

CHAPTER FIVE: THE CONSORTIUM: PROGRAMME DESIGN, ARRANGEMENTS AND DELIVERY

5.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the program design, structure and coordination, curriculum delivery and pedagogical issues, partnerships and collaborative arrangements for institutional implications and ends with the conclusion of the issues that pertain to program design arrangement and delivery. It is argued that, the program of the Consortium has come with innovations and has guarantee for financial assistance to students of remarkable achievements academically.

5.1 Programme design, structure and Coordination

In 1998, the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town initiated a discussion, which subsequently included the other three Universities (Universities of Western Cape, Durban Westville and Natal), on the need to review their doctoral programmes in education (Cross, 1999). This discussion is said to have taken place in the context of a widely recognized shortage of high-level capacity in the area of Education Policy research. These universities came to the conclusion that their existing programmes could be improved through partnership and collaboration. The analysis made was that the model that was used in each of the institutions provided neither the disciplinary training nor the research mentorship appropriate to support students in their work. Hence, these universities came together to form a Consortium to put together their strengths for the major purpose of improving their existing curricula and structures for the doctoral degree.

The doctoral programme is designed to produce high-level skilled education policy researchers and analysts, but (i) the current students generally do not possess the necessary primary knowledge; (ii) the focus is on literary critique and there is lack of empirical basis for analysis; (iii) there is lack of theoretical and conceptual grounding; (iv) there is a need for a more structured programme delivery with clear benchmarks; and (v) there is a need for a more systematic support system in order for this programme to reach its mandate and goals. While the educationists have made great strides in developing and arguing policies and arguing them forcefully, they exhibit very few of the skills of gathering empirical data about the effects of policies, implementation, or even about what is actual

happening in the education system. In this program, students spend three to four years on the PhD degree, a large commitment in time as well as in institutional and personal resources (Cross, 1999). However, the major requirement of the programme is to network with other students, supervisors and academics and its major factor is the successful completion of the PhD.

5.2 Structure

The establishment and the existence of the programme of the Consortium came about through a series of meetings with the deans to advise each other on research training for graduates. The following issues were addressed through a planning process which resulted in the program design and structure. This doctoral program signals a departure from traditional PhD's within South Africa in its incorporation of a teaching component designed specifically to prepare candidates for subsequent research and the writing of their thesis. It emphasizes a strong research focus and, despite the inclusion of modules, candidates are aware that this is not a coursework programme. For new students the duration of the full-time PhD remains at a minimum of three years whilst the expected time of completion is four years (Cross, 1999:6). Generally the programme consists of four components: (i) Four generic taught modules offered at Winter and Summer residential schools in year 1; (ii) Four taught modules at candidate's own university, preferably in year1; (iii) Doctoral colloquia in subsequent years; and (iv) A thesis to be written and submitted in years three and four. It is important to note here that the modules are compulsory and their satisfactory completion is a prerequisite for continuation to the next stage of the programme. Moreover, they also count towards assessment, but are not regarded as credits for individual qualification. .

Once students have attended the winter and Summer Schools, the terms of their scholarship and the rules of the programme are binding. This is because membership of the Consortium brings with it a number of firm responsibilities such as the production of the literature review after the first residential school; successful proposal hearing at the second residential school; satisfactory completion and approval of the research proposal within six months after the second residential school; completion of all coursework requirements; completion of a framework of a fieldwork and data analysis to be

approved by the supervisor after the first colloquium, but in good time before the second; hearing of a draft dissertation report; and the presentation of research.

5.2 Curriculum delivery and Pedagogical approaches

In the first year of study, each student attends a summer and a winter week in residence schools built around tuition, reading and reflection. The training programme for the students consist of two major elements, namely, a taught component and a practical research-training component (Cross, 1999:6) The taught component of the programme consist of generic and specialist modules during the first year of the programme, two of each at the summer and winter schools and these include the following:

- Policy Research and Analysis
- Basic Research Methodology: Design, Methods and Analysis (A module developed and delivered in conjunction with US based scholars)
- Issues in education Policy and Planning
- Advanced Research Methodology: Design, Methods and Analysis (A module developed in conjunction with US based scholars)

The Policy Research and Analysis module assumes that students have some research training and therefore introduces students to the most important approaches to policy research and analysis. This module focuses on the importance of research in policy generation and implementation together with policy analysis. Furthermore, it provides students with an introduction to research paradigms, especially, those that involve quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Research Methodology: Design, Methods and Analysis is an advanced course that is intended to inform student's research for their dissertations. The course provides an intense overview of key research approaches to help the student develop his methodology for data collection, analysis and interpretation. Issues pertaining to research sampling, surveys,

experimental design, evaluation, observation, measurement are addressed in as far as they relate to educational policy.

The Issues in Educational Policy and Planning module varies by faculty and is dependent on the profile of the candidate. Overall however, it examines the process and mechanisms of policy making, with students being introduced to different theoretical approaches to policy analysis and educational policy in South Africa.

Advanced Research Methodology: Design Methods and Analysis show the formal relationships which the Consortium of South African Universities have with a number of institutions and scholars based in the US. These scholars work in large-scale research projects. These scholars are invited to develop modules in conjunction with the Consortium, which draws on their work in their country. The purpose for such a model is to provide students with an opportunity for comparative reflection (Handbook of Educational Policy studies, 2001).

In addition to the compulsory and generic modules, students are required, in between the winter and summer schools, to undertake four modules, or their equivalent within their home-based institutions. The planning, development and delivery of the specialists' modules are offered quarterly in centralized venues such as Wits or Natal/Durban-Westville or Cape Town/Western Cape and they are the responsibility of each participating institution. These modules are drawn from any program in the university relevant to the research in which the student is involved and there is no need to limit it to those subjects offered in the relevant schools of education. For reporting purposes, the Consortium is informed about specialists modules selected for each candidate.

5.3 Partnership and Collaborative arrangements

The Consortium has formal relationships with a number of institutions and scholars based in the US and Australia. The purpose for such a model is to provide students with an opportunity to for

comparative reflection. Moreover, details of the programme of each school are sent to students well in advance.

In this programme, attempts are made to place students within suitable internships. These provide full-time students with workplace experience, for example in government departments, NGO's, education planning units, schools and other educational institutions. Arrangements are made by the Consortium member institution to ensure that these internships are supervised in order to maximize the benefits (Cross, 1999:8). When it comes to student networking, the Consortium arranges for students to join affinity groups with members of other institutions with whom they have research interests. Direct and subsequent distant contact throughout the duration of the PhD allows for exchange of ideas and encourages productive academic discussion. These groups also have the advantage of breaking down the feeling of isolation that is often encountered by doctoral students who work on their own (Cross, 1999). This translates to the one-to-one student staff consultation groups that are arranged and they include those groups across institutions and whenever possible with visiting international academics.

5.4 Conclusion

Through the program of the Consortium, there have been a number of benefits such as; the flexibility of delivery that is evident in its structure and design, and the partnerships and collaborative arrangements. Each of these has emphasized on the need to work in collaboration to bring about researchers of quality and who possess sound judgments. This chapter has outlined the programme structure and its benefits to the individual student and has revealed that the structure of the Consortium programme has brought with it innovations in South Africa by incorporating a teaching component that is designed to prepare PhD candidates for the subsequent research and the writing of a thesis. As illustrated in these two arrangements, the programme emphasizes systematic support in theory and a method structured approach to delivery and maximization of peer support among staff and students.