based components do not interfere with the traditional academic thrust of the programme. The case of Philosophy best fits this profile. The Philosophy curriculum is strongly theoretically-based and is rooted in Western rationalist philosophy, as it has always been:

²⁰⁶ Report on Humanities review, 2006, University of the Witwatersrand.

HSS3, 28 February 2007.

²⁰⁸ Minor academic development, 2004, University of Witwatersrand.

And we try to make sure that you cover all the basics within a good Philosophy degree.... And so we say they've got have some basic knowledge of epistemology, of metaphysics, of logic, philosophy of language, and philosophy of mind, ethics, and social critical philosophy. This is the core of the discipline plus some of the specialisation, and we make sure we cover that. After that, if we've still got the resources, if we've still got the students, we can put on some more specialised things, which are more in line with our esoteric interests. But we'll only do that after we've met the needs of the department.... That's how we do it in Philosophy....²⁰⁹

The Philosophy department has a strong sense of identity and understanding of what a Philosophy programme should look like. They do not aspire to become more contemporary or responsive:

Now Philosophy as yet does not have a course on African philosophy. Now that's partly because of the nature of philosophy, which does not have courses in any denomination of philosophy. We don't do Indian philosophy, we don't do Jewish philosophy, and we don't do African philosophy. We just practice philosophy in the classical, analytical, Western tradition which is sceptical-based rather than building up, as it were, theories about what particular people might have thought about....²¹⁰

However, despite their strong traditional approach, there is evidence that even these traditional strongholds were forced to make some compromises. As a result the Philosophy department initiated several programmes geared toward the business sector:

This department instituted an Applied Ethics programme at the Masters level for professionals. It was instituted four years ago. This year was our third intake. This year we have registered (you should pass this information to the person at management who said this about out of the box) 24 Masters degree students in the Applied Ethics programme. This is a niche area that we are now developing.²¹¹

These programmes focus on the needs of the market but do not interfere with the core disciplinary curriculum.

²⁰⁹ HM3, 15 February 2006.

²¹⁰ HM3, 15 February 2006.

²¹¹ HM3, 15 February 2006.

Even in Philosophy you've got to pay attention. So if there are issues in ethics, for example, or applied ethics as we've done, you need to be able to respond to that appropriately. We've just had a request from the School of Accountancy. They need a course now because of the fall-out from Enron on applied ethics. So we'll be responsive; we'll do that. But at the same time the other side of it is that we still teach classical Philosophy. Why is it relevant? Because it teaches you about thinking, it teaches you about philosophy. Those are where our roots go back to. Classical thought is as alive today in many respects as it was then.²¹²

This suggests that disciplines cannot completely escape external pressures to transform their curricula; however, these disciplines are situated in contexts which affect the nature of their curriculum responses. The case of Philosophy suggests that the exogenous factors are superseded by the endogenous factors. This could be the result of the fact that Philosophy is more strongly classified and therefore has stronger boundaries than other disciplines within the faculty. According to Bernstein (1971), this would account for its 'relatively impenetrable' borders and the strength of the endogenous over the exogenous change imperatives. This is further reinforced by the fact that the discipline has a high level of resources and capacity, which places it in a less vulnerable position than most other disciplines in the faculty. Philosophy, also receives a higher level of student subsidy from the government than many other disciplines in the faculty. In addition, it is in a strong position from an intellectual capacity perspective, with all academics in the department having PhDs and the department having a higher level of research output than many other departments in the faculty.²¹³ Thus the discipline is in a position of strength from a resource dependency perspective and is strongly bounded from other disciplines, which affects the nature and extent of its accommodation of external pressures to transform.

The position of Philosophy does not fit neatly into the findings of the Frank and Gabler (2006) study.²¹⁴ Their study predicts that Philosophy as a discipline is in a downward spiral. They argue that since Philosophy is too dependent on Master thinkers and does not give us the tools to influence our daily lives in direct ways, it is no longer of importance to the society. As a result it will either adapt or close down.

²¹² HM3, 15 February 2006.

²¹³ HM3, 15 February 2006.

²¹⁴ See the discussion of the Frank and Gabler study in Chapter Two.

However, the Wits case suggests that Philosophy continues to remain stable with few changes to its core curriculum.

7.7 Conclusion

Despite the fact that the literature privileges market responsiveness as a dominant driver of curriculum change, the Wits case reflects a more complex and nuanced response. First, it is evident that there are a number of different discourses and approaches within the faculty. This ranges from market discourses to a more traditional or conservative discourse. This includes proactive and reactive market discourses, a hybrid discourse and a traditional discourse. These are the result of an interplay between different curriculum drivers and the characteristics of the discipline itself. This suggests that curriculum reform is driven by both external and internal factors and that these affect disciplines, departments and programmes in different ways.

There are a number of possible explanations for why this is the case. First, disciplines that are less strongly bounded are more open to accommodation of the markets or society. Second, financial and academic capacity plays a significant role in locating disciplines and programmes in weaker or stronger positions in relation to external stakeholders. This is often underpinned by resource dependency theories. Third, since global realities have changed, this may affect the disciplines as they read from new scripts (Frank & Gabler, 2006:63). This suggests that curriculum changes as the society changes. In this regard it would be interesting to speculate on whether curriculum will continue to favour market-based approaches in light of the fact that the markets have revealed their sins. In other words, since the markets are in crisis with the economic meltdown, ethical concerns and general loss of faith in the system, will curriculum continue to bias market-based curriculum approaches? My perception is that curriculum will continue to align with conceptions of responsiveness. However, it will probably validate both economic and socio-political curriculum concerns. Traditional non-utilitarian curriculum will probably develop a small elite and niche space within which to operate.

The next chapter focuses on the nature of curriculum reform trends in the Faculty of Humanities.

CHAPTER 8

PROFESSIONALISATION OF CURRICULUM: OVERALL TRENDS IN THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

8.1 Introduction

Having examined what the drivers of curriculum change are in the various disciplines and departments, this chapter focuses on the key curriculum trends occurring in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand. In particular, this chapter explores the faculty's response to the emerging professionalisation discourse that is dominating curriculum reform efforts in higher education across the globe. Changing global and local realities have placed pressure on higher education to strengthen the relationship between academia and society, with a dominant focus on workplace needs. This pressure has manifested in a number of curriculum transformation strategies that focus on skills, problem solving and application-based approaches underpinned by utilitarian educational discourses. Thus this chapter discusses the nature of curriculum reform approaches in the Faculty of Humanities through two key questions: i) What are the curriculum reform trends and strategies in the faculty? ii) How does this influence knowledge conception in the faculty?

This chapter contends that there are shifts from traditional curriculum approaches toward increased professionalisation of curriculum in the faculty. This is achieved through a number of different strategies, including a focus on contemporary issues, a shift toward skills-based curricula and the introduction of interdisciplinary programmes. These different strategies have implications for curriculum reform, with some changes being less fundamental than others. The chapter also suggests that even though there are shifts toward application-based approaches, in general there is strong support for maintaining some elements of the liberal education tradition in the faculty, and there are concerns that some professionalisation strategies could diminish the educational value of the courses and programmes that they offer.

8.2 A Conceptual Framework: Dissecting Mode 2

A fundamental difference between previous debates about higher education and present ones has to do with the extent and nature of curriculum transformation efforts. The present socio-political and economic context has placed pressure on universities to transform the curriculum in order to serve the society in more direct ways. In order to explore actual curriculum trends in the faculty, this chapter draws on Bernstein's (2000) concept of regionalisation and 'genericism' as well as Nowotny, Scott and Gibbons' (2003) notion of forms of contextualisation.

The new socio-political and economic context calls for closer ties between the "external world and the knowledge enterprise than ever before" (Muller, 2005b:9). One of the key characteristics of curriculum reform efforts is its increased association with the 'external' and the decreased focus on the 'inward'.²¹⁵ Bernstein (2000:54) suggests that knowledge has always had both an external and an internal focus, which sit in a fine balance with each other. However, the new socio-economic and political context is tipping the balance away from an inward to an outward knowledge focus. As a result, "knowledge, after nearly a thousand years, is divorced from inwardness and literally dehumanized" (Bernstein, 2000:86). This increased focus on the external has implications for curriculum reform trends. Bernstein argues that the dominant model for constructing curriculum in the twenty-first century is underpinned by notions of regionalisation and genericism, which result in the recontextualisation of knowledge from a focus on the inner to a focus on the outer.

Regionalisation refers to the way in which knowledge reconstitutes itself around fields of practice. Regions result in the mobilisation of various disciplines around common themes that are driven by external stakeholder needs and interests. This is different from 'singulars' or disciplines which represented the dominant form of knowledge in higher education until the twentieth century. The notion of singulars refers to knowledge that has a unique space and a "specialised discrete discourse with its own

²¹⁵ Bernstein refers to Bourdieu's concepts of sacred and profane to discuss external and internal notions of knowledge. Sacred generally refers to knowledge for knowledge's sake and to epistemological standards of truth. It also allows for a focus on knowledge absent from practical necessity. Profane, on the other hand, refers more arbitrary and everyday knowledge. This is drawn from Maton (2003/2005:101-112).

intellectual field of text and practices” (Bernstein, 2000:55). Singulars are strongly bounded and typified by the traditional academic disciplines (Beck & Young, 2005:185). They are brought together to form regions. Unlike singulars that face inward, regions face outward toward fields of practice (Beck, 2002:621).²¹⁶ In other words, new regions of knowledge configure around external themes or issues as opposed to disciplines which focus on the inward trajectory of knowledge (Beck & Young, 2005:187).

One of the implications of regionalisation is the expansion of university programmes beyond their traditional disciplinary stronghold (Frank & Gabler, 2006:2). In fact, the number of applied fields grew substantially between 1915 and 1995 in the USA, with an array of new areas such as advertising, communication, human nutrition and even kinesitherapy making their way into university curricula (Frank & Gabler, 2006:49-51). Between 1979 and 1994 university curricula became even more applied, with fields such as computer and information sciences, protective services, and transportation and material moving becoming prominent, while philosophy, English, foreign languages and religion all declined in the USA (Conner, 1998:2).

While Bernstein’s concept of regions offers a valuable tool for analysing curriculum reform trends, the concept of regions does not fully explain changes that are taking place in the Faculty of Humanities. For example, although Bernstein’s concept of regions explains ways in which disciplines come together to focus on fields of practice, this is inadequate in terms of explaining changes that are occurring within disciplines.²¹⁷ Even though Bernstein does refer to the fact that disciplines are becoming fragmented and are thinning their boundaries, he and others (Beck & Young, 2005) focus largely on the notion of regions and integration of disciplines in their analysis of curriculum reform in the twenty-first century. Therefore, for the purposes of this chapter, the researcher will use the concept of intra-disciplinary recontextualisation to locate curriculum changes that are occurring within disciplines. Basically this refers to curriculum changes within disciplines that are focused on the external world.

²¹⁶ Beck draws these concepts from Bernstein.

²¹⁷ Bernstein acknowledges that disciplines are undergoing changes which have the potential to fragment knowledge and affect ways in which disciplines are constituted but he does not locate these changes in the framework of regions and genericism.

Genericism is a concept used by Bernstein (2000) to explain the increased focus on generic skills required by the workplace. This skills discourse assumes that the provision of generic skills such as problem-solving skills, communication skills and teamwork are becoming more important for university graduates than traditional theoretical curriculum. Genericism, which has its origins in pre-university and work-based training, has now come to occupy a significant portion of university curricula. It is based on the notion of trainability and is informed by “short-termism” (Beck & Young, 2005:15). In its extreme form, genericism has no content and is totally divorced from the sacred (that is, from content, disciplines and the inner structure of knowledge).

... there appears to be an emptiness in the concept of trainability, an emptiness which makes the concept self-referential and therefore excluding (Beck & Young, 2005:5).

Regionalisation, intra-disciplinary recontextualisation and genericism can be located within Gibbons’ mode 2 conception of knowledge (Gibbons, 2000). However it must be noted, that even though this is presented in very dichotomous terms for conceptual analysis, in reality the various aspects are related to each other in intricate ways that cannot always be cleanly separated. It must also be noted that while regionalisation and intra-disciplinary recontextualisation tend to focus on the development of specific skills and knowledge, genericism focuses on more generic skills.

In order to strengthen the discussion on regionalisation, intra-disciplinary recontextualisation and genericism, this chapter also draws on forms of contextualisation, high and low skills, and high and low theory to locate the discussion. Since Bernstein does not distinguish various forms of regionalisation and genericism, this study will utilise the concepts of forms of contextualisation (Nowotny et al., 2003:191, Stankiewicz, 2000), as well as high and low skills and high and low theory (extrapolated from the mode 2 versus mode 1 debates) to develop a more nuanced sense of curriculum reform. Contextualisation is defined by the extent to which curriculum is informed by practice and experience rather than theory. Thus weak contextualisation generally has a low reliance on experience and a high reliance on systematic theorising (Nowotny *et al.*, 2003:191). Similarly, strong contextualisation has a high reliance on experience and a weak reliance on theorisation. It must be noted that

this conception of contextualisation refers to the extent to which knowledge is linked to the external world, while the concept of recontextualisation referred to by Bernstein is about the way in which knowledge is reconstituting itself in the field of practice. Diagram 8.1 summarises the conceptual framework for this chapter. The notion of low and high skills versus low and high theory is drawn from the mode 1 versus mode 2 debates because it adds a critical dimension to the notion of contextualisation. In other words, the notion of high and low skills offers the researcher a means of deepening the analysis of contextualisation.

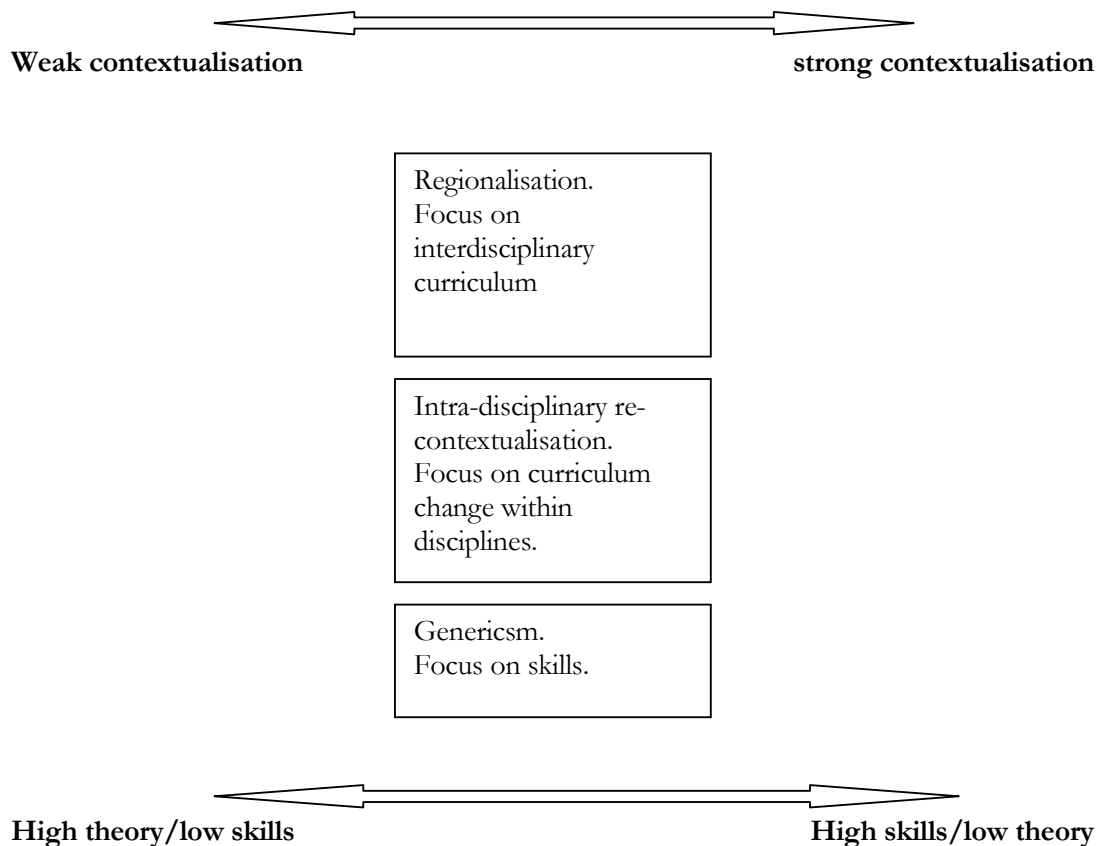


Diagram 8.1: Conceptual framework for curriculum reform trends

There are a range of different curriculum approaches aimed at increasing links between university curricula and their application in a societal context. This increased professionalisation manifests in several different curriculum strategies. This framework allows one to locate the array of different curriculum trends emerging in the faculty. This includes changes in the discipline as well as outside of the discipline, and accounts for both skills and theoretical approaches. It also provides sufficient depth to situate subtle differences and similarities between the different approaches. For example, it allows for an analysis of different extents of genericism or different levels of emphasis on theory versus skills in all three curriculum approaches. Thus regionalisation and genericism offers an umbrella framework within which to locate the discussion, while the forms of contextualisation allow the researcher to deconstruct these concepts further, and the high skills and high theory approach offers a means of understanding different forms of contextualisation.

8.3 Wits Promotes Society-curriculum Alignment

As indicated in the policy chapter, Wits has embraced the skills/vocational discourse and initiated a substantial restructuring exercise to encourage this shift. Wits policy documents abound with conceptions of relevance and responsiveness to society and call for more innovation and new thinking around university curriculum. On this basis, the documents argue that programmes should promote relationships with professional practice and work-based placements.²¹⁸ However, even though Wits policies reflect a strong focus on professionalisation, there is also ambivalence as the university tries to balance this with its traditional academic approach.²¹⁹ Wits policies, therefore, reflect a complex mix between mode 1 and mode 2 knowledge approaches.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Wits HEQC quality audit, Self-evaluation report, 2006, p. 163.

²¹⁹ See Chapter Two.

²²⁰ See Chapter Two for details.

8.4 Curriculum Trends in the Faculty: A Flea Market Frenzy

8.4.1 Humanities under pressure to transform

The faculty acknowledges that it has experienced significant pressure to strengthen the relationship between the curriculum and society, and that this has led to a period of significant curriculum restructuring:

I think that one of the major developments that's happened in the Humanities in the last few years has been to carry further the relationship between the formative first degree and the professional qualifications....²²¹

I would say one of the drivers is this thing about getting a job, career pathing. Many universities are responding by giving students specialist areas for jobs. Parents are also looking for jobs for their children, such as tourism....²²²

While this pressure exists across faculties, Humanities is particularly affected because its curriculum has generally been underpinned by traditional liberal education which focused heavily on the 'inner'. Thus the faculty has been associated with education that is aimed at cultivating cultural, social and political understandings and not on serving extrinsic needs (McCabe, 2000). This is starkly different from the pressures to professionalise the curriculum that the faculty has recently experienced:

... and to valorise vocational education in a way that they have never done before....²²³

The pressure to transform the curriculum has resulted in a variety of curriculum strategies aimed at strengthening the links between academic knowledge and societal practice (see Table 8.1). This includes a focus on contemporary world²²⁴ issues, a focus on skills and the introduction of interdisciplinarity. This has resulted in course proliferation, course and programme repacking and redesign, and course closures.

²²¹ HM2, 20 May 2005.

²²² HM7, 12 May 2005.

²²³ HED7, 22 February 2007.

²²⁴ Bernstein (2000) refers to the shift from the word to the world.

Table 8.1: Summary of curriculum reform trends

Summary of trends	Examples
Discipline closures	Religious Studies department closed down.
Course closures	British Politics and Government 1760-1784 in History; History of Education at postgraduate level.
Course proliferation	Sociology offered 11 additional courses between 1999 and 2005. For example, the introduction of a course in the Sociology of Health and Illness.
Repackaging	History developed a new first-year course – ‘Living with the USA’.
Thematic approaches/Regions	Heritage Studies, Forced Migration, Journalism, Media Studies, Policy and Management Studies in Education, Film and Documentary History
Disciplinary recontextualisation	A change of focus in existing courses and disciplines. For example, a focus on policy, discussions, Ubuntu and crony capitalism in contemporary South Africa.
Genericism	Developing presentation skills in some courses or a focus on communication skills taught through the Graduate School of Humanities. Business English and Spoken Business English through the English department.

These trends can be compared to the frenzy that occurs at a flea market. A flea market is generally a place where a wide range of goods are sold and where this makes it difficult to predict exactly what will be sold at any particular time. Often the flea market sells whatever customers are willing to buy, and in some way anything goes. The flea market is also a place where the seller repackages products to suit client needs. It is a place that is bustling with trade-offs between sellers and potential buyers. One must have a good eye at the flea market because while some goods are excellent some are very poor in quality. Clearly this is different from the traditional liberal curriculum practices that prevailed in the faculty in the past (see Table 8.2 for a characterisation of the two approaches).

Table 8.2: Characterisation of present and past curriculum trends

Past – before 1995	Present – 1995-2005
Few classical disciplines in the faculty	A range of new courses, programmes and ‘disciplines’
Disciplinary focus – singulars	Disciplinary and interdisciplinary – singulars and regions
Strong theoretical emphasis	Theory and skills
No genericism	Emerging genericism
Focus on understanding	Understanding and application
Historical approach to knowledge	Contemporary approach to knowledge
Less contextual	More contextual
More stable: similar courses for many years	More dynamic: greater proliferation of courses and programmes
Courses in disciplines were similar to those in many other institutions across the globe. For example, Education had Sociology, Psychology, Philosophy and History of Education.	Greater diversity in course offerings
Three- to four-year degree programmes	Degree programmes as well as short courses

8.4.2 *Programme expansion and diversification: meeting market and student needs*

The proliferation of courses and programmes is a sign of significant curriculum development efforts at universities across the globe. The number of degrees, disciplines and courses offered at higher education institutions across the globe have increased substantially and have outstripped programme closures or discontinuations (Becher & Trowler, 2001:14; Kletz & Pallez, 2002:59; Manns & March, 1978:544). Becher & Trowler (2001:14) suggest that the proliferation of disciplines and sub-disciplines should not be underestimated in the macro analysis of higher education curriculum transformation. However, the research conducted by Frank & Gabler (2006:1) suggests that proliferation is occurring in some disciplines, while in others there are sharp declines in course and programme offerings. For instance, while the applied disciplines have grown, those in the pure Humanities have shrunk (Frank & Gabler, 2006:48).

Trends in the faculty indicate that there has been extensive course development and renewal in order to respond to society’s changing needs. The development of new programmes and courses within the institution as well as in the faculty represented a huge curriculum development exercise over the past ten years. While course and programme offerings have increased across the institution, the growth of offerings in

the Humanities far exceeds that of other faculties. It is estimated that the Faculty of Humanities has approved approximately 150 courses per year (over the past three to four years), which is more than the total number of new courses and programmes developed in all other faculties combined.²²⁵ Furthermore, as with the trends in the above studies by Manns and March (1978), Becher and Trowler (2001), and Kletz and Pallez (2002), the course renewals outstripped the course closures. These courses are located within as well as outside of disciplines and reflect an attempt to transform curriculum to more contemporary skills and application-based approaches. In fact, one university administrator believes that the faculty “had a knee-jerk reaction by spurning many courses that were going to be sexy”.²²⁶

Between 1997 and 2005, postgraduate programmes (Masters degree programmes) grew substantially in all schools. This included, for example, a range of postgraduate courses and programmes such as the introduction of Rock Art Studies, Heritage Studies, Community Counselling, Forced Migration, Journalism, Media Studies, Policy and Management Studies in Education, Film and Documentary History, and Population and Demography Studies. It must be noted that the curriculum growth pattern has been different for different schools and disciplines. For example, International Relations reflected significant changes in 1999 and 2005, while in all other years the department underwent smaller incremental changes. In 1998 there were 14 Masters degree courses on offer, but in 1999 there were 20, of which half were old courses and the other half new courses. International Relations also reflected a huge change in 2005 with 19 new courses – none of the courses overlapped with courses offered in 2004. International Relations also changed from full-year courses to the modular system in 2005, which may account for the dramatic differences between the offerings in the two years. An example of a new course is Terrorism: Transitional Issues in International Relations. Sociology also showed a significant change between 1999 and 2001. In 1999 there were eight courses on offer, of which one was removed and 11 added to make a total of 19 in 2001. In 2001, therefore, there were 11 new courses on offer.²²⁷ Examples of additions include Global Institutions and Economic Restructuring, Work

²²⁵ Informal interview with Kamal Bhagwandas, project co-ordinator of the Faculty of Humanities Course and Programme Development, Academic Planning Unit. 10 July 2007.

²²⁶ UM1, 11 March 2005.

²²⁷ University Calendar, 1997-2005.

and Labour in the Global Economy, and the Sociology of Health and Illness. Masters courses in Political Studies reflected significant changes in 2003, when there were 21 courses compared to 15 in 2002; only four courses were common in both years. Examples of new courses include Transition to Democracy: Globalisation, Commodification and Regime Change in a Post-communist World and The State in Africa: Democratisation and Crisis.

This course development trend was not only evident at the postgraduate level, but also penetrated undergraduate programmes, despite the fact that Wits' strategic priority was focused on increasing its postgraduate numbers. In the School of Human and Community Development this included the introduction of Community Psychology in order to become more locally responsive and Organisational Psychology to respond to business needs.²²⁸ In the School of Language and Literature Studies, changes included the addition of Publishing Studies, Media Studies, South African Sign Language and IT for Humanities. In the School of Social Sciences new courses included Dynamics of Social Crisis in Sociology, African Cities in History, and Nationalism and Nation Building in Politics. In the School of the Arts Music underwent three changes during this period in an effort to find a balance between the classical music route and the more popular ethno-music route. This led to the development of a course on Ethnomusicology. In addition, courses such as Tourism were developed to support the Arts in the new South Africa.²²⁹ In the School of Education a range of new courses was developed, including Introduction to Educational Technology and e-learning for Educators,²³⁰ Performance and Life Coaching, Mentoring and Emotions in Teaching and Learning, and Becoming a Mentor and Assessor for Educators.²³¹

In addition to the development of a range of new programmes and courses, a repackaging strategy was also embarked on in the faculty. To this effect courses were repackaged to suit student interests and to increase student enrolment. Repackaging

²²⁸ Minor academic development, Organisational Psychology, 2004.

²²⁹ Music is still undergoing serious debates of where it should focus, with tensions between traditional and more popular approaches, as well as technological and old school approaches. School of the Arts Review submission, 2006.

²³⁰ Faculty of Humanities Board meeting minutes. 6 May 2003.

²³¹ Academic minor development, 2005/313; 2005/315; 2005/3111.

strategies generally entailed the reorganisation of modules and course content on more topical issues. For instance, History repackaged its first-year course to focus on more contemporary issues. The History Department at Wits had been a popular department during the 1970s and 1980s when it offered radical social history which became a tool of resistance against apartheid (Ludlow, 2006:30). However, in the post apartheid period, student enrolments dropped substantially and the History Department experienced serious challenges with regard to its sustainability; it was faced with threats of retrenchment and closure as a result. The department responded by redesigning its first-year course so that it would be more appealing to students.

And I think that we need to ... and we're busy discussing this at the moment, we need to try and find a way of repackaging what we want to say to make it more attractive....²³²

Thus they repackaged their first-year curriculum into a course which is called *Living with the USA*. The first part of the course focuses on 'the third world' and examines the evolution of Africa and India after World War 2. The second part of the course is titled *Hotspots and Rivals* and covers the Middle East and China.²³³ This clearly represents a more contemporary and 'relevant' History curriculum.

... it needs refashioning and repackaging. So he's very clever and he changed it into this whole course called *Living with the USA* ... And so essentially the first part had retained the Cold War but repackaged and redone and much more orientated towards what does this mean for us today. And then the second part of the new part is about the Middle East.²³⁴

New course development as well as repackaging is increasingly focused on the outer instead of the inner workings of knowledge – that is, courses or programmes are increasingly organised by the context in which the proposed knowledge will be used.

It must also be noted that while in general most departments showed a growth in course offerings, there were some exceptions to this. Departments such as Religious

²³²HSS1, 8 March 2007.

²³³ Social sciences handbook, Undergraduate studies, 2004

²³⁴ HSS3, 28th Feb 2007

Studies, Classics and Afrikaans were rationalised or closed down, and Philosophy experienced marginal course increases.²³⁵

In trying to explain and understand the nature of these changes, this study draws on the large-scale study conducted by Frank and Gabler (2006) in the USA. While there are some correlations between that study's findings and the Wits case, there are also some differences. Frank & Gabler (2006) show that programmes in the Humanities are declining and those in the Social Sciences are growing. The Wits case suggests that this demarcation between the Social Sciences and Humanities is not as clear-cut. For example, Philosophy reflected declining course offerings in the Frank and Gabler (2006:90) study, which is not the case in the Wits study. In South Africa the Humanities and Social Sciences are generally considered similar and are located in the same branch of learning.

Across the faculty, there is evidence that the significant drive to reform and repackage curriculum has resulted in changes within as well as outside disciplines. The Wits case suggests that disciplines are reconstituting themselves in disciplinary and interdisciplinary ways. In addition, there is a growing emphasis on the notion of skills and application-based curriculum.

8.4.3 Reconstituting the disciplines

One of the dominant curriculum reform trends in the faculty is about the ways in which disciplines are reconstituting themselves to strengthen their relationship with society. A key strategy for strengthening the links between academia and society has been an increased focus on contemporary contextual issues. This usually occurs within disciplinary boundaries and reflects an attempt to redirect some aspects of disciplinary study toward the field of practice. As a result curriculum is more utility-based and promotes greater emphasis on application and problem solving and less on merely exploring and understanding phenomena. This trend is evident across most schools, departments and disciplines. It includes, for instance, the study of the History of African Cities (focus on municipalities in Africa between 1900 and 2004) and the focus

²³⁵ For details see next chapter on inter-disciplinarity

on the Middle East in History, the focus on *Ubuntu*,²³⁶ Black Economic Empowerment and Crony Capitalism in Post-apartheid South Africa in Political Studies²³⁷.

Clearly one of the key characteristics of the recontextualisation of the discipline is the focus on contemporary issues. There are two approaches to strengthening the contemporary focus of curriculum within disciplines. One is underpinned by a greater emphasis on practice while the other continues to remain theoretical but draws on the context to locate theoretical debates.

8.4.4 Concerns with solving society's problems: a focus on practice

Not only has curriculum increasingly focused on the 'external' but strategies for relating to the external world have been reconstituted. For example, while there was always some focus on South African contextual issues in the curriculum, the nature and focus has changed. First, the new focus on South Africa prioritises policy implementation and problem solving. This is different from previous curriculum which focused more strongly on providing explanatory frameworks for understanding society:

In the old BEd Honours, this is quite a while ago, there was a very clear conception that it was actually academic rather than practical, and that it was deconstructive. So the whole idea was to mount a critique against apartheid education. That was the very clear logic of that. ... it was a principled critique of apartheid education, and it was a principled critique on the grounds of democracy. And not in the kind of rhetoric that's very easy now; it was a well worked out programme; it had been very carefully developed as a kind of ideology critique.²³⁸

Thus in the 1980s curriculum on South Africa focused on developing an explanatory framework to understand the socio-economic and political basis of apartheid. In particular, the focus on Marxist and neo-Marxist theories aimed at providing a systematic analysis and critique of apartheid became dominant in the Wits academic community.

²³⁶ Essay topics for second-year Political Studies students.

²³⁷ This is included in a second-year Political Studies course: – The State, Modernism and the Constitution of the Nation.

²³⁸ HED7, 22 February 2007.

One is, in a certain sense the eighties have a remarkable relation to history, because of the democratic revolution which eventually was, people become very interested in trying to explain the society that they're living in. ... There was very intense political debate about the significance of different interpretations of really obscure things like the history of land tenure in South Africa and that sort of thing; it was very passionate.²³⁹

Curriculum is now much more heavily focused on development and implementation. There is a sense of urgency to solve society's most pressing economic, political and social problems:

Obviously with the post ninety-four situation you move into a very different world. And I think also in a sense of those issues are immediate....²⁴⁰

Second, this urgency is informed by the changing interests of society from the political domain to economic growth, the changing interests of students from political issues to employment concerns, and the shift from a focus on political radicalism to development and globalisation (Cross et al., 2008:19).

Third, this approach privileges a consensus model of analysis as opposed to a conflict model of analysis which has been associated with many previous curriculum strategies.

There was a sense that you needed to prise open worlds and their kind of forms of consciousness. I'm not sure there's that same understanding now.²⁴¹

The early 1990s marked a turn away from critique of current education policies and practices to a critical examination of possible policies and practices for the post-apartheid era.²⁴²

This results in an increase in content that deals more with policy making and implementation and less with critiquing. Thus the focus is on rebuilding society as opposed to analysing and critiquing social, political and cultural phenomena:

²³⁹ HSS10, 7 March 2007.

²⁴⁰ HSS10, 7 March 2007.

²⁴¹ HED7, 22 February 2007.

²⁴² School of Education, Review, 1999-2003, p. 3.

... First of all, I think that ... I mean, it's one thing to deconstruct a society, it's another thing to reconstruct a society.²⁴³

The recent focus on policy in higher education curriculum is not unique to South Africa; however, its manifestation in the South African context is particularly significant. In the South African case, it is further entrenched by the reconciliatory politics that was aimed at nation building during the immediate post-apartheid era. In order to build the society beyond its fragmented past, government embarked on a reconciliatory strategy aimed at creating a sense of belonging and identity. In this context socio-political analysis is less important than finding solutions. and consensus is more important than critique. This strategy has implications for curriculum in South African higher education. The challenges experienced by the History Department make this point poignantly:

... And perhaps the late 1990s was the sort of seriously low point. And that's always been an enigma for us. Because I think we all imagined that post-1994 there'd be a groundswell of support for History as our new dispensation sort of looked back with different lenses to say, we need, in order to build our new democracy, we need to understand the past.... But that sort of promise of History playing a sort of pre-eminent role in the public discourse about where we are, didn't materialise. And to some extent I think ... It had to do, I think, with the way that the transition was conceptualised. And I think that one element in that was a very narrow understanding of how the past informed the present. And to put it bluntly, I think that it was understood through narrow lenses ... the main task of constructing this new nation was actually looked at from very narrow nationalist perspectives.²⁴⁴

Another manifestation of the consensus approach is that curriculum does not reflect on the past but focuses on the present and future. This has to do with the fact that many South Africans are not keen on delving into the past. Some find the past too painful, while others would rather escape from their own role in supporting apartheid policies, and yet others believe that they are part of a new generation and have nothing to do with the past:

²⁴³ HED7, 22 February 2007.

²⁴⁴ HSS1, 8 March 2007.

The second element is that I think people for some reason, I think there are good explanations, simply didn't want to engage the past. It seemed to be so traumatic, so painful. And linked to that ... if you link those two points then the ... if you look at what happened in the schools, students got turned off History because for them it was like ... the past but also it was a particular past. It's all about politics, about how bad apartheid was, about how we struggled, and all these old people telling us it was so heroic and now we must be grateful to you, you know. And that's just ... I was at school obviously long before that kind of thing happened, but if I had been taught that kind of History, I would be turned off as well'. ... I think that the young people who are coming through the schools are ... there is a greater distance between pre '94 and where we're now. ... My son was born in '94 so his attitude is, you know what, I'm a Mandela child, it doesn't really matter....²⁴⁵

There is concern that the choice to foreground consensus in the curriculum will be detrimental to students. It is argued that students will lose their abilities to think critically, which is essential to the democratic ethos:²⁴⁶

... We have a very sort of technicist approach to our education, which I think is hugely problematic because I think that we're developing a society where people are not thinking critically....²⁴⁷

This approach will also affect efforts to promote and sustain notions of citizenship:

... And then people come out of education really not even understanding the key debates in the field....

There's a lot of people who don't understand what it means to prepare people for democracy. It's very superficial. And again because ... and I particularly feel it on this campus.... People aren't exposed to debates on what does it mean to be a democrat ... I know I've already pointed to ... popular conceptions of what democracy is or isn't....

And all those, I mean there's a popular demand and there's a principled critique. And they aren't necessarily the same, and my argument has always been that if you want to empower people, you need to teach them to argue on the institution's terms against the institution....²⁴⁸

The focus on practice results in curricula that could be categorised as low in theory, high in skills and framed by strong contextualisation.

²⁴⁵ HSS1, 8 March 2007.

²⁴⁶ This means engaging with information and content in ways that require logic and judgement based on evidence and reason.

²⁴⁷ HSS1, 8th March 2007

²⁴⁸ HED7, 22 February 2007.

8.4.5 Theorising practice: understanding contemporary phenomena

Another trend occurring in the faculty suggests that even though there is a shift toward a focus on contemporary curriculum issues in the disciplines, this is done through a theoretical approach. Therefore, although the focus is on present-day contemporary issues, this is not achieved through a focus on practice but rather through theorising contemporary phenomena. For example, a second-year Political Studies course on The State, Modernism and the Constitution of the Nation requires that students engage with the notion of *Ubuntu* through an essay question: 'Is *Ubuntu* anti-democratic?' This requires students to engage with theories of democracy as well as *Ubuntu*. Other courses that reflect this approach include, for instance, courses on Nationalism and Nation Building in Africa, Media, Democracy and Development in South Africa, and Construction of Nationhood and the Cinema.

This approach draws on theories within disciplines to understand society. This begs the question whether there is any difference between this approach and previous, more traditional curriculum approaches within the faculty. First, it draws more heavily on the contemporary issues than previous curricula. For instance, previously in Sociology, the curriculum focused on understanding ways in which societies have developed and changed over time, while presently the focus is more heavily on explaining and understanding the present context. Second, the curriculum does not foreground progression and historical analysis as previous curricula did. For example, previously the curriculum systematically traced knowledge development over time through the key thinkers in the discipline, while presently it draws on those aspects of theory that are required to understand a particular phenomenon. This means that a systematic engagement with Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Giddens and so on is no longer the dominant model of teaching Sociology. Instead the focus is on contemporary topics such as globalisation, HIV and so on. This is similar to regionalisation in that it reconstitutes around a field of practice but it does so within existing disciplines:

And whereas we had a very strong political economy focus in the past we've moved much more into thinking around sort of democratic theory and the transition from authoritarian to democracy and so on. You know, when I first came here we did a kind of Plato to NATO; we don't do that any more. We ... do a more theoretically oriented but we try and locate it in what students will be able to hook into, that will grab their interest. So we look at contemporary issues.²⁴⁹

In this approach, the curriculum draws on theory to locate and analyse contemporary socio-political issues. Previously the focus was largely on building theoretical knowledge in a systematic way, underpinned by a strong sense of progression. Currently the approach draws on some aspects of theory in order to explain present phenomena, resulting in a less structured and more randomly informed theoretical approach. This is certainly aligned with conceptions of relevance, because theories that are relevant remain while those that are not tend to lose their space.

Third, while the previous curriculum assumed that students would be able to transfer theoretical knowledge to various application contexts, the present approach makes the relationship between theory and practice more explicit.

I think that we succeeded in making that link between current issues and History. Which has always been there, but it's not always been obvious to the students that what they're learning in History has relevance right now. ... Yes, more explicit t.²⁵⁰

This approach reflects a moderate curriculum strategy which can be characterised as having a balance of theory, skills and contextualisation. Perhaps this approach is closest to Muller's (2005:12) notion of 'strategicality' which calls for an approach that meets the needs of society while also preserving key aspects of traditional academic practices that are held in high regard by the academic community

Even though these programmes have maintained a theoretical approach, there are concerns about the implications of the approach for knowledge conception in the faculty. Specifically there is a concern that contemporary approaches do not allow for systematic and historical engagement with knowledge – that is, rigorous historical, socio-political and economic analyses, which affect student outcomes. Contemporary

²⁴⁹ HSS9, 7 February 2007.

²⁵⁰ HSS1, 8 March 2007.

approaches can focus too much on the present in a way that does not deal with the past. In other words, in some instances a focus on the present is narrow and does not develop the idea that social, political, economic and cultural developments are historically linked. Therefore, there is concern that a narrow approach to contemporary curriculum will result in loss of theory and unsystematic treatment of knowledge. The following excerpts reflect some of the concerns with adopting a narrow contemporary approach:

... I think in some ways it sort of takes a modern walk on contemporary culture which is rather ahistorical....²⁵¹

... but I do know that in this society and in relation to the broader world that we've been speaking about – co-modification, consumerism, treating knowledge like an object, you name it – my first thing is to prise open that world. ... And then my next thing is to start giving them some structure for this world that I've prised open ... agency structure debates, constraints, and possibilities. I'm interested in giving people an imagination for the possible a way of understanding that in fact concepts have a history in History, that concepts aren't just general things So to understand that in fact all knowledge is premised on other knowledge, that it's always a debate. ... But I do know there are certain concepts that people should understand if they're going to make sense of themselves and others....²⁵²

This is supported by Shilling (1993:106) who suggests that focusing on contemporary matters, has resulted in research that favours the particular as opposed to the general and in this way ignores central theoretical approaches to understanding education change. Furthermore, this approach can lead to *ad hoc* analyses which confuse levels of focus (meso, macro, micro) and levels of abstraction (explanation or description) (Shilling, 1993:108).

It is evident that a focus on contemporary issues represents a particular form of responsiveness. Thus it is characterised by a focus on the external in a way that foregrounds the 'here and now'. Furthermore, the different contemporary approaches have different implications for curriculum reform efforts.

²⁵¹ HSS10, 7 March 2007.

²⁵² HED7, 22 February 2007.

8.4.6 Regionalisation: the coalescing of disciplines

The faculty offers a range of different strategies for achieving relevance and responsiveness, or the professionalisation of curriculum. One such strategy is referred to as regionalisation, which is used to describe ways in which disciplines come together to focus on fields of practice. This includes the emergence of interdisciplinary degree programmes as well as non-degree programmes that are designed to suit clients' immediate needs.

The shift to inter and trans-disciplinarity is regarded as one of the key curriculum trends in higher education in the twenty-first century. Bernstein (2000) refers to the concept of regions to denote ways in which disciplines coalesce around thematic or topical concerns. Since disciplinary versus interdisciplinary curriculum approaches represent one of the most critical debates about knowledge conception and production in higher education, a chapter will be dedicated to discussion of this issue. This section will merely summarise the key findings regarding this debate since it represents one form of curriculum change evident in the faculty.

Similar to trends across the globe, the Wits case suggests that there is an increase in the number of interdisciplinary programme and course offerings within the faculty. However, while the faculty has made an effort to develop a range of interdisciplinary programmes, they are still strongly discipline-based at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level.

The Wits case reflects different conceptions of inter and cross-disciplinary collaboration which are located largely at the Masters degree level. These programmes occur across schools and departments and take a variety of different forms. Some are thematically driven with implicit roots in the disciplines – for example, Forced Migration Studies or Journalism – while others still have explicit links to the disciplines – for example, Film and Media Studies have strong theoretical links to concepts of modernism and postmodernism. Some are theoretically informed while others are more skills-based. For instance, the initial conceptualisation of the Forced Migration programme was underpinned by a skills discourse, while the redeveloped programme is far more theoretically rooted. The study suggests that these different conceptions of

interdisciplinarity have different implications for curriculum development. For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Chapter Nine.

8.4.7 Genericism: the rise of the skills discourse

Another manifestation of the professional discourse evident in the faculty is the focus on generic practical skills that are fast becoming prerequisites for job entry. This approach is informed by the fact that university graduates are increasingly viewed as being unprepared for the workplace. In particular, labour markets argue that students are not geared for the workplace because they lack certain generic skills like communication, presentation and teamwork, and are pressuring the universities to integrate it into their curricula. Alan Bourne, Talent Q director, said:

Our research illustrates that universities could be doing a lot more to help graduates prepare for the world of work. They enter the workplace with high expectations of their employer, but bring very few of the most essential soft skills.²⁵³

In response universities are integrating some of these basic skills into their programmes. The data suggests that the faculty has three approaches for introducing students to generic skills. The first approach is to integrate a range of generic skills such as presentation, communication and teamwork into existing courses:

If our students are not going to come away being social scientists at least, or even necessarily as politically knowledgeable as we'd like them to be, at least they might acquire things like presentation skills or public speaking skills, writing skills.²⁵⁴

²⁵³ This is a quote from a research study of 5 000 people that explored graduate readiness for work. The title is 'Research shows naïve university-leavers lack workplace survival skills'. The study was conducted by Talent Q, a recruitment agency. The article can be found on personneltoday.com, posted on 2 January 2008, accessed on 27 August 2008.

²⁵⁴ HSS8, 22 January 2007.

For example, the Academy for Film and Dramatic arts²⁵⁵ [have as their] strategic goal [to achieve] 95% employability, and they are measured by this, and because it is embedded in their strategic goals, they have to do market research and they have to teach them employability skills as well as content. They have to teach them things like entrepreneurship, how to put together a portfolio, etc.²⁵⁶

The integration of these basic generic skills occurs within existing disciplinary or even interdisciplinary courses and programmes. For instance, Political Science students have to do presentations on key political debates as part of their assessment. This approach teaches generic skills through existing course content.

The second approach to integrating generic skills into the formal curriculum is through offering separate modules that are directly linked to workplace skills within formal degree programmes. This approach requires the development of new courses or modules that focus on the development of generic business skills for example, the introduction of a module on Music Business Studies as part of the Music degree programme. This module covers topics such as basic financial skills, business management skills, marketing and distribution skills, drawing up contracts and writing funding proposals²⁵⁷.

A third approach is to introduce basic skills independently of the degree programme, which students can select on an *ad hoc* and needs basis. This is done through the Graduate School of Humanities, which has been particularly effective in offering work-based skills to students. This includes workshops on topics such as Year Planning and Time Management, Using the Web as a Tool and so on. This programme was initiated in response to the findings of a Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) study which indicated that Humanities students took longer to settle into jobs and had lower employment prospects than other students.²⁵⁸

The skills programmes offered through the schools are generally integrated into the disciplines and degree curriculum whereas those offered through the Graduate School

²⁵⁵ This refers to the programme of Film and Dramatic Arts in the School of Arts

²⁵⁶ UCS2, 12 May 2005.

²⁵⁷ Minor academic development, 2004. A2004/267.

²⁵⁸ Graduate School for the Humanities and Social Sciences Review, 2006.

are in addition to the formal curriculum. Both approaches are informed by the need to make students ‘trainable’, and assume that a range of generic skills such as communication and teamwork will ensure that students can successfully adapt to various environments, which is linked to the notion of trainability (Beck, 2002:623). However, Bernstein (2000:59) warns that generic modes are informed by short-termism and trainability and can be devoid of content

The Wits study suggests that different approaches to introducing generic skills into higher education have different implications for curriculum. Generic skills may be integrated with content or may be ‘content free’. In addition, genericism has been associated with courses that have little or no theoretical content as well courses that are theoretically focused. Perhaps genericism needs to be viewed within a matrix of content integration strategies versus content-free strategies as well as explicit theoretical focus and non-explicit theoretical focus.

8.4.8 Commodification of knowledge: the borders of regionalisation, disciplinary reconstitution and genericism

The idea of repackaging knowledge into short and digestible programmes to meet client requests is now part of the faculty’s offerings. This marks a significant shift in thinking about what constitutes university business. Previously such programmes would not have been considered as academic knowledge, but have now come to occupy a space (albeit a small space) in the university’s curriculum. This approach sits on the border of regionalisation, disciplinary reconstitution and genericism.

In order to create stronger relationships between academia and the world of work, Wits introduced a range of programmes that responded to the direct and immediate needs of the workplace. In the case of the faculty, this included the introduction of a range of short courses which are informed by clients’ needs. While short courses have always been part of the institution’s offerings, these were very few and located mostly in the Business School. However, the number of short courses increased by 53 between 1993 and 1997 to approximately 124 in the period 1998-2002.²⁵⁹ In terms of

²⁵⁹ Policy on short courses, version 2, undated.

the Faculty of Humanities, 66 new short courses were approved between 1993 and 2004.²⁶⁰ The bulk of short courses in the faculty are located in the School of the Arts, the School of Language and Literature, and the School of Education.

These courses are aimed at meeting immediate knowledge requirements for the workplace, and they also provide the university with an income-generation strategy. They are usually the result of requests from 'clients' and they are not driven by traditional academic interests. In 2002 Wits set up Wits Enterprise, a separate company, to administer some of these commercial ventures.²⁶¹ Since 2007, the School of Languages has offered a range of European, Asian and African languages and also offered courses in Business English and Spoken Business English, while the School of the Arts offers a range of courses such as Image Manipulation, Digital Video, Final Cut Editing and Macro Media Flash.²⁶² In addition to courses run by Wits Enterprise, some courses are run directly through the schools. Examples include Democracy Training for Professionals in Political Studies, Quality Assurance through Whole School Evaluation in Education, Translation and Interpretation Courses in the School of Language and Literature, and courses on Newspaper and Magazine Design and Television Studies in the School of the Arts.

This represents an extreme form of regionalisation or disciplinary reconstitution which is strongly guided by the external environment with little focus on the inner as an organising principle of the curriculum. This form of regionalisation or disciplinary reconstitution is skewed heavily away from the 'sacred' or from systematic theoretical learning (Beck, 2002:619). Thus the link between the new courses and programmes and the initial discipline is substantially reduced or limited. This has implications for knowledge conception and academic identity. While one could argue that this is actually a form of genericism, this study suggests that commodification sits on the borders of extreme regionalisation, disciplinary reconstitution and early manifestations of genericism. Thus it draws on the disciplines where necessary and focuses on the field of practice, but also focuses on skills required by the business sector. These skills

²⁶⁰ Database of ABEX-approved short courses on offer at Wits for the period 1993-2004. A2004/711. 2004.

²⁶¹ HEQC self-evaluation report. University of the Witwatersrand, 2006.

²⁶² Short course directory, Wits Enterprise, 2007, University of the Witwatersrand.

can be generic but also specific (e.g. Final Cut Editing), thus the borders of regions, disciplinary reconstitution and genericism. This form of knowledge is underpinned by high skills, low theory and strong contextualisation.

Similarly Wits has made a concerted effort to introduce internships as a graduation requirement in some programmes. While internships have always been part of the professional degree programmes (Medicine, Engineering), this has widened to include some non-professional programmes. Internships could include working at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER), for instance.²⁶³

The policies and procedures around service learning are an obvious instance of this integration. Further evidence of this integration is provided by the place of service learning and all forms of internships within the academic curricula....²⁶⁴

Internship programmes focus on regionalisation (Social Sciences WISER internships), disciplinary reconstitution (internship for History students analysing archival documents) and genericism. First, internships provide students with work-based experiences in particular fields. To this effect the School of the Arts and the Graduate School of the Humanities have introduced a range of internships into their programmes aimed at strengthening the relationship between university knowledge and work-based application. This represents a form of regionalisation since the focus is on the field of practice, drawing on various disciplines through a thematic or problem context:

These kinds of co-operations are not confined to the Arts. The programme in Journalism and Media Studies offers fellowships and internships with the media industry to promote interchanges between the university and the practitioner work in the areas of ...²⁶⁵

This could take also the form of disciplinary-specific internships such as History students working on archival documents, even though this form is not common.

²⁶³ WISER offers internships for non-professional academic programmes.

²⁶⁴ Wits HEQC quality audit, self-evaluation report, 2006, p. 293.

²⁶⁵ Wits HEQC quality audit, self-evaluation report, 2006, p. 278.

Second, internships provide students with some general work-based skills. This component is about understanding work cultures and developing the cultural capital to operate effectively in the workplace. It is more appropriately located in the generic arena and foregrounds the basic skills such as computer literacy and communication that are required by employees.

It is clear that internships are focused on regionalisation and disciplinary reconstitution as well as genericism. Therefore, they provide students with opportunities to apply their knowledge in a real-life context, and also provides them with an understanding of the way in which the workplace operates (work cultures) and introduces them to a range of basic skills like computer literacy and communication.

8.5 A Skills versus Theory Approach

One of the implications of the professionalisation of higher education is the shift from more abstract and theoretical curriculum approaches to practical and skills-based approaches. Thus the theory versus skills debate is a central feature of the tension that underlies discourses on curriculum reform in the twenty-first century. While this debate is not new and began as far back as Descartes' analysis of rationalist versus empirical perspectives of knowledge,²⁶⁶ Bourdieu's theoretical versus practical logic, Foucault's programmes versus technologies, and Luria's abstract versus situational thinking (Muller, 2005b:1), this has come to occupy centre stage in present day deliberations about university education.

Curriculum reform trends in the faculty show that there are definite shifts toward application and skills-based approaches and that there are a variety of strategies for achieving this. The Wits case reflects regionalisation, disciplinary recontextualisation and genericism. It also reflects different forms of all of these, which have different implications for curriculum. The first strategy focuses on practice, at the expense of theory. This approach is classified as strong contextualisation, characterised by a low

²⁶⁶ Descartes' perspective is that that knowledge is acquired without resort to experience, while empiricists argue that knowledge is derived from experience.

reliance on theory and a high reliance on experience. This approach is evident in the School of Education.

Most of the stuff in assessment is practical. You want to know how to do feedback or how to do peer assessment.

In other words we didn't read empirical studies; we didn't read specific studies to classrooms, or to curriculum development or to assessment. Nothing like that. It was theorists like Althusser ... So education as a question was more by implication. And the focus was more on the discipline and mainly social theory as well as, as much as it was developed at the time, educational knowledge, or sociology of knowledge. Nothing like empirical studies that we are doing today....²⁶⁷

This is in line with the study conducted in South Africa by Westhuizen, Henning, Gherdien and Morris (2007) which shows that a range of Masters and PhD dissertations in educational technology were largely practical in nature and did not focus on conceptual or theoretical issues. They also found that the theses concluded with guidelines and recommendations as opposed to theoretical contributions to the field.

The second approach attempts to combine theory with application. This can be classified as focusing on middle-level theory and having a medium reliance on experience. This is different from the previous curriculum in the extent to which it focuses on the external and also the way in which it draws on theory.

At the same time we are mindful of the fact that you can't do that in a historical vacuum. So the sort of birth of politics and the context within which theory emerges is a good part of what we deal with..... We still do a more theoretically oriented approach but we try and locate it in what students will be able to hook into, that will grab their interest.²⁶⁸

Examples of this approach include Forced Migration and Heritage Studies.

The third approach is one that is underpinned by a skills and practical focus, without a theoretical component. While there are theoretical assumptions underpinning the curriculum, the curriculum itself does not have an explicit focus on theoretical issues. These include many of the short courses and the courses that are directly related to

²⁶⁷ HED1, 7 February 2007.

²⁶⁸ HSS9, 7 February 2007.

basic workplace skills. This represents a high contextualisation, characterised by a strong reliance on experience and low reliance on theory. For example, course such as Music Business Studies or Image Manipulation focus on skills and have a strong reliance on the field of practice.

8.6 Lamenting the Loss of Theory: Disillusionment and Contestation

Despite the fact that some curriculum shifts have resulted in the thinning or loss of theory, there is overriding support for the value of theory as a tool for teaching and learning in the faculty.²⁶⁹ In general the faculty does not believe that it is the role of higher education to concern itself only with narrow and immediate skills for employment.

Thus the faculty reflects strong support for maintaining a theoretical approach to the curriculum. It calls for a broader conception of skills that are not the narrowly defined technical skills required by the immediate work environment.

... So obviously we are more keenly aware that students do need a job at the end of this but once again I stress that what we trying to do is give them skills – thinking skills, writing skills – which will enable them to fit very well in whatever kind of job they will find afterwards.²⁷⁰

... And then skills-based where we'll sort of look at, try and get them to analyse a primary document, try and understand what is a primary document, how does it differ from secondary documents, how would you look at it critically? And then concentrating on oral history as an example of primary material. And of course oral history has its own very unique problems and advantages. We want them to try and grapple with those things....²⁷¹

Faculty members argue that narrowly conceived approaches to skills development are not useful for learning, neither are they suitable to the complex society in which

²⁶⁹ The tensions that underpin the shift from a theoretically informed curriculum to one that is increasingly skills-based is evident at the Masters degree level, where strong claims can be made for both options. Since the Masters degree represents the pathway to academic as well as professional training, the tension between the two is most evident at this level.

²⁷⁰ HM3, 15 February 2006.

²⁷¹ HSS2, 23 January 2007

students are located. They suggest that the broader notion of skills is better suited to the complex and ever-changing environment in which students will have to function:

So the contribution that the Humanities can make to understanding new forces in society, to read our world, to make intelligible what is happening to us, is enormous.²⁷²

I think it's a good thing, although I don't like crude distinctions between intrinsic and extrinsic aims of education. I would want to say that the nice practical subject is Philosophy because it teaches people to think. So I would like all of what we do to be acknowledged to have vocational implications.²⁷³

This approach foregrounds critical thinking which is considered as the faculty's forte'.

I just think that the Humanities offer us a model of critical thinking that we cannot let go of. And that we are slowly being swept into this tide of kind of log frames and inputs and outputs and it's crap basically.²⁷⁴

It's more the pedagogy, the emphasis on critical thinking skills and analysis rather than memorisation.²⁷⁵

... critical thinking skills And that is something which is a mark of our students, it ought to be a mark of our students, but we've got to tell them out there why this is so much more valuable than a purely technical education which is going out of date quite soon.²⁷⁶

For proponents of this approach,²⁷⁷ there is a concern that a narrow skills-based approach will impoverish teaching, learning and research in the faculty:

²⁷² HM1, 10 June 2005.

²⁷³ HM2, 20 May 2005.

²⁷⁴ HSS9, 7 February 2007.

²⁷⁵ HSS4, 31 January 2007.

²⁷⁶ HM3, 15 February 2006.

²⁷⁷ Respondents in the faculty were unanimous about this issue.

I think that the Humanities' academics have lost their way. Many are moving toward a postmodern extreme of anything goes and meta-theory is undervalued. Shift toward less theory and more fragmented and bitsy watered-down programmes...²⁷⁸

It is widely believed in the faculty that this approach will result in *ad hoc* and unsystematic approaches to knowledge:

... So they're not, they don't have a frame to think about what they ... they write, more like collections of issues. It's not even descriptive writing, because it's not framed. They don't have a sense of who are the parents of the field or the master, mistress of the files, whatever you want to call it. They don't know the difference between Giroux and some other that they picked up on the Internet....²⁷⁹

Clearly the Wits case indicates that there is overwhelming support for a theoretical approach to curriculum. Similar arguments are made by those who suggest that the commodification of higher education has skimmed off its theoretical discourse, which is a powerful means of educating students (Roberts, 1998:23). This is also indicated in Yates (2000:1) who argues that there is an assault on logic which is underpinned by anti-intellectualism located in market-oriented approaches to knowledge. However, the faculty reflects different understandings of what is considered acceptable theoretical knowledge, and also whether practice should be integrated into the curriculum and how this should be done.

8.7 Conclusion

Curriculum reform in the Faculty of Humanities reflects an increasing focus on the external environment. This is driven by a number of factors and is achieved through a number of different strategies. In particular, it is driven by increased pressure to professionalise higher education in order to make it more relevant to society's immediate needs. The faculty has responded in a number of different ways to achieve responsiveness in curriculum. This includes the emergence of regionalisation, disciplinary reconstitution and genericism. These comprise curriculum changes within

²⁷⁸ UCS1, 11 March 2005.

²⁷⁹ HED1, 7 February 2007.

disciplines, across disciplines and outside of disciplines. These range from degree programmes to short courses and vary in their focus on skills versus theory as well as the extent to which they relate to the immediate environment. The curriculum reform trends in the faculty could be viewed on a continuum from traditional disciplinary to genericism (see Diagram 8.2).

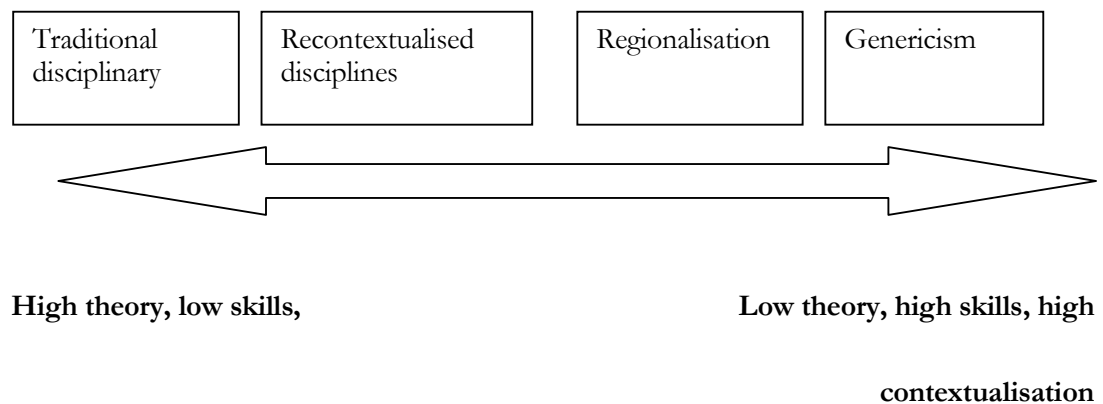


Diagram 8.2: Curriculum approaches in the faculty

Much like the flea market, there is something for everyone. Products are so different from one stall to the next, that it is difficult to compare. Therefore, difference and diversity in offerings is what makes it difficult to compare quality. While the ‘Wits’ name is usually associated with particular brands underpinned by particular practices and values, this new approach tends to dilute the Wits product. In this context it is difficult to identify the key common characteristics of the Wits product.

The next chapter focuses in more detail on one aspect of curriculum change that was discussed briefly in this chapter – interdisciplinarity.

CHAPTER 9

BREAKING DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES: THE STATUS OF THE DISCIPLINES

9.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses in detail on one aspect that was raised in the previous chapter – that is, the rise interdisciplinarity. Specifically it focuses on the status of disciplines as entities for organising and delivering knowledge in the Faculty of Humanities. This is achieved through the following questions: What is happening to the discipline as an entity for knowledge production and delivery in the faculty? How has this affected curriculum strategies and trends in the faculty?

The chapter deals with key debates regarding the appropriateness of the discipline as a means of organising knowledge and socialising students in the twenty-first century. The literature suggests that the notion of the discipline, particularly in the Humanities, is under pressure to change and is no longer regarded as the most suitable strategy for teaching, learning and research in the higher education sector. This is informed by pressures to become more responsive to society's needs, and raises a number of challenges for academic disciplines that are perceived as being outdated and unresponsive. This chapter argues that despite new knowledge production strategies which promote interdisciplinarity, the Wits case continues to reflect a strong disciplinary base as fundamental to its teaching, learning and research programmes. However, this does not imply that the discipline continues as it always did. Instead the Wits case shows that disciplines are under pressure to become more applied and utilitarian.²⁸⁰ This has resulted in the emergence of several curriculum reform strategies including the emergence of new interdisciplinary programmes in the faculty.

²⁸⁰ For details see previous chapter.

9.2 Conceptual Framework: The Roots of the Discipline

Even though there are many different notions about what constitutes disciplinary and interdisciplinary curriculum, there is some agreement that a discipline is a body of knowledge that has its own theories and thinkers and explains the world in particular ways. Disciplines are also ways of organising knowledge in institutions which bring their own cultures and practices. The key features of a discipline include:

- the presence of a community of scholars;
- a tradition or history of inquiry;
- a mode of inquiry that defines how data is collected and interpreted;
- a definition of the requirements for what constitutes new knowledge;
- the existence of a communications network (Davies & Devlin, 2007:3).

Since the nineteenth century the ‘discipline’ has been the key organising unit of knowledge in the higher education sector. Universities in Europe started with a few key disciplines such as Philosophy, Law and Theology (Davies & Devlin, 2007:3). In the USA the concept was used for the first time to develop learning programmes at Yale University and drew on the notion of “discipline as a strict regimen of behaviour” (Stankiewicz, 2000:305). Disciplines came to be distinguished from each other through “methods of inquiry, networks of concepts, theoretical frameworks, and techniques for acquiring and verifying findings...” (Stankiewicz, 2000:305). The support for disciplines became widespread and represented the central focus of both research and curriculum strategies in higher education. This did not only affect university curriculum in significant ways, but also had implications for the structuring and organisation of institutions. The discipline represented a powerful centre for knowledge conception and production which often superseded institutional goals and institutional loyalty (Becher & Trowler, 2001:16).

However, this situation changed in the twenty-first century when the legitimacy and authority of disciplinary learning, teaching and research came under attack. Absolute support for the disciplines started waning in the context of “the post modern condition” which increasingly supported claims of knowledge as relative and socially

constructed (Menand, 2001:11). In other words, the sense that disciplines are arbitrary ways of organising knowledge undermined the authority of disciplinary frameworks. Disciplinary knowledge has also come under attack for being irrelevant to society's needs and interests. This has resulted in calls for a shift from mode 1 disciplinary knowledge to mode 2 inter and trans-disciplinary curriculum approaches (Nowotny et al., 2003:179).

During this period, interdisciplinarity gradually came to occupy a more central position in higher education curriculum, and in some instances became an integral part of mainstream curricula (Brint *et al.*, 2008:2). The earliest attempts to introduce interdisciplinary curriculum into higher education was through 'American Studies' in the USA in the 1930s (Ratcliff, no date). The notion of interdisciplinarity resurfaced through Women's Studies and Black Studies in the 1970s, using culture as the organising principle and ethnography as a key method (Ratcliff, no date). Today interdisciplinarity has become increasingly prominent in both school and university education. This claim is supported by the Frank and Gabler (2006) curriculum study as well as by increasing publications in the field (there are more than 500 publications on interdisciplinarity) (Aboelela *et al.*, 2007:333). In fact, interdisciplinarity is a key characteristic of mode 2 knowledge which is gaining momentum (Nowotny *et al.*, 2003).

In order to discuss the status of disciplines and emerging interdisciplinarity at Wits, this chapter will draw on two concepts. First, in order to unpack regionalisation²⁸¹ and interdisciplinarity, the chapter will draw on Lake's (1994) differentiated notion of interdisciplinarity. Lake (1994:3) provides a framework to locate interdisciplinary curriculum on a continuum from high curriculum fragmentation between disciplines to high levels of connections and integration at the interdisciplinary level.²⁸² The researcher draws on Lake's (1994:3) notions of fully "integrated", "connected and disciplinary" and "fragmented and discrete" to discuss the range of inter or trans-disciplinary approaches evident in the faculty. In addition, the term "non-explicit

²⁸¹ The term 'regionalisation' was coined by Bernstein (1971) to describe the coming together of disciplines. Refer to the previous chapter for details.

²⁸² Lake (1991) uses Fogarty's conception of curriculum integration from *The Mindful School*.

interdisciplinarity” is added to the above to explain cases in which curriculum is drawn from several disciplines without indicating which disciplines are being drawn on.

Second, the chapter will draw on Frank and Gabler’s conception of institutional framing to strengthen the discussion. As discussed in Chapter Two, Frank and Gabler (2006) suggest that curriculum change is the result of changes in our understanding of our reality. They argue that as a society we now favour evolutionary instead of divine explanations of ‘our being’, which has fundamental effects on curriculum. This places human beings in a position of both knowledge and power to act and change their dispositions. As a result, there is pressure to change curriculum in order to empower and enable agents to change their realities. This favours a utilitarian curriculum discourse which provides society with greater capacity to know and act. Furthermore, the power to know and act undermines curricula that focus on the ‘masters’ and favours curricula that focus on ordinary citizens and everyday events (Frank & Gabler, 2006).

9.3 Wits Encourages Cross-fertilisation

Wits’ curriculum policy reflects the same ambiguity with regard to the discipline versus interdisciplinary curriculum approach that is apparent in national policy. Thus Wits supports both disciplinary and interdisciplinary strategies. In the first instance, the policy highlights the importance of disciplinary knowledge:

The University is concerned with research that addresses the internationalization of knowledge, particularly within the disciplinary communities, and the constant expansion of the boundaries of knowledge within disciplines.²⁸³

In the second instance, it supports interdisciplinary collaboration. In this regard the mission statement commits to developing “flexible study programmes that will improve interaction between disciplines”.²⁸⁴ In fact, Wits made several structural attempts to encourage cross-disciplinary work. To this effect it set up the Graduate

²⁸³ HEQC audit report, self-evaluation, 2006, p. 210.

²⁸⁴ Mission statement 3 August 2006. Online: <http://www.wits.ac.za/depts/wcs/mission.shtml>.

School of the Humanities²⁸⁵ and restructured its faculties to encourage interdisciplinarity.²⁸⁶ This study explores disciplinary trends in the Faculty of Humanities.

9.4 Faculty Trends: Pressure on the Traditional Disciplinary Form

9.4.1 The discipline evolves

While the Faculty of Humanities at Wits continues to reflect disciplinary curriculum strategies, the evidence suggests that there are a number of pressures on disciplines to transform. This includes pressure to transform from an “insular self”,²⁸⁷ pressure on some disciplines to close down and pressure to increase cross-disciplinary collaboration. This has implications for what constitutes disciplinary knowledge as disciplines reconstitute themselves. The Wits case reflects the following curriculum reform tendencies:

- curriculum changes without losing the discipline;
- course, discipline and department closures;
- department mergers;
- protected courses and disciplines;
- interdisciplinarity.

9.4.2 The discipline: a key organising unit in the faculty

The Wits case shows that the discipline remains the key organising unit of knowledge in the faculty, despite pressures to shift toward new knowledge delivery forms. Before embarking on a discussion about the discipline it must be noted that there are different perspectives on what constitutes the ‘discipline’ within the institution. For some it refers to courses, for others it refers to subjects and for yet others it refers to programmes. Furthermore, there are traditional as well as more open-ended and less traditional conceptions of the discipline. The traditionalists have a very clearly defined notion of the discipline:

²⁸⁵ HEQC audit report, self-evaluation, 2006, p. 258.

²⁸⁶ Interview, F. Coughlan, Head of Strategic Planning, interviewed at Wits on 1 June 2005.

²⁸⁷ This is dealt with in the previous chapter in the section on reconstituting the discipline.

No, I don't think that's true. Environmental Studies is interdisciplinary; sure, it's a subject, you can teach it, but it's not going to be a single discipline over there, going to be a set of disciplines. Classics are a subject but Classics involve several disciplines; it involves historical approach, there's literary approach, there's philosophical approach. Those are all different; they can come together as part of Classical Studies but it does not make Classics a discipline; it makes it a subject area.²⁸⁸

For others it is clearly a more eclectic and dynamic notion of disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity:

...it depends upon how you look at it, really, the growth and those first actual academic disciplines. Now I think that if you really want to go back to how disciplines have grown...²⁸⁹

Having said that, in some ways Migration Studies is becoming a discipline of its own and so there is a kind of body of work and a body of knowledge that our students then are becoming familiar with²⁹⁰

If one uses the notion of the discipline as a body of knowledge that has its own rules, principles and identity, it is evident that the Faculty of Humanities has remained largely disciplinary-based, despite efforts to reorganise the faculty to foster cross-disciplinary curriculum strategies. In fact, the faculty took a deliberate decision to remain disciplinary-based in terms of curriculum approaches at the undergraduate level.

... The faculty as a whole had a review of this particular issue about four or five years ago; in fact, it was in 2000 and we decided then, unlike other institutions, that we going to retain the course structure and curriculum – that is, keep the BA....²⁹¹

... At the undergraduate level, in the BA we offer more classical format-critical thing, etc. I think Wits has resisted these pressures but not entirely.²⁹²

Therefore, the faculty considers the traditional BA degree to be of considerable value and made a deliberate decision to maintain this discipline-based structure. This is informed by the assumption that effective interdisciplinary learning is dependent on enculturation into disciplinary approaches (Muller, 2003:111).

²⁸⁸ HM3, 15 February 2006.

²⁸⁹ HSS5, 26 January 2007.

²⁹⁰ HSS6, 23 January 2007.

²⁹¹ HM3, 15 February 2006.

²⁹² HM7, 12 May 2005.

I think many of us think that students still need to start by getting a disciplinary-based foundation, and I think that may well be right.²⁹³

One could argue that the support for a disciplinary approach at the undergraduate level was strong and resisted structural attempts (restructuring and policy) to transform the delivery approach:

... we were sort of told with all this sort of breathless enthusiasm that the time had come to sort of take South African higher education to the cutting edge, go interdisciplinary, equip students better for the markets. And so the old idea of a double major BA had become old-fashioned and boring and dull, and we needed to grow, become exciting. And package programmes on tourism and programmes on... And I personally was never persuaded because ... I don't favour an interdisciplinary undergraduate training. I think at the undergraduate level, it's quite important for students to be grounded in the canon of a discipline ... we decided that we were not persuaded if this was an intellectually appropriate route to go What we decided was that we were going to stick with our degree, with our BA....²⁹⁴

This strategy foregrounds the discipline as the basis for developing the skills and knowledge required by the knowledge economy and does not support the argument that interdisciplinarity is a more suitable strategy for developing critical and competent citizens.

However, while the discipline remains the key organising unit of knowledge in the faculty; and many disciplines remain popular with students,²⁹⁵ there is evidence that disciplines are experiencing pressure to transform in order to meet the needs of society. This has resulted in a number of changes in the faculty, including the closure of some disciplines, pressure on disciplines to adapt and the emergence of new interdisciplinary programmes, which are discussed in detail below.

9.4.3 Some disciplines do not survive the storm

The study shows that a number of courses, programmes and departments²⁹⁶ were closed down while others were rationalised between 1995 to 2005. In some instances,

²⁹³ HM2, 20 May 2005.

²⁹⁴ HSS11, 7 March 2006.

²⁹⁵ For example, Psychology is very popular with students.

²⁹⁶ See chapter three for descriptions of course, programmes and departments.

changes were the result of proactive shifts in strategy toward more market-driven approaches or new knowledge development approaches (mode 2), while in other instances they were driven by reactive strategies to low enrolment and financial sustainability concerns. While few courses faced closure, they still represent a significant event because it has implications for the survival of these disciplines or sub-disciplines in the institution. (For details see Chapter Seven on drivers of curriculum change.) This was part of an institutional restructuring process and a sign of significant curriculum upheaval.²⁹⁷

In the Faculty of Humanities, at least three departments were closed:

They closed the under-subscribed divisions such as Classics, Afrikaans and Religious Studies.²⁹⁸

... There was a rationalisation process at the time of restructuring.²⁹⁹

While these departments had one significant commonality (low utility value) which may account for their demise, there are also several other department-specific reasons for their closure. For instance, the closure of Afrikaans could be accounted for in a number of ways. The first reason is linked to the onset of post-apartheid South Africa, where Afrikaans was no longer given special status as one of two significant languages used in the country. Under apartheid, Afrikaans was a compulsory subject at the schooling level and it was also prominent in places such as the courts, television and even product packaging and road signs. Thus Afrikaans represented a powerful language which had the resources and capacity to develop in equal measure as English. In fact, both Law and Education degree requirements included Afrikaans as a prerequisite for graduating. In post-apartheid South Africa, there are 11 official languages, and Afrikaans is one among the 11 languages. In addition, Afrikaans has

²⁹⁷ As mentioned previously, Wits underwent a restructuring process which resulted in the consolidation of the Faculties of Arts and Education into one entity. This involved the consolidation of 23 legacy departments into the five schools and resulted in some departments closing down and others merging. This also led to the retrenchment of some staff and the relocation of others.

²⁹⁸ UCS1, 11 March 2005.

²⁹⁹ While Frank and Gabler's (2006) study uses staff retrenchment and employment trends as an indicator of the flourishing or demise of the disciplines, the staff retrenchment that occurred was very minimal and could not be used as an indicator of changing curriculum at Wits.

negative connotations because of its association with apartheid. Second, this situation is further complicated by the increased global positioning of South Africa, a situation in which Afrikaans is not a premier language. A very good example of this shift from Afrikaans is reflected in the decision by Sasol's³⁰⁰ Board to rule that the group's Memorandum of Articles of Association will now be in English, ending a 57-year reign of Afrikaans as the group's key language of legal and other communication (Brown, 2007). Therefore, due to both globalisation and democratisation, Afrikaans lost its protected place. As a result Afrikaans was repositioned in the socio-political and economic context and its authority and legitimacy came into question.

Similarly Religious Studies³⁰¹ faced a number of challenges to survive in the faculty. The Religious Studies Department was one of the biggest departments in the Faculty of Arts until the early 1980s. It "...thrived during the 1980s for both political and vocational reasons".³⁰² However, this changed drastically from the 1980s to the 1990s as interest in the discipline declined sharply.³⁰³ This is attributed to a number of factors. The first is that, in an attempt to become relevant to a diversity of religions instead of just Christianity, the programme shifted from theology to Religious Studies. In this process of inclusion, the discipline shifted from a professional focus to a more general focus, losing its vocational advantage:

The process of inclusivity resulted in the shift from the narrow Christian-based vocational preparation to a broader programme, which had implications for its survival.³⁰⁴

This is in line with Frank and Gabler's (2006:91) study which suggests that Religious Studies were "ceding territory to new age religions". Historically, Religious Studies represented one of the key pillars of university education. However, it was strongly located within particular religions supported by particular religious organisations. Today the postmodern and social justice discourse demands a more inclusive

³⁰⁰ Sasol is South Africa's leading oil company, converting coal into fuel.

³⁰¹ It must be noted that information on Religious Studies was based on only one interview since all other staff are no longer at the university.

³⁰² HSS12, 5 December 2007.

³⁰³ HSS12, 5 December 2007.

³⁰⁴ HSS12, 5 December 2007.

conception of Religious Studies. However, this inclusive approach reduces the professional opportunities associated with the discipline. This shift toward increased generality and reduced specificity and professionalism is contrary to the utilitarian discourse that is dominating curriculum reform efforts.

The second issue is that the discipline was influenced by the transformation from apartheid to democracy. During the apartheid era, Religious Studies represented a key vehicle through which both apartheid and anti-apartheid scholars engaged with the political terrain. Therefore, while “the discipline was tainted by the apartheid project”³⁰⁵; it also played a key role in the fight against apartheid. However, during the post-apartheid era its validity and importance was substantially reduced. Neither proponents nor opponents of apartheid could see the value of Religious Studies in the new national context. This context was concerned with socio-economic development, and Religious Studies was unable to make a direct contribution to that development.

The third issue is the fact that Religious Studies at Wits did not have the advantage of very senior and powerful academic figures who could lobby for its continued existence:

Religious Studies did not have the big names to fight its case of survival in the new efficiency context. For instance, History’s survival was partly influenced by the presence of big names like Phil Bonner and Colin Bundy.³⁰⁶

It has also been suggested that “the Faculty of Arts at Wits was strongly Marxian and did not have much concern about its closure.”³⁰⁷ In this context, a proposal was put forward to save the discipline by providing service courses to other disciplines and by providing certificate-type programmes on religious issues to the wider public. This was not approved and Religious Studies was eventually closed down.

The fourth issue is that key debates on religion that are viewed as more contemporary have been incorporated into other fields such as History and Political Studies, which makes Religious Studies redundant. Thus the already porous boundaries between

³⁰⁵ HSS12, 5 December 2007.

³⁰⁶ HSS12, 5 December 2007.

³⁰⁷ HSS12, 5 December 2007.

disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Bernstein, 1971) are becoming even more porous, redefining what constitutes the discipline.

It must be noted that while Religious Studies in other South African institutions faced similar challenges, many reconstituted and were saved. The programme at the University of Cape Town (UCT) has strong leadership which secured its survival; some Afrikaans universities re-focused on ethics; UNISA is supported by the Iranian government to fund Islamic studies; and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) is supported by the Lutheran Church to meet its professional needs.³⁰⁸

Trends in Religious Studies at Wits are echoed in institutions around the globe. Frank and Gabler (2006:105) show that Religious Studies or Theology lost more than half of its original space in university education between 1975 and 1995. This suggests that local factors such as apartheid are not the only ones influencing Religious Study trends and those global factors also account for the changes. In this regard Frank and Gabler (2006) argue that society has shifted away from divine capacities and the power of god and religion in shaping their lives and providing the truth. This diminishes the authority and legitimacy of Religious Study programmes generally (Frank & Gabler, 2006).

Classics and Greek were also closed down. In addition to the utility argument, Frank and Gabler (2006) suggest that the shift from hierarchical society structures to more flattened structures results in the weakening of Western knowledge forms and a recognition of other knowledge forms. Thus Western languages and literatures lost their space in the university curriculum. While this explanation is suitable for understanding the closure of Classics and Greek, it does not explain why African Languages also faced the same challenge.³⁰⁹ In other words, since African Languages constitutes non-Western knowledge, it should have received an impetus but instead it is facing a crisis of existence.

In addition to the closure of some disciplines and departments, other departments were forced to merge in order to remain sustainable. Much like the department

³⁰⁸ HSS12, 5 December 2007.

³⁰⁹ See section 9.4.4 on vulnerable disciplines protected.

closures, department mergers were also a rare occurrence. Examples include the merger of the Departments of African Government and Political Studies.³¹⁰

The African Government Department could no longer exist as an independent area of study and was subsumed into Political Studies. While this may have been driven by efficiency concerns, it is also underpinned by the fact that disciplinary boundaries are blurring and certainty over knowledge territory and disciplinary ownership is no longer as clear-cut in some disciplines.

In addition to department or discipline closures and rationalisation, the faculty also experienced some course and programme closures. This was the result of restructuring and rationalisation, but also had to do with policy and market responsiveness. Again the closing down of courses and programmes did not result in the closure of the discipline, but it begins to redefine what constitutes the discipline. While all schools and disciplines reflected course and programme closures, the trend varied across disciplines and schools, with most showing some change and a few reflecting very little change.

For example, the School of Education reflects several curriculum change periods between 1990 and 2005. The first and most significant changes occurred in the early 1990s and resulted in the reduction or closing down of some disciplinary-based education curricula. In particular, Sociology, Philosophy or Meta-theory and History came under significant scrutiny in the early to mid 1990s. History of Education underwent similar challenges to those experienced in History. Thus the demise of apartheid resulted in the down-scaling of History as critical knowledge area. Sociology and Meta-theory lost their impetus after the fall of the Berlin Wall because these disciplines had strong Marxist leanings at Wits.³¹¹ While History, Sociology and Philosophy of Education experienced significant curriculum reform, Educational Psychology seemed less affected. One could speculate that Psychology is more directly linked to professional knowledge than Philosophy or Sociology and therefore remained intact.

³¹⁰ HSS8, 22 January 2007.

³¹¹ Informal interview with Professor Bensusan, School of Education, 10 October 2008.

The second set of changes occurred in 1997 when about 14 educational programmes were removed.³¹² This included the Bachelor of Arts in Education, the Bachelor of Music in Education, the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Education, the Bachelor of Physical Education and the Bachelor in Primary Education.³¹³ This was the result of changes in national policy that redefined the education degree packages and programmes. In particular, the new Norms and Standards for Teacher Education set out a framework for teacher education, including proposing a new four-year degree-level programme for teachers.³¹⁴

The third significant change was between 1999 and 2003, during which time the university's Faculty of Education merged with the Johannesburg College of Education. The amalgamation³¹⁵ resulted in tensions as both entities offered undergraduate courses which had to be streamlined. An agreement was finally reached whereby the historical College division was given the mandate to teach 'their' undergraduate Bachelor of Education degree. This resulted in the legacy Faculty of Education having fewer undergraduate offerings in the general BA degree; following these changes, very few education courses were offered by the school in the general BA degree.

The fourth change period between 1997 and 2005 was the result of new policy development.³¹⁶ The implementation of an entirely new curriculum for schools, Curriculum 2005 (C2005) had a significant impact on teacher education. C2005 was underpinned by outcomes-based education and resulted in a complete overhaul of the curriculum (content, process, outcomes and pedagogy), which had implications for teacher education. For example, Mathematical Literacy was introduced into schools for the first time and institutions needed to 'churn' out teachers who could teach this new subject. At the same time, subjects like Physical Education were phased out.

³¹² Rules and syllabus, 1996-2004.

³¹³ School of Education review, 2004. University of the Witwatersrand; Rules and syllabus, 1996-2004. These programmes were fully phased out by 2005.

³¹⁴ Norms and standards for teacher education, 1996 (COTEP) Committee of Teacher Education Policy; Norms and standards for educators, 2000.

³¹⁵ For details see Chapter Two.

³¹⁶ The policy on curriculum was instituted in 1997 and the first implementation occurred in 1998. This started affecting teacher development in the late 1990s. In addition, the Norms and Standards for Teacher Education redefined teacher education requirements

Similarly, other schools experienced cycles or series of changes, even though these change trajectories were specifically connected to the discipline or field. History reflected one significant change period in 1999. Thereafter changes were moderate. In 1999 a number of courses such as Radicalism and Reaction in Late Eighteenth Century Britain, Theory and Practice, Themes in African American History, and US and British Politics and Government 1760-1784 were removed. Similarly, Political Studies reflected a significant change period in 2003 when 11 Masters degree courses were discontinued. In the case of Anthropology, however, there was a gradual change without any peak periods. This is similar to trends in other countries where different disciplines responded differently to pressures to change (Menand, 2001:11).

Another significant trend occurring in the faculty was the large number of courses that were registered with the university but that had not been offered for a few years. This is the result of extremely poor student enrolment or resource and capacity issues in the department. For example, in 2005 there were 110 undergraduate courses that had fewer than five students each, and 696 undergraduate courses that had no student registrations at all.³¹⁷ If combined with postgraduate courses the situation looks even bleaker:

In 2005, the University had about 2 800 courses / units with four or fewer registrations for each course. The majority of the courses showed the same trend over the past three years. Of the above courses in 2005, there were about 2 400 courses / units with no registrations at all; the majority had had no registrations for the past three years....³¹⁸

While it was expected that courses that were in abeyance were generally those that had low utility value, this was not always the case. While some courses that had low utility or were too theoretical such as The Subject, the Object and the Avatar in the School of the Arts or Moral Philosophy in the School of Social Sciences or Jewish Studies in the School of Language and Literature were in abeyance, this did not represent the only trend. Some courses with greater utility value, such as Introduction to the Principles of International Relations and Media Studies were also in abeyance.³¹⁹ It appears that

³¹⁷ Report on Humanities review, 2006: 11.

³¹⁸ Abeyance of courses and units, 2006.

³¹⁹ Rules and syllabus booklet, Faculty of Humanities, 2007, University of the Witwatersrand.

courses that were too theoretical, newly developed courses such as Communication Theory and Media Studies, and courses that focused too much on the past were all in the abeyance basket. In response, the university proposed an abeyance policy as a means of regulating this situation. This policy proposed that courses that had no registrations for two years would be marked as not offered for the third year, and if that course had no student registrations in the fourth year, it would be removed from the rules and syllabus books. Furthermore, the reinstatement of these courses would not be automatic and would require reapplication as a new course.³²⁰ Implementation of this new policy began in 2006.

This clearly reflects that while entire disciplines will not be lost in this process, some curriculum areas within disciplines will face survival challenges as enrolment and resource issues lead to abeyances and subsequent closures. In fact this situation led to the emergence of regional collaboration between Wits and the University of Johannesburg (UJ)³²¹ with regard to French Honours studies. Wits and UJ offer a joint Honours degree in French Language and Literature. Through this collaboration, students from Wits can choose two courses in the field of French Language and Literature from the University of Johannesburg. Since Wits was no longer able to offer certain courses in the field due to low enrolment numbers, funds and capacity, they allowed their students to complete these courses at UJ.³²² This trend has many implications for curriculum. It may result in the loss of certain knowledge areas at Wits but may strengthen the programme at another university. It may also allow institutions to focus on their niche areas so that less popular courses are not fighting for very few students, operating on low budgets and losing academic credibility. However, it may also stifle academic diversity in the field as there are fewer providers. Finally, it may also affect the coherence of the curriculum package because different universities have different values and academic approaches which inform their curricula and pedagogical practices. This raises some critical questions around curriculum reform: How much variety of courses and programmes should there be? When does this constitute an

³²⁰ Abeyance of courses and units, 2006.

³²¹ A historically white, previously Afrikaaner university located within about ten kilometres from Wits.

³²² Academic development documents, 2005. List of new undergraduate course developments in the Faculty of Humanities.

inefficient use of resources? How do we balance efficiency and diversity imperatives with academic values? The business sector has an easy technical (economic and mathematical) means of making such decisions; however, this is not as simple in the knowledge industry where value is located in economic, political, social and cultural dimensions.

It is important to note that even though some courses were closed down, retrenchments were few at Wits. Therefore, staff retrenchment could not be used as an indicator of the status of the discipline. This is unlike trends in the Frank and Gabler (2006:35) study, in which retrenchments or staff reduction was used as a reliable indicator of the status of disciplines.

9.4.4 Vulnerable disciplines that weather the storm

While many disciplines that were not breaking even were under threat of closure, some disciplines were protected from closure despite their vulnerability and/or instability. This did not mean that these disciplines or sub-disciplines were not under pressure to transform, but it did mean that the university opted to keep them ‘alive’ despite the fact that they were not financially viable. It is argued that this could be the result of their national importance, their strong academic histories or their political significance. This suggests that efficiency represents just one driver of curriculum change. Two respondents put it aptly when asked, “When do they close down disciplines or programmes?”

You have to look at financial viability. And a whole series of questions arise about intellectual viability and contribution. That’s a complicated answer which I cannot answer fully now, but finances cannot be the only basis for closing courses.³²³

.... So there are notions within Wits, within faculties, within programmes, within courses, within university-type cross-subsidisation, and it’s not just mechanical break-even or you are out. Because we are a university. ...³²⁴

³²³ HM1, 10 June 2005.

³²⁴ HM4, 14 March 2006.

To this effect, the faculty and institutional response to African Languages and History best represents examples where socio-cultural and political imperatives override those of economic responsiveness and efficiency.

African Languages at Wits have experienced poor student enrolment numbers over the past ten years, which can be attributed to a number of factors. First, similar to Afrikaans, the impact of globalisation has resulted in the domination of English as the key language of business and communication throughout the world, affecting the status of other languages.³²⁵ Linked to this is the fact that many students associate English with success and economic currency.³²⁶ Second, it is suggested that the curriculum of African Languages is not relevant and interesting to students.

... the lack of student interest in African languages, I believe has to do with poor curriculum, pedagogical practices within it, and I think that one would have to look at that...³²⁷

African languages are in this crisis despite the fact that they are relevant in the national context, since thousands of South Africans speak an African language as their first language. "For instance, African languages ... This should be relevant but it still struggles".³²⁸ However, despite its difficulties, the university has agreed to continue the programme and find ways of boosting its numbers.

In 2001, during the restructuring of the faculty, the university agreed that African Languages should continue to be offered at the university because of its national importance.³²⁹

³²⁵ In fact, the top rated universities are all English-medium because research currency is measured through English-language journals. According to the Times Higher QS world ratings, the dominant language of research is English and as a result only one non-English-speaking institution qualified for the top 200 university rankings (Harris, 2007).

³²⁶ CHE institutional culture, throughput and retention study (2007). Draft. 29 November 2007. This study show that students view English as the access to success in higher education. This version is unpublished at this time.

³²⁷ HM4, 14 March 2006.

³²⁸ HM7, 12 May 2005.

³²⁹ Humanities, review, 2006: 29.

This protection of African Languages is the result of political imperatives that override efficiency and market pressures. Since African languages were marginalised during the apartheid era, the new government put into place a range of policies to validate, protect and grow African languages. Therefore, despite the fact that many students do not see the value in studying African languages, the institution has made an effort to foster its' growth. In fact, programmes in African Languages are not regarded as efficient in terms of attracting students, nor as academically sound through its research output.³³⁰ Despite this, the university agreed that it is of national importance and should not be closed down but restructured to attract students.

Another example is that of History, which experienced poor student enrolment, with first-year student numbers dropping from an average of about 280 about ten years ago to about 60 in 2003 (Ludlow, 2006:35):

... But it's very much sort of a struggle for survival kind of thing. And so there was a huge knock to History.³³¹

The study suggests that History is struggling to survive because:

- of the pressure to professionalise higher education curricula;
- some History topics do not resonate with students;
- the implementation of the new schooling curriculum undermined History;
- of the reconciliatory strategy of the post-apartheid government.³³²

Firstly, History does not have a strong association with the workplace:

South Africa is at risk of producing a politically disengaged, apathetic and unpatriotic generation as the national skills agenda aggressively promotes Maths and Science at the expense of other subjects such as History.³³³

³³⁰ Report on the Faculty of Humanities review, 2006. University of the Witwatersrand, S2006/2573.

³³¹ HSS10, 7 March 2007.

³³² For details see previous chapter.

³³³ This is also supported by an article written by Dr S Lekgoathi, Wits intranet site. <http://intranet.wits.ac.za>. December 2007.

Secondly, some History topics do not resonate with students' interests:

...There are some very interesting historians at Wits but there also are some, let me tell you, I understand that we have an expert on feudal taxation system. I mean, for god's sake. So there's another man who's an expert in British naval history....³³⁴

Thirdly, the implementation of the schooling curriculum undermined History. The South African schooling curriculum changed in the late 1990s, with the creation of an interdisciplinary subject focusing broadly on the Social Sciences, which combined Geography and History. This strategy undermined History as a discipline as many schools implemented Social Sciences without teaching any History. This also signalled that History was not as important as subjects like Mathematics, which affected teacher education intake and university enrolment in the discipline:

... And then there was a very specific story which you may be aware of the change in the government's curriculum policy on History at schools and what that did was that absolutely crashed the numbers of History students.³³⁵

. . . So what we think is because the school curriculum was in such flux, and there was a rumour that History would be taken out of the school curriculum, and a lot of our constituency comes from people who want to be school teachers. So we imagined that they thought there wouldn't be much future.³³⁶

Fourthly, the decline of History has been linked to the advent of post-apartheid South Africa. Under apartheid, History played a critical role in providing students with a systematic lens through which to understand apartheid.

³³⁴ HM4, 14 March 2006.

³³⁵ HSS10, 7 March 2007.

³³⁶ HSS3, 28 February 2007.

History suffered from a number of things. One is, in a certain sense the eighties have a remarkable relation to History, because it was a revolution which eventually was, people become very interested in trying to explain the society that they're living in. For example, at History Workshop we had a weekly page in *New Nation*, which was one of the oppositional papers. We had cultural festivals which attracted thousands of trade unionists on campus. There was very intense political debate about the significance of different interpretations of really obscure things like the history of land tenure in South Africa and that sort of thing. It was very passionate....³³⁷

However, in the 'new South Africa' History no longer has the same urgency and significance.

Then we also think that maybe it had something to do with the politics at the time because in the 1980s people thought that History would be the key to understanding South Africa's society, and then it became irrelevant to that generation in the nineties.³³⁸

This is the result of both democratisation and globalisation. Therefore, as stated above students are more commercially driven and 'forward' looking and the past is no longer as important. Also as mentioned in an earlier chapter, the 'new South Africa' and the 'new generation' are unwilling to delve into the past because it is painful and divisive, and they prefer to focus on a united future. This was further entrenched by the government's position on peace and reconciliation which reinforced these notions:

Obviously with the post-94 situation you move into a very different world. And I think also in a sense of those issues it's very immediate, it's very different when you have a riot on the streets every day. And I think the other thing is it's all opened us up to a more kind of global culture, interesting, I think in some ways sort of takes a modern walk on contemporary culture which is rather ahistorical. I mean you do get sort of television and so on about historical topics. You get sort of references to the past and culture. But it's not really like it's hugely historically based. And so I think there's that....³³⁹

This is also supported by Baines (2004:4) who suggests that History is struggling in post-apartheid South Africa because of the way in which the new government dealt

³³⁷ HSS10, 7 March 2007.

³³⁸ HSS3, 28 February 2007.

³³⁹ HSS10, 7 March 2007.

with nation building. He suggests that in an attempt to create a common history that binds South Africans, the government underplayed the tensions of the past. The ANC has tried to “build the imagined community” to support its fragile democracy, and in the process it has gone too far to rid us of the past (Baines, 2004:3). Such an approach romanticises History and reduces it to superficial activity such as purchasing artefacts and souvenirs. He warns that this constructs “simplistic and sanitised versions of history that amount to mythicization” (Baines, 2004:4). This is reflected in the portrayal of consensus in museums and other public history platforms (Baines, 2004:9). This is similar to the direction that History took in the USA in the 70s, which was also underpinned by consensus and accommodation of a new dispensation (Menand, 2001:7).

However, despite the difficulties that History experienced, the department was not closed down. Instead it was placed under pressure to transform. During this difficult period, History experienced low student enrolments, retrenchments and struggled to break even financially, but it was not closed down. This could be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, the traditional liberal values of the institution resulted in the continued support for History as a discipline. History has historically been central to university education and academic curriculum. It is conceivable, therefore, that this tradition contributed to the survival of History:

The literature suggests that this is occurring to History as a discipline in all universities. Well I suppose it would be resisted in institutions which have a broader conception of knowledge. Let's say in our Faculty of Humanities... we are under pressure; the faculty is deeply in debt. And we do look at the cost effectiveness of programmes. We looked at the instrument looking at income ratio relative to expenditure and stuff... But there was a high level of sophistication around saying how do we interpret this. And when do you stop being a university? It's just an anathema, I think, do think that you can have a university that doesn't offer history.³⁴⁰

So Bundy protected us because he said, that history is strategic; you can't have a university without history.³⁴¹

Secondly, the political importance of History in the post-apartheid context contributed to its survival. Despite the fact that government's approach to reconciliation

³⁴⁰ HM4, 14 March 2006.

³⁴¹ ³⁴¹ HSS3, 28 February 2007.

undermined the status of History, there is strong support for the discipline in the political and civil sphere. In particular, the development of a more appropriate and representative history of the country is seen as critical to fostering democracy. The South African Constitution and policy framework is heavily focused on redressing past historical inequities and does not deny the past. The fact that government views History as important but also undermined it represents a contradiction that requires further investigation. It may also be the result of the unintended consequence of the reconciliation strategy. Irrespective of the reasons, some elements of society continue to view History as important, which contributes to its survival:

We cannot develop a nation or build a sense of shared history if we are constantly running from the past.... History is very much related to citizenship and connectedness.³⁴²

Frank and Gabler (2006:176) suggest that History is no longer about a few great men, because people are no longer interested in the masters but are focused on their own role in changing society. Thus History must resonate more with the general population rather than with the elite few if it is to survive. However, the study of the ANC and the anti-apartheid struggle does not seem to capture students' interests any more than the History of World War 1. This suggests that curriculum should be contemporary and immediately useful to students in order to capture their interest. Therefore, the introduction of the course on Living with the USA is an example of a more contemporary version of History. Frank and Gabler (2006:178) also support this notion and suggest that the "university History curriculum grew more presentist" over the decade, which also explains why History weathered the storm and only declined slightly when compared to other disciplines in the Humanities (Frank & Gabler, 2007:174).

The survival of courses and programmes that are not financially viable or have no student/client interest suggests that there are wider issues informing their existence. Therefore, it is not possible to assess curriculum on the basis of business accounting principles only. However, the fact that many of the courses that are struggling to survive are rooted in socio-cultural and political dimensions of responsiveness raises

³⁴² ³⁴² Dr S. Lekgoathi, Wits intranet site. <http://intranet.wits.ac.za>. December 2007.

concerns about the dominance of economic imperatives for change. Economic responsiveness does not have the same impetus and positioning as socio-cultural responsiveness. Despite that fact that notions of social justice and usefulness are said to be equally important in the new, broadly inclusive university (Ramirez, 2004:8), the Wits data suggests otherwise – that is, economic responsiveness overrides other forms of usefulness.

It must be noted that even though these fields of study have not been closed down, they have been placed under severe pressure to increase their enrolment, become more efficient and responsive, and increase their research output,³⁴³ all of which have implications for their curricula.

9.4.5 Interdisciplinarity at Wits: emerging trends

Interdisciplinarity is receiving increasing prominence in both research and teaching as a more effective way of providing students with the complex skills and knowledge required by the knowledge society. Interdisciplinarity is defined in various ways and exists in various forms. References have been made to cross, trans, multi and interdisciplinarity (Davies & Devlin, 2007). These all result in different types of collaboration between different knowledge areas, and range from modest to extreme relationships or forms of connectedness between disciplines.

The Wits case reflects a complex combination of disciplinary and interdisciplinary programmes. Curriculum practices within the faculty suggest that there are an increasing number of interdisciplinary courses, mostly at the postgraduate level. Interdisciplinarity is evident at programme, course, packaging and delivery levels. The data suggests that interdisciplinarity at Wits:

- remains an experiment in some schools;
- is sometimes deployed as a strategy for professionalisation of the curriculum;
- assumes a variety of different forms;
- is the object of increasing contestation.

³⁴³ See Chapter Six on managerialism.

Even though there is an emergence of interdisciplinary collaboration, in the main schools have maintained a disciplinary thrust at the undergraduate level. In fact, all but one school remained discipline-based at the undergraduate level; the exception is the School of the Arts.

It's a good question because the School of the Arts is a highly interdisciplinary school. Probably the most interdisciplinary school in the faculty. I am not sure if you know that we have a common first-year course for every student in the faculty. The Film, Visual and Performing Arts. Every student in the professional school does that. So we've done away with the first year of History of Art, Drama and so on and, ya, all of it, and we have one common core course which all students have to do....³⁴⁴

However, interdisciplinarity featured more strongly at the postgraduate level across the faculty, and has assumed many different forms. Thus while Bernstein (2000:52) refers to regionalisation to describe the ways in which disciplines are coalescing, he does not focus on the types of regions or the different forms of interdisciplinarity that may arise. The next section explores the different forms of interdisciplinarity evident in the Faculty of Humanities.

9.4.6 Interdisciplinarity and regionalisation assume different forms

It is evident that there are a range of interdisciplinary approaches in the faculty. These approaches reflect a variety of implementation practices and advocate different conceptions of interdisciplinarity.

The first approach is the emergence of interdisciplinary programmes that are thematically based, such as Forced Migration Studies, where the core organising unit is the theme or concept and not the traditional discipline. For instance, the Programmes Handbook³⁴⁵ suggests that the Forced Migration programme is based on the central notion of understanding the key socio-political issues regarding human displacement. This course is not the result of two different disciplines coming together to team-design or team-teach. Instead it is fully integrated around the external theme with respect to all aspects of its curriculum design, delivery and organisation. The

³⁴⁴ HM6, 29th March 2006

³⁴⁵ Handbook on forced migration, 2006 studies programme. Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand.

programme is run by a dedicated unit of its own, whose staff has an allegiance to Forced Migration – that is, Forced Migration can be likened to their core ‘discipline’. Another example of this approach is that of Journalism and Media Studies, which is also strongly integrated through the theme or concept as opposed to the discipline. This reflects a total integration approach in which the “linkage idea is central to organizing learners’ and teachers’ working relationships and provides an environment where there is a high level of ideological consensus amongst staff” (Bernstein, 1971:64). These examples could be described as ‘new disciplines’ or as strongly integrated conceptions of interdisciplinarity. Martin and Etzkowitz (2000) suggest that there are numerous examples of interdisciplinary fields that have come to be recognised as self-functioning disciplines over time. For instance, experimental psychology emerged from anatomy and physiology, and biochemistry from chemistry and biology. This approach to curriculum requires:

That the disciplines must give way to some relational idea.

Also there must be consensus about the integrating idea and it must be explicit.

The nature of the linkage between the integrating idea and the knowledge to be coordinated must be spelled out.

A committee of staff must be set up to provide feedback and act as an agency of socialisation into the new code (Bernstein, 1971; 108).

This represents an ideal form of regionalisation in which disciplines coalesce around the fields of practice with a new identity. Thus the ‘new discipline’ becomes increasingly recognised as a separate entity with its own rules, methods and focus of study. In Lake’s (1994) terms, this constitutes a fully integrated interdisciplinary curriculum. Bernstein’s conception of interdisciplinarity best fits with this description. However, this study suggests that other forms of cross-disciplinary approaches do exist but that they do not fit with Bernstein’s ideal conception of interdisciplinarity.

The second approach evident in the faculty arises out of programmes or courses that have been interdisciplinary for a few decades but have become even further removed from the traditional disciplinary bases from which they originally grew, resulting in what could be referred to as a hidden or non-explicit interdisciplinary approach. For

instance, Education, which was originally associated with four key disciplines over the past ten years, is now losing its link with these disciplines at the postgraduate level.

So we always were applied because we were always applying from the disciplines. But now the discipline is further and further away from us.³⁴⁶

Education theory, for example, was traditionally associated with the history, sociology, philosophy and psychology of education.

... I did a lot of meta theory and we went into social theorists as well as some stuff in curriculum. I mean, those terms like management and curriculum didn't exist at the time. We had four components which were psychology of education, sociology of education, history of education and philosophy of education. So all the studies were influenced directly from those four disciplines. So the application to education was taking a discipline knowledge which would be in my case Sociology and applying it to Education... And that was in the form of Sociology of Knowledge.³⁴⁷

In this approach the initial interdisciplinary approach could be referred to as connected but disciplinary, since the disciplines that were taught were discrete but connected through educational issues. However, these traditional disciplines are no longer clearly recognisable³⁴⁸ as they are subsumed by organising themes that are more strongly located in the context of application. For example, History of Education no longer exists, and both Sociology and Philosophy have been integrated into other courses and programmes on an *ad hoc* basis.

³⁴⁶ HED1, 7 February 2007.

³⁴⁷ HED1, 7 February 2007.

³⁴⁸ This change has been more drastic for Philosophy and Sociology of Education, while Psychology of Education has remained unchanged in many ways.

Well, I think that historically over the last 15 years there have been changes in Education as a discipline internationally, which some people prop the label postmodern on, which I don't understand why they do. I wouldn't describe it as that but Education, the theory of education has historically been located in four disciplines – History, Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology. Then those disciplines have over time started being applied to generic areas – curriculum, management – and that has had a profound impact on the curriculum within the school at undergraduate and postgraduate level in that there is a focus away from focus on the root disciplines to the applied areas and that brings with it lots of tensions. Part of that move has been informed by a half-baked approach to repositioning the university.³⁴⁹

This approach is integrated and the disciplines are present but not explicit; that is, they are now implicit or hidden.

... I've been here at least ten years, in a ten-year post. In the old days we had very clear-cut disciplines. So you had a section on Psychology, you had a section on Philosophy, you had a section on Sociology. I mean, what happened with globalisation is a whole move to integration of knowledge ... where in fact the discipline homes were collapsed....³⁵⁰

... In some instances it is difficult to clearly identify the thread of disciplinary thought within the course. For instance, the course on assessment draws on some theory but it is largely empirically based. This was aptly described by a respondent who suggested that there is a 'lot of invisible stuff in our courses',³⁵¹ referring to Bernstein's notion of visible and invisible pedagogy.³⁵²

Trends in other countries suggest that education is undergoing similar changes across the world. For instance, in Britain Sociology of Education has lost its significance and it has only managed to survive by focusing on the applied aspects of the disciplines (Shilling, 1993:105).

This approach is different from the total integration approach mentioned above because it arises from a disciplinary base, whereas the total integration approach starts

³⁴⁹ HM4, 14 March 2006.

³⁵⁰ HED7, 22 February 2007.

³⁵¹ HED1, 7 February 2007.

³⁵² According to Bernstein (2000) hidden pedagogy refers to pedagogy that does not make explicit certain academic requirements. These are assumed and taken for granted. Bernstein argues that this results in disadvantaging children and students from working-class backgrounds who are not acculturated into these practices in their homes as is the case for middle-class children.

from the premise of the issue or problem being solved. This approach continues to draw on disciplinary approaches, albeit in an increasingly hidden or non-explicit way.

The third trend is the emergence of interdisciplinary programmes or courses that are also thematically based, such as Heritage Studies, but where two or more existing departments or disciplines come together to deliver the programme while remaining separate departments. The interdisciplinary programmes that are located within disciplinary departments generally use this approach, drawing on their disciplines to collaborate. This approach fosters disciplinary collaboration through programme and course packaging and delivery. This strategy represents a temporary alliance between courses and programmes while maintaining disciplinary roots, and constitutes the dominant type of interdisciplinarity that is occurring within disciplinary and departmental homes in the faculty.

This could be referred to as partially integrated – academics have their main identity in their discipline and collaborate on projects with their disciplinary identity still intact. This approach generally has one core course that is thematically developed while other courses that constitute the programme are drawn from the discrete disciplines. This is referred to as connected and disciplinary:

I think it's got to be run quite carefully. Mostly what happens with these interdisciplinary courses is there will be a core course which is the only real new thing in it, which we'll be trying to pull together some of these themes in, say, Heritage Studies. And then they'll actually mostly be choosing appropriate options in existing courses anyway around that. And then the dissertation obviously will be supervised by someone running that interdisciplinary course and will have a particular theme around that course. So that, for example, in Heritage Studies they'll do a core course which simply is very involved and then they might choose a straight History course or a course at the School of the Arts....³⁵³

The course is actually called Public Culture. It's the way it's structured, but it's the core course, the core compulsory course of the Heritage Studies programme. He and I do Public Culture. I do all that historical and public history and then he does the performance and culture aspect.³⁵⁴

³⁵³ HSS2, 27 January 2007.

³⁵⁴ HSS3, 28th February 2007.

Similarly, the Masters degree programme in History and Documentary Film also reflects this approach to interdisciplinarity:

I'm involved in a programme called History and Documentary Film ... which is basically co-operation between us and Film. They do a core Film course. They actually have a documentary Film course and then they pick up a couple of History modules, and they do a dissertation which takes the form essentially of making a documentary film.³⁵⁵

These programmes offer thematically based approaches but are organised through the conceptual lenses of disciplines. Therefore, while themes partly inform the design of the curriculum, the programme draws heavily from the disciplines to develop a complete package for students. While in the first case the theme or field of practice is the basis for the design of the curriculum, in this case curriculum represents an interplay between the theme and the disciplines in ways that continue to propagate disciplinary knowledge.

This form of interdisciplinarity could be referred to as transitory regionalisation, in which regions are formed for the purpose of the course or programme without losing the disciplinary identity. For instance, academics who teach in these programmes are located in particular disciplines, whose identity continues to reside with those disciplines. This could be referred to as connected and disciplinary in accordance with Lake's (1994) notion of cross-disciplinary approaches.

Finally, it must be noted that while there is evidence of increased interdisciplinarity at the postgraduate level, this trend is not evident in all the schools and departments, with some showing little or no efforts in this regard (for instance, the School of Human and Community Development or the Department of Philosophy). This is confirmed by the faculty review process conducted in 2006, in which it was noted that some schools, such as the Schools of the Arts and Education, were strongly interdisciplinary, that the School of Social Sciences and Languages had some interdisciplinary activities, and that the School of Human and Community Development had no interdisciplinary courses.³⁵⁶ This clearly suggests that different disciplines respond differently to

³⁵⁵ HSS2, 23rd Jan 2007

³⁵⁶ Faculty review 2006. Academic Planning Unit. University of Witwatersrand

curriculum reform pressures based on their context, the discipline and the academic community.

9.4.7 Interdisciplinarity: site of struggle and contestation

While the literature on interdisciplinarity suggests that institutions either support or oppose interdisciplinary strategies, the Wits case reflects a more complex response which includes an array of perspectives.

The Wits case suggests that there are four perspectives on interdisciplinarity. First, there is opposition to interdisciplinarity, with strong support for disciplinary learning. Second, there is the pragmatic approach which supports interdisciplinarity because it is more efficient and meets society's needs. Third, there is support for interdisciplinarity that is underpinned by a strong disciplinary foundation. Fourth, there is support for interdisciplinarity that is not overly attached to any form of disciplinary foundation but calls for a systematic and coherent curriculum programme.

The first perspective does not support interdisciplinarity as it is felt that such an approach affects systematic learning and results in fragmented and superficial accounts of knowledge.

When I designed this course, what I had in mind was strong History students looking for a more vocational rounding off of their degrees. What we've got most of the time are people who don't have any History background who've come from the film world ... So their disciplinary base is very weak in that sense.³⁵⁷

I think that we're basically producing a far more kind of superficial engagement with education, I think. They're not going to ask very fundamental questions. ... And I'm saying, if you ask me, if you want a good course in assessment, you don't need all the text in assessment. You need to ask the questions like, how do you make a judgement? You need to do Philosophy. You need to do meta theory, you need to do epistemology.³⁵⁸

The second and pragmatic perspective suggests that while there is strong support for the discipline, this is not viewed as viable in the context of the new efficiency and multi-skills requirements of the economy. Respondents who support a pragmatic

³⁵⁷ HSS2, 23 January 2007.

³⁵⁸ HED1, 7 February 2007.

approach believe that the discipline represents a powerful way of viewing the world and a powerful way of educating societies; however, it is not optimal in the present climate.³⁵⁹

As you know there is a heavy debate at the moment. I am still a believer that a formative degree gives you a good education. But I also think that the reality is that it is increasingly the upper middle class that can afford to do a formative degree.... If you go through great lengths to get a loan for your education then the chances are that you are after an education through which you will be immediately employable... So even though I think you are going to get the best kind of education through a formative degree, I think that it is a luxury to be able to afford to do that. The middle to upper middle socio-economic group can do that; they can say go and do a BA while you decide about what you going to do.³⁶⁰

In the pragmatic perspective, the discipline will have to make compromises in order to survive because the terrain no longer allows for pure disciplinary approaches to prevail. The pragmatists are concerned with markets and efficiency discourses.

The third and dominant perspective supports a disciplinary-based interdisciplinary approach, which suggests that disciplinary learning is necessary for effective interdisciplinary engagement. Thus it is argued that interdisciplinary programmes should be underpinned by a disciplinary foundation. This includes maintaining disciplinary programmes at undergraduate level, but also developing interdisciplinary programmes that draw on the strengths of the disciplines. This advances the discourse that mode 2 is dependent on mode 1 knowledge forms. This approach calls for 'qualified' support of interdisciplinarity:

I think it's generally true that the so-called interdisciplinary studies can become very shallow if they are not rooted in strong knowledge of more traditional disciplines. But I think it's also true that some of the more interesting questions are formulated outside of those classical domains.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ This view is held by institutional managers outside the faculty:

³⁶⁰ UCS4, 1 June 2005.

³⁶¹ HM1, 10 June 2005.

For proponents of this approach, there are some exciting possibilities of working in interdisciplinary ways, but this can only be done once students have been exposed to disciplinary learning:

... And I think in that sense one shouldn't get too religious about the idea of a discipline. On the other hand, I do think that there is something to be said for a student being trained in a discipline at an undergraduate level and then branching out later. Because I do think that very, very amorphous kinds of undergraduate courses can actually become problematic. ... when I say interdisciplinary I'm not saying non-disciplinary....³⁶²

And if interdisciplinary programmes do not draw on the disciplines, this results in a poor-quality curriculum with poor student outcomes:

Well, I think a number of different things are happening. I think there's a kind of intellectual debate about disciplines which I think is doing exactly what you described. On the other hand, you get in a sense a sort of a more of a training emphasis where in some areas it is quite anti-disciplinary, but I think often not in a particularly coherent kind of way. I think it actually often ends up with quite soggy kind of courses coming out....³⁶³

This perspective supports the notion that mode 1 curriculum is a necessary prerequisite for mode 2 application. Therefore, effective mode 2 knowledge production cannot occur without mode 1 curriculum (Muller, 2000b:80).

A fourth perspective is one that is not overly attached to the discipline and believes that knowledge will develop in interesting ways even without the disciplines:

I'm not too romantic about any of the disciplines. If a History discipline goes, I don't think people are necessarily going to stop doing History. I don't think that that necessarily means History goes itself. I think historical research methods are included in other disciplines of History. And I think the same happens with Philosophy. You probably get a different type of Philosophy ... but....³⁶⁴

... I don't think that it suffers in any sort of major way for not being tied to some sort of grounded disciplinary agenda ... so I don't see that as an issue.³⁶⁵

³⁶² HSS10, 7 March 2007.

³⁶³ HSS10, 7 March 2007.

³⁶⁴ HSS5, 26 January 2007.

³⁶⁵ HSS4, 31 January 2007.

The Wits case shows that there are a number of perspectives and approaches to interdisciplinarity. Basically there is support for interdisciplinary approaches depending on how they are executed. Thus it is suggested that interdisciplinary approaches must be carefully thought through, otherwise they can result in a highly fragmented and disorganised learning programme. Aside from the pragmatists, who do not specify how interdisciplinarity should occur, others call for programmes that are well-conceived, systematic and theoretically grounded.

.... but I think that there are good ways and bad ways of doing it. And the bad way of doing it is that you just have a kind of intellectually incoherent mish-mash.³⁶⁶

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter suggests that there is no neatly packaged way of describing the changing status of the discipline in the Faculty of Humanities. Instead there are several complex statements that characterise these trends. First, the chapter shows that disciplinary curriculum strategies remain the key organising unit of knowledge in the faculty. Second, it suggests that, despite the dominance of discipline-based approaches, there are three key trends that have implications for traditional conceptions of the discipline. These include the closing down of courses and programmes, the protection of some vulnerable disciplines and the emergence of interdisciplinarity. Thus some programmes that have low enrolments and/or academic outputs, such as Religious Studies, have been closed down. It is evident that most of these programmes or courses have lost their position and stature as a result of both global and local factors that result in very specific manifestations for each course or programme. Other programmes that are equally vulnerable have been protected from closure by the university. These programmes and courses, such as African Languages, have socio-political relevance that accounts for their survival. This does not mean that they are not under pressure to transform; it just means that they are being given a chance to reform, despite their bleak efficiency and academic performance. This suggests that curriculum reform is not merely about number crunching and markets but that it also has other dimensions.

³⁶⁶ HSS11, 7 March 2007.

Furthermore, there are a number of interdisciplinary programmes emerging in the faculty. These range from thematic approaches, to approaches that draw on the disciplines in non-explicit ways, and finally to approaches that draw on the disciplines in ways that preserve disciplinary knowledge and identity. Despite the range of approaches evident in the faculty, most use the discipline as a basis to work in interdisciplinary ways.³⁶⁷ This is evident in the institutional structures and associations that academics have with their disciplines.

The boundaries between disciplines are blurring, which has a number of implications for what constitutes knowledge in higher education. As a result, disciplines are working more closely together through a variety of strategies. These include more conservative strategies in which the disciplines maintain their identity, to more radical strategies where decisions about what constitutes curriculum and disciplinary knowledge are no longer as clear-cut as they used to be. This begs the question, ‘When is a discipline no longer a discipline?’ That is, how much reform can disciplines accommodate without losing their essential identity? Because this is different for each discipline, it is more difficult to define. Furthermore, if it is accepted that disciplines are not static but rather dynamic and relative constructs, could interdisciplinary programmes be viewed as pre-paradigmatic disciplines?³⁶⁸ If this is the case, how would we define the different ‘disciplinary’ forms that emanate through this process?

³⁶⁷ Even though this is not a quantitative study, the structures and practices in the faculty suggest that inter and cross disciplinary work occurs through the discipline.]

³⁶⁸ This is drawn from Czerniewicz (2008) who uses this concept to discuss whether educational technology is field and discipline.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION: MAKING SENSE OF THE COMPLEXITY

10.1 Introduction

This study began as a personal journey inspired by the need to find answers to raging debates occurring in various public spaces about the relevance of the Humanities curriculum in the twenty-first century. In particular, these debates suggested that society no longer values the Humanities because the focus is too theoretical and unable to meet the skills needs of the knowledge economy. Instead, education that supports the economy directly and is heavily skills-based is perceived as being of most value to the 'millennial citizen'. At the same time, claims have been made that society is facing a social crisis underpinned by racism, sexism, xenophobia and environmental challenges which require a more responsive type of Humanities curriculum. This tension between the various purposes of higher education and what constitutes valuable knowledge in the twenty-first century formed the basis of my personal interest which led to the academic investigation. The privileging of education for economic purposes is of particular concern to me because it has the potential to undermine the role of the Humanities in developing citizens who understand society and are able to integrate this understanding of society into their work and personal lives. With this mission in mind, I embarked on a journey to investigate the nature of curriculum reform, with a particular emphasis on the Humanities.

When I shifted from the public debate to the literature, I began an academic enquiry into the matter. Through this process I refined the focus of my study and decided to explore the nature of curriculum transformation in higher education through an analysis of curriculum change in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand. The rationale for selecting the Humanities as a site through which to conduct my study was informed by academic as well as personal reasons. It was confirmed in the literature that the Humanities did face a particularly difficult and challenging period of legitimacy and relevance. This is the result of the increased focus

on economic responsiveness and labour market needs as key drivers of curriculum change.

This chapter traces my academic journey in an attempt to understand what knowledge and curriculum discourses underpin curriculum change and what overall theoretical insights can be drawn from the study.

10.2 Theoretical Journey

When I started this research undertaking, I assumed that the Faculty of Humanities faced a crisis of form and existence, and that it was transforming in order to circumvent the crisis. This suggested that the Humanities were shifting from their traditional liberal practices to focus on economic concerns and the needs of the business sector. I was also certain that disciplines and programmes were succumbing to market needs, student interests and perceived needs. It seemed that I had the answers to my research questions and was merely confirming these through the study.

Therein lies my first lesson from the research process; these issues are complex and there is no one easy right answer. This is probably because the nature of academic research is not about oversimplifying ‘findings’ and finding the ‘right answer’ but is rather about offering insights that deepen the explanatory framework of a complex phenomenon.

In an attempt to provide an explanation that reflects the complexity of curriculum change, my study suggests that while there is a shift toward utilitarian curriculum discourses underpinned by student interests and market needs in the context of efficiency constraints, this picture does not fully capture the nature of change taking place in the faculty. Instead, the situation is far more complex and nuanced.

A key message emerging from the study is that curriculum change occurs at the nexus of a multiplicity of drivers and pressures which interact with the discipline, resulting in an array of different outcomes. As a result, sweeping generalisations about curriculum trends are not sufficient in predicting context specific changes. Thus while change in higher education is a universal phenomenon, and there are some powerful common

change imperatives and even outcomes, curriculum change is informed by a range of drivers which interact in complex ways, giving rise to different logics that explain the nature and extent of curriculum transformation. This study reflects on the nature of these different logics in the context of various departments and disciplines in the Faculty of Humanities.

At the outset it must be noted that one of the key characteristics of the literature is its tendency to privilege the role and influence of global pressures and global trends (global economy, knowledge economy and technological change) on curriculum reform processes and outcomes, while underplaying the roles of local and institutional factors. In this regard, analysts have been too quick to explain the transformation of higher education through global pressures. The literature in the field suggests that significant curriculum reform processes are underway in higher education across the globe. It is suggested that this is the result of the new trends in the world economy and its associated socio-political context. These global pressures have resulted in the dominance of mode 2 knowledge approaches, and prioritise utilitarian and efficiency discourses.

The literature also focuses heavily on the influence of external factors in curriculum reform while underplaying the role of knowledge itself in shaping curriculum outcomes. The dominant discourse that explains the nature of curriculum change in the literature focuses on the external drivers of curriculum change. For instance, the strong associations made between responsiveness and curriculum change minimises the role of knowledge and the discipline itself in curriculum reform outcomes. The study debunks this oversimplified conception of curriculum change contained in the 'sweeping global speak' that dominates the literature.

While I came to acknowledge the relative dominance of globalisation and global factors in transforming higher education, I was also confronted by the different logics informing curriculum change. Acknowledging the existence and significance of these logics constitutes a critical methodological and theoretical imperative. Indeed, curriculum change takes place at the interface of these various logics. In other words, in addition to the globalisation discourse, there are institutional legacies and cultures as well as national political and ideological discourses that also shape the curriculum

terrain. These factors configure around different disciplines in different ways. In addition, the nature of the discipline itself also has a bearing on curriculum reform outcomes and processes.

Therefore, the overall argument suggests that while there is definitely significant curriculum transformation occurring in the faculty, this is not as easily predictable and deterministic as indicated in the literature. The thesis contends that curriculum reform is a complex interplay between a range of factors that are external as well as internal to the discipline. As a result the study presents a more complex and nuanced picture of curriculum change that stays clear of essentialist tendencies.

10.3 Noteworthy Insights Emerging from the Study

As part of the overall argument proposed above, the study also raises several theoretical insights that may contribute to an understanding of curriculum change. While my study drives the point that the Humanities should not be lumped together as a homogeneous entity, with the same pressures and same responses to societal change, it does raise some common issues that are peculiar to the Humanities which contribute to an understanding of knowledge production and conception in the field. These insights are discussed below.

Key drivers of curriculum change. This study suggests that there are a several different drivers of curriculum change – survival factors, the strength of academic identity and scholarship, disciplinary boundaries and the nature of leadership within schools and departments – that may have a bearing on curriculum reform outcomes. Therefore curriculum reform is an outcome of the interplay between socio-economic and political pressures to transform and the different curriculum discourses that are embedded within different disciplinary communities. This suggests that the different drivers of curriculum interact with the discipline within an institutional context. This results in an array of different curriculum responses that could be situated on a continuum from reactive and proactive market approaches on the one extreme to more traditional academic approaches at the other extreme. Therefore, despite the fact that the literature privileges market responsiveness as a dominant driver of curriculum change, the Wits case reflects a more complex and nuanced response. It is evident

from this study that different disciplines are driven by different concerns which result in different curriculum responses.

However, while there are a number of factors that affect curriculum reform outcomes, there are a few key drivers of change that need to be acknowledged. This includes market forces, the financial situation of the discipline, political forces and the internal structure of knowledge in the discipline (with market forces and financial viability representing the most influential factors).

The new stakeholder university. The changing socio-political and economic context has profound implications for the management of universities and the organisation of knowledge. Knowledge has become the primary fuel for innovating successfully in the global economic context. Thus business, governments and other stakeholders have become increasingly interested in what universities deliver and how they do so. In the 1970s and early 1980s, Wits maintained a reasonable level of autonomy and distance from the state and society despite the hands-on approach of the apartheid government. This changed somewhat in the late 1980s when political stakeholders called upon universities to play a role in the fight against apartheid. This led to the People's Education movement and the call for more inclusive, non-Western curriculum that was relevant to South African society. Despite these calls to transform curriculum, academics continued to have control over their curriculum, and curriculum remained traditional liberal. However, in the post-apartheid era, there were a number of stakeholders interested in university education. This gave rise to the stakeholder university at Wits in which academics no longer had all the power. Instead power shifted to other stakeholders such as institutional managers, the business sector and even students, who became increasingly influential in curriculum reform outcomes. These stakeholders generally promoted curriculum that was much more responsive to society's needs. However, even though stakeholders, including government, pushed a utility discourse, curriculum policy continues to be under-defined.

An under-defined curriculum policy environment. While higher education curriculum reform has become an important means of steering the sector toward responsiveness and accountability, the policy environment in this regard is surprisingly under-defined. Unlike the case of schooling, the South African government has not

developed a systematic and coherent national policy framework for curriculum reform in higher education. Thus even though the higher education policy framework shifted from a more loosely structured approach which gave greater autonomy to institutions to a more tightly steered approach between 1994 and 2006, this did not result in a more prescribed curriculum.

Besides the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) guidelines, a frame of reference for curriculum change is thinly strewn across several higher education policy documents and legislation. Furthermore, the existing policy framework points to three powerful and somewhat conflicting transformation imperatives – access and equity, responsiveness, and efficiency and effectiveness. The conflicting nature of these and the diverse institutional legacies are reflected in a diversity of policies and strategies underpinning institutional curriculum practices. On the one hand, the national policy context offers sufficient space for institutions and departments to make their own curriculum choices. This allows for diversity and innovation and preserves elements of autonomy and academic freedom which is so revered by higher education. On the other hand, such a broad policy framework does not allow for a level of standardisation and cannot guarantee quality across the sector. Furthermore, since the policy is all-encompassing, it is fraught with tensions between competing interests.

Institutional policy is broad, varied and vaguely formulated. Institutional curriculum policies reflect an attempt to reconcile the demands of equity and responsiveness with concerns around efficiency and effectiveness in the context of its traditional liberal approach to education. This creates an environment in which policy tends to be broad in its attempt to accommodate various perspectives and to allow for wide interpretation. At the same time, this approach manifests in significant tensions between competing interests located in both the policy and implementation arena. On the one hand, therefore, Wits refers to the need for curriculum that is responsive to society's needs, while at the same time it also refers to the importance of knowledge for its own sake. This can be further illustrated through a brief periodisation of curriculum trends at Wits:

The first phase focused on ridding the institution of those courses or programmes that were neither economically nor socio-politically useful nor financially viable. This focused on those fields or disciplines that were obvious cases of crisis. During this period the university got rid of its most 'archaic' curriculum components. Courses that were viewed as extraordinarily distant from conceptions of usefulness were closed down. This included, for instance, closing down Classics and Greek.

The second phase closely followed the first and involved the widespread shift toward notions of usefulness in the curriculum. During this phase there was a proliferation of courses and programmes that were regarded as relevant and useful.

It often makes people start contemplating market orientation options. So it will be, how can we twist the course we currently offer and call it Tourism, or, and I am not trying to attract a particular market. But there is a rise in new labels on courses to attract particular markets.³⁶⁹

This period was characterised by the reconstitution of curriculum in the Humanities toward an increased focus on responsiveness and relevance. This included an emphasis on skills and applications, and focused on contemporary issues. Courses and programmes such as Information Technology for Humanities, Tourism and Heritage Studies emerged during this period.

A third phase is about the humanities reclaiming some of its space. While the initial responses to pressure to reform curriculum could be characterised as reactive and somewhat frenzied, later developments suggest that the faculty's responses became more measured.

The Humanities had a knee-jerk reaction by spinning many courses that were going to be sexy. However, many of these courses were not the money spinners they were expected to be. However, the frenzy has passed and there appears to be more circumspect thinking and planning.³⁷⁰

Thus programmes that were developed with a strong focus on practice and skills reinstated the importance of theory. In particular, the Forced Migration and Heritage

³⁶⁹ UCS3, 18 May 2005.

³⁷⁰ UCS1, 11 March 2005.

Studies programmes were first developed with a strong application and external focus, while subsequent redevelopments reflect a resurgence of theoretical and traditional liberal curriculum approaches. Similarly, the strong backing and support of the work of the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) indicates the movement toward reclaiming the space of the Humanities. This has reaffirmed the importance of 'knowledge of' that promotes critical engagement with social, economic and political issues in a way that is not simplistically linked to the immediate needs of the society. This growing support for the knowledge and skills offered by the Humanities is also linked to complex conceptions of citizenship that are receiving greater impetus than previously because of the emerging social crisis (Hadland, 2009:9). There is a growing lobby for the role of the Humanities in developing critical citizens who are able to participate in and foster the democratic ethos. This revival of the Humanities is not particular to South Africa or to Wits. Concerns with developing effective citizenship are a world-wide phenomenon. The Nairobi Report reaffirms the critical role that the Humanities and Social Sciences can play in providing invaluable insights into the economic, political, cultural and historical spheres of society which are essential to securing stable and thriving democracies in developing countries (Harle, 2009).

Managerialism and changing institutional and faculty identities. In this regard, the study suggests that despite the broad and somewhat all-encompassing policy framework, the institution is constrained by a range of contextual factors that privilege utilitarian discourses. This emphasis on utility, together with the increasing focus on financial indicators in curriculum decision making, favours technicist and utilitarian curriculum discourses. This gave impetus to new management at the university who employ efficiency and productivity instruments to manage academic entities. In this context of financial constraint and performance management approaches, the university has carved out a strategy that attempted to combine the performativity discourse with its own traditional liberal one – that is, to provide some level of autonomy in curriculum decision making. Thus Wits has used a combined strategy of steering and control to encourage curriculum reform, which affected different disciplines in different ways.

While there is a relationship between curriculum reform and managerialism, the nature of this relationship differs depending on the vulnerability³⁷¹ of particular courses or programmes. There appears to be a relationship between academic freedom and financial vulnerability. Thus programmes and courses that are more financially viable bestow greater autonomy upon their academics to influence curriculum. Financially vulnerable programmes have less autonomy and reduced spaces within which to determine their own curriculum. Thus more vulnerable courses and programmes experience more interference in curriculum matters than less vulnerable courses and programmes. However, it must be noted that this is not a causal relationship as there is also evidence that some disciplines have been protected despite their lack of financial viability.

Management practices and academic identity. It must also be noted that new management practices affect academic identity as academics become administrators and fund raisers. In addition, academics no longer have total power over curriculum as they previously did. Other stakeholders affect curriculum in a variety of ways. The traditional concept of academics as those who spend their time reading, thinking and deliberating about big ideas without too much hurry is no longer accurate as they increasingly focus on managing budgets, working toward tight deadlines with industry and performing other non-academic tasks.

Different disciplines accommodate utilitarian discourses in different ways. While the study acknowledges the widespread shift toward utility discourses, it also shows that strategies for achieving these differ depending on the context in which the disciplines are situated. For instance, these responses differ in terms of the extent to which they focus on theory versus skills, as well as the extent to which they focus on present-day issues versus historical issues. Thus the strategies for developing utility can be located within a matrix of high and low skills, high and low theory, and high and low contextualisation, and have different implications for knowledge conception. Thus the utilitarian discourse manifests differently within the different disciplines and programmes. Some programmes tend to maintain their original traditional approach, while others attempt to balance the demands of utilitarian approaches with more

³⁷¹ This includes student enrolment numbers, research outputs and financial well being.

traditional approaches, which could be likened to Muller's (2005:12) conception of 'strategicility', and yet others have gone the utilitarian route.

The study also suggests that courses and programmes that are associated with low utility are generally under threat of closure. However, it also suggests that utility is not the only reason for course closures. It argues that there are several local and global factors influencing the status of these disciplines which lead to their closure. For instance, Afrikaans lost its status and legitimacy at a local level, and has no currency at the global level. The study also showed that some disciplines that were vulnerable and susceptible to closure were protected. These were generally courses or programmes that have socio-political importance, or strong academic records that secured their survival. For instance, African languages which were under threat of closure because of low enrolments and poor academic records were not closed down. This did not mean, however, that they were not under pressure to transform.

Genericism, regionalisation and intra-disciplinary recontextualisation. The different manifestations of utilitarianism emerging in the faculty could be classified by notions of regionalisation, genericism and intra-disciplinary recontextualisation. Bernstein (2000) refers to both genericism and regionalisation as key manifestations of twenty-first century higher education curriculum underpinned by utility discourses. Regionalisation refers to the ways in which disciplines are coalescing to form new entities and new knowledge. Genericism refers to the extent to which generic skills are integrated into higher education curriculum. While the study acknowledges that both regionalisation and genericism are evident in the faculty, it also draws attention to the fact that the dominant curriculum reform trend in the faculty is located within disciplines – that is, increased utilitarian curriculum approaches within disciplines.

This study refers to the concept of intra-disciplinary recontextualisation in order to locate the ways in which disciplines are recontextualising within disciplines, instead of outside or across disciplines as is indicated by Bernstein through the concept of regionalisation. The study reveals that there are different forms of genericism, regionalisation and disciplinary recontextualisation. These differ in terms of their focus on theory versus skills or application, the extent to which knowledge is carefully structured in a historical manner or more randomly organised, as well as the extent to

which the discipline maintains its identity or is superseded by a new identity. The Wits case shows evidence of curriculum reform efforts that maintain disciplinary boundaries, such as in History and Political Studies, as well as examples of programmes such as Forced Migration that move beyond disciplinary boundaries. In addition, there are examples of courses and programmes in which skills are integrated within disciplines as well as skills courses offered outside of disciplines in short courses.

The status of the discipline. The literature argues that the shift to interdisciplinarity is becoming the dominant knowledge form in the twenty-first century. Even though there are emerging interdisciplinary programmes, the Wits case suggests that the discipline remains a strong feature of the faculty's curriculum approach. Thus the Wits case continues to reflect a strong disciplinary base as fundamental to its teaching, learning and research programmes. However, this does not imply that the discipline continues as it always did. Instead the Wits case shows that disciplines are under pressure to become more applied and utilitarian.

Disciplinarity vis-à-vis interdisciplinarity. Even though the discipline continues to represent the dominant knowledge form of curriculum in the Faculty of Humanities, there is an increase in interdisciplinary programmes, particularly at the postgraduate level. In this regard the study shows several different forms of interdisciplinarity in order to become more responsive to society's needs. Thus the study suggests that there are several different strategies for achieving interdisciplinarity, which vary from more conservative approaches where disciplines maintain their identity, to more radical ones where decisions about what constitutes curriculum is informed by themes or issues that are located outside traditional disciplinary identities. The total integration approach represents the ideal form of interdisciplinarity, in which the disciplines are subsumed by the theme or issue which forms the basis upon which knowledge is organised in the programme. The connected and disciplinary approach reflects relationships between disciplines in ways that continue to maintain the identity of the 'mother' disciplines. The hidden disciplinary approach is one in which programmes that are already interdisciplinary have moved even further away from their mother disciplines, and these disciplines have become hidden or non-explicit as a result. This approach is more integrated than the 'connected and disciplinary' approach and less integrated than the

‘total integration’ approach. Perhaps this represents a continuum of integration approaches from disciplinary to total integration.

Curriculum reform vis-à-vis institutional identities, norms and traditions. The study suggests that a range of emerging practices are tempering or undermining traditional institutional norms. The movement toward professionalisation of programmes, including the shift toward interdisciplinarity, affects the traditional practices associated with the institution and faculty. In particular, these shifts have a bearing on the ways in which disciplines and departments perceive and constitute knowledge. They begin to tamper with the existing organisation structures which are built upon traditional disciplines. This is further complicated by the emergence of multi-stakeholder contexts that change the power and identity of academics and academic practices. The new socio-political and economic climate has resulted in the reconfiguration of stakeholder relationships in higher education, which has implications for curriculum. Today university managers, business, professional associations and even civil society have a stake in curriculum. This changes the context in which curriculum is developed and transformed, and also affects the power and identity of academics. Finally, the emerging managerialist practices that have been introduced into the institution affect academic identity and promote technicist curriculum strategies which are antithetical to the traditional humanities and institutional approach to knowledge. However, despite the pressures to transform the curriculum and widespread transformation trends, the faculty continues to uphold some elements of traditional curriculum principles and practices.

Student perceptions, choice and curriculum change. Even though there are some key global factors³⁷² affecting curriculum change, the post-apartheid condition also had a significant influence on curriculum trends in the faculty. For example, under apartheid, black South Africans did not have access to careers in science, technology or business, and many students enrolled for courses and programmes in the Humanities. However, as the workplace opened up, a large number of students shifted to other fields which are viewed as more lucrative and having better job prospects than those in the Humanities. This has led to an enrolment crisis in some programmes. This was

³⁷² The utilitarian and skills discourses are certainly global.

further exacerbated by the fact that many Humanities programmes focus on historical and political issues, while many students in post-apartheid South Africa are more interested in economic growth and development. This position was supported by government's approach to reconciliation which focussed on 'quick wins' and 'populist' strategies to bind a divided society and undermined the place of socio-political critique in the rebuilding of the nation. This resulted in unintended local consequences that affected the survival of some programmes in the Humanities.

Mounting pressure to transform the curriculum toward utilitarian and technicist discourses. The concern here is about the nature and extent to which present curriculum reform trends affect the survival of the Humanities. The concern is about whether the Humanities are in crisis and in a downward trajectory or whether they are merely reconstituting themselves in the new societal order. The study suggests that the Humanities are facing pressure to transform and have undergone several changes in order to meet the new demands of societal responsiveness. Proponents support the idea that the Humanities should become more relevant to students' realities, while opponents argue for maintaining the traditional approach. Despite the position of various academics on this matter, changes in the faculty reflect widespread shifts toward utilitarian discourses. The nature and extent of these shifts represent a critical indicator of whether the Humanities curriculum has been completely undermined or whether it is being reconstituted.

10.4 Overall Findings: A Summary

There definitely is a shift in curriculum toward conceptions of usefulness. Even though this notion of usefulness is both socio-political and economic, it is more strongly rooted in conceptions of economic responsiveness.

In curriculum terms this means the increasing professionalisation of curriculum. This has been done through focusing on contemporary contextual issues, solving societal problems, focusing on generic skills as well as the emergence of interdisciplinarity. However, the nature and extent of this shift varies considerably among the different disciplines and departments.

This suggests that curriculum reform is a complex process which is not easily predictable. It is influenced by several drivers of curriculum change acting upon the discipline at any given time. This includes external drivers such as economic responsiveness and internal drivers which focus on the logic and principles associated with the particular knowledge form.

While there are many factors influencing curriculum change, dominant external drivers include conceptions of economic responsiveness and financial viability. These two factors play a significant role in influencing curriculum reform, amid other factors. Therefore, while curriculum reform is complex and dynamic and should be viewed in the context of the discipline and its relationship to the world, there are some factors that appear to have stronger influence than others.

Having made a number of claims about curriculum reform in the Faculty of Humanities, it is important to note that many elements of the traditional curriculum still remain intact. This has been achieved either through compromise strategies or non-compliance with market pressures to transform.

Thus far this chapter has provided a number of insights which raise more questions than they do answers. Clearly the journey that I embarked on did not lead to a destination but rather to cross-roads that link up to a range of different travel options. This provides opportunities for new journeys on which we can embark.

10.5 Opportunities for Future Research: Going Deeper and Wider

While this study provided an in-depth analysis of curriculum change in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, the insights cannot be generalised to other institutions in the country. It would be useful to establish how widespread these curriculum trends are in other South African institutions. This could form the basis of a quantitative study or several studies that may add substantially to the existing work.

Equally, while the study focused on one case in detail, it did not go deeply enough into curriculum changes in each discipline. It would be interesting to conduct a detailed study of curriculum transformation trends through one or two disciplines or interdisciplinary programmes. This could include some programmes or disciplines that were closed down.

This study did not differentiate between the Humanities and the Social Sciences or between professional programmes and academic programmes. A study that compares these various forms of knowledge would also provide interesting insights into curriculum reform trends.

A study that disaggregates the different factors that influence curriculum in the various disciplines would offer invaluable information about the nature of curriculum change. This includes an examination of the relationship between the financial situation, enrolment patterns and curriculum reform strategies. This could be done using both quantitative and qualitative research approaches.

A comparative study between institutions or even between faculties would provide useful insights into the ways in which the external drivers affect curriculum in the different fields of knowledge. In particular, such a study would offer opportunities to explore the relationship between curriculum reform and institutional culture.

This study suggests that academics in the Humanities believe that their curriculum promotes critical thinking. However, critical thinking is a feature of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies and cannot be examined only in terms of

curriculum content. This presents a possible study which could explore the relationship between critical thinking, pedagogy and assessment in the faculty.

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