Leading article

Traditional tutorial system – fit for purpose or past its sell-by date? University students' pedagogical experiences

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Abstract

Universities in South Africa and elsewhere have seen a significant increase in student enrolment resulting in large class sizes. Consequently, the potentially detrimental effects of large classes on student learning have become a permanent feature that needs constant monitoring. An increase in student enrolment without a proportionate increase in teaching staff and resources arguably compromises the quality of teaching and learning. The tutorial system is a teaching strategy employed to minimise the negative consequences of large classes, but in the post-apartheid era, concerns have been expressed about its effectiveness. The context of this article is a compulsory Bachelor of Education (BEd) module, The History of Education at a higher education institution (HEI). In 2013, 820 students had to be accommodated in a tutorial system of 27 groups taught by 12 tutors. If the same formula is to be used, the projection for 2014 is 1 100 students divided amongst 44 tutorial groups of 25 students each. The article is concerned with the pedagogical value of the tutorial system viewed from the students' perspective and, therefore, focuses on the experiences of students as participants in a tutorial system as a supplementary and consolidating teaching strategy. The data were extracted from quantitative sections of the student course evaluation forms (N = 60) and a qualitative questionnaire (N = 50) administered to a random sample of students. Excel spread sheet and content analysis were employed to analyse the data sets. Using as a conceptual framework Shulman's pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and Wenger's concept 'community of practice' (COP) the findings revealed arbitrary, contradictory and unequal participatory learning outcomes. Given the diminishing 'fit for purpose' between learning objectives and outcomes, recommendations are made to make tutorials more meaningful and productive in the immediate future.

Keywords: large classes, tutorial, pedagogical content knowledge, participation, community of practice

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are experiencing pressure to accommodate the increasing demand for university places. University academic staff are also facing increased pressure to deliver the teaching and learning mandate given the available resources. Higher education institutions also have to respond to a Council on Higher Education (CHE 2013) report that poor academic preparation at school is 'the dominant learning-related reason' for poor university performance and that less than 5 per cent of black African and coloured youth succeed at university, and more than half of all first-year entrants never graduate at all (*Mail & Guardian* 2013). As an adjunct, the tutorial system has traditionally been part of a university's teaching strategy to support learning. However, given the changes that currently beset higher education (HE), tutorials have increasingly become an essential feature of a university's teaching structures. In the South African context, the underlying changes in universities due to the merging process resulted in large numbers of students which further entrenched the tutorial system. While studies on the tutorial system have mostly focused on the tutor's role, the students' educational experiences have largely been under-researched. Based on my work as a module coordinator, my discussions with tutors, and interaction with students, the question that comes to mind is whether the tutorial system fulfils the 'fit for purpose' test given the ambiguous and contradictory experiences of students and tutors when they participate in the tutorial system.

Traditionally, the tutorial system was a closed circle of students headed by a tutor who was entrusted to assist students with mastering an academic task. The tutorial teaching was generally student-centred and allowed for the students to participate actively. Ideally the size of the tutorial group should not be more than 12 students. Tapper and Palfreyman (2000) reported that tutorials at the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom (UK) involved 12 or more students. An increased enrolment of students, which often takes place without a proportionate increase in the provision of teaching staff and resources, has led to unexpected and uncertain educational outcomes. From a teaching and learning perspective, it would be reasonable to ask the question: what are students' experiences of the tutorial system? The expectation today is that the tutorial system would ensure that students do not become victims of large class sizes. Some of the deleterious and detrimental consequences of large class sizes are reported to reduce students' level of active involvement; reduce students' depth of thinking in the classroom; and lower overall evaluation ratings for course instruction.

This study was conducted with students in the Teacher Education Department at an HEI in KwaZulu-Natal. Previously, the course was presented by a number of tutors who performed the task of lecturers. Due to many complaints from students with regard to the quality of teaching, inconsistent assessment practices and discrepancies with regard to teaching styles, concerns were raised about the achievement of the course objectives. These complaints were raging for a while until

it was decided to change the mode of delivery. In 2013, students had to attend one lecture with a large number of students, offered by a senior tutor and one tutorial lesson presented by 11 tutors. The primary task of the tutorial was to consolidate the course material which included a few readings and supervision of assessment tasks including a short essay, a multiple choice question test and a group task. The article reports on an investigation into students' experiences of the tutorial system as part of the compulsory Bachelor of Education (BEd) module, The History of Education. This course is deemed an important knowledge component for teachers given the complex and controversial educational history which provides the background to the present curriculum and educational system.

While the literature dealing with the role of tutorials reveals scepticism regarding their effectiveness (Amos 1998; Elton 2001; Nespor 1986), the article argues that the tutorial system has yielded a mix of arbitrary pedagogical outcomes thereby bringing its pedagogical value and meaningfulness into question. The article uses Shulman's (1987) model of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) to evaluate the cognitive component of students' learning and Wenger's (1998) concept of 'community of practice' (COP) as the context in which the individual student participates in the tutorial. This model adopts the notion of learning as a social experience wherein a learner participates in a community and is shaped through learning (Singh 2011, 1627). While Shulman's model is useful in explaining the cognitive learning that takes place, it falls short of attending to the learning practices of students which Wenger explains as 'participation'. By asking the question 'what are students' experiences of the tutorial classes', the article considers whether the tutorial system passes the 'fit for purpose' test. It proposes a consideration of blended learning options (Tshuma 2012) to make the tutorial system a meaningful educational intervention in the immediate future.

Having provided an introduction to and context of the current study, the rest of the article is structured as follows: a brief literature review to locate the study, a methodological note, presentation and interpretation of the data which is followed by a discussion and conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The tutorial can possibly be regarded as the earliest pedagogical device used by ancient Indian gurus through the times of the Socratic dialogue to the modern-day Rousseau who used the method in the education of Emile, his student (Hampson 1998). In a one-on-one student-tutor relationship the possibilities of learning increase exponentially as compared to multiple learners in a tutorial where the tutor's attention is divided amongst all. In a study on the tutorial system at Oxford University in the UK, the Commission of Inquiry (1997) found that the most common size of tutorial was two students but that the tutorials in social science, sciences and engineering tended to be bigger than those in the arts. At other UK universities, such as Sussex, tutorials normally involve 12 or more students (Tapper and Palfreyman 2000).

It is generally accepted that the tutor's attention per student in a tutorial will be determined by the number of students in the tutorial group. A smaller tutorial will thus be more effective than a larger one.

The tutorial system is playing an increasingly important role in the context of an inevitability of large class sizes. Tutorials are also being entrenched due to budgetary constraints faced by HEIs. In the South African context, the merging process which resulted in large numbers of students registering for undergraduate study often from socially disadvantaged communities, and the broadening of access to tertiary education, has meant that postgraduate tutors are regarded as essential for the continued functioning of undergraduate teaching (Duncan 2012, 23). The traditional view of tutors as the next generation of aspiring academics has now changed to the view that the tutors have become an indispensable source of labour to deliver universities' academic programmes.

Underhill and McDonald (2010) support the claim that the tutorial system and its integration into mainstream programmes is critical to manage the pressures under which universities operate. The mere number of students registered in a course makes it impossible for permanent lecturers to undertake quality control and assessment. Often, tutors may be expected to assist in assessment of tasks and final examinations.

Most of the literature on tutors deals with tutor development programmes which aim at improving the tutors' pedagogical knowledge. Some of the studies are discipline specific and document particular programmes in particular institutions. Lowman and Marthie (1993) discuss their qualitative research on finding ways to harmonise and homogenise training approaches through the tutorial manual as a means to train tutors. The use of 'purposeful reflective practice' as a means of assisting novice teachers in HE is reported by Kane, Sandretto and Heath (2004), while McDonough (2006) motivates for action research as a methodology to engage postgraduate tutors in thinking about their teaching practice. Hardre (2005, 169) makes a case for instructional design: 'a systematic method for creating instruction that can enable teacher assistants to organize knowledge into a cognitive accessible, functional usable toolkit'. McClean and Bullard (2000) explored the teaching portfolio as a staff development device. Simmons (2011) describes the first five years of faculty teaching experience in terms of five stages, namely: survival, safety, belonging, self-esteem and self-actualisation. In this model, postgraduate tutors would typically be characterised as teachers in the very first stage with the focus on the instruments of learning and mastery of content. Simmons (2011) makes the argument that support should, therefore, be directed at this level of need, necessarily foregoing a focus on students or developing teacher identity. Simmons' (2011, 8) report concludes that:

> To the degree that is possible to generalize from the survey results, students perceive their seminar teachers (local context they are tutors) to be halfway between students and academic, general teacher assistants perceive themselves mainly doctoral students with certain teaching responsibilities and staff members perceive them as research students and academic apprentices.

Duncan's (2012) study on tracking the experiences of five tutors' experiences in designing a programme concludes that tutors are sensitive to the many constraints that circulate in an institution and that tutors in turn recirculate and reproduce the regulative rules and discourses that are operative in a given context.

The literature discussed mainly refers to the tutorial system from the perspective of institutional concerns to address issues of class sizes and budgetary constraints and to ensure that tutors, who are an essential feature in teaching, are provided with the necessary professional support. The literature on students' experiences seems to be under-researched in the South African context. The size of student enrolment poses challenges to the meaning of a learner-centred approach in education. Moore (1968) asserts that the tutor-student relationship should be mutually beneficial when they engage on an intellectual level where the student gradually acquires independence from his/her tutor. Elton (2001) argues that tutorials at Oxford and Cambridge are centred on the tutor rather than on the students' ideas and that they do not normally result in high quality student learning. Ashwin's study (2005) involved 28 undergraduates from a variety of disciplines from different years of study using interviews about their experiences of the tutorial at Oxford. The study reported on four student conceptualisations of the Oxford tutorial, namely: (1) Tutorials as the tutor explaining to the student what the student does not understand; (2) Tutorials as the tutor showing the student how to see the subject in the way that the tutor does; (3) Tutorials as the tutor bringing things into relation to each other to help the student develop a new perspective in the wider context of the discipline; and (4) Tutorials as the tutor and the student exchanging different points of view on the topic and both coming to a new understanding. These studies mainly focus on students' cognitive understanding in the tutorial. The tutorial size that I coordinated in 2013 ranged between 40 and 80 students on the undergraduate level.

A recent study conducted with Management and Financial Accounting students asserted that in a well-structured, collaborative, fun, stress-free tutorial environment where everyone is valued, meaningful learning occurs naturally (Bargate 2012). In the current study, tutorials focused on structure, understanding, challenging, and written tasks and were enjoyed by students (Bargate 2012, 166). While there are lessons to be drawn from the study, it must be seen as a highly structured and monitored experiment conducted with a selective sample (Bargate 2012, 54). When considering the possibility of Bargate's study for general application there are many limitations such as the fact that Bargate (2012, 59), a lecturer with 20 years' teaching experience acted as the 'facilitator'. In the case study the pedagogical content knowledge was beyond question and students were tutored and monitored intensely. However, what makes the study useful is the argument that meaningful learning may occur 'naturally' where students experience 'fun, stress free ... where everyone is valued'. The question remains: how could these highly desirable learning conditions be (re)created within the tutorial system on a large scale with arguably less qualified tutors and a variety of students with different levels of commitment? Its relevance to the current study is that the affective and interactional variables become important

when researching students' learning experiences. Thus, students' experiences are positive when they find the tutorial atmosphere relaxed and enjoyable.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

A case study method approach was adopted to focus on students' experiences of the tutorial classes. According to Willis (2008), the case study method has 'experiential knowledge' at the heart of what is to be learnt. Case study facilitates the conveying of experience of actors and the stakeholders as well as the experience with the case. It does this largely with narrative and situational descriptions of case activity, personal relationship, and group interpretation (Willis 2008). I agree with Willis (2008, 218) that while the case study method allows for a deep description and exploration of a phenomenon, its generalisability is restricted on the basis of an individual case. As a qualitative study aiming at an interpretation of a group experience of students, the study does not seek to generate broad generalisations. However, this does not detract from the scientific nature of the study which intends making a contribution to existing knowledge in a field that is still relatively under-researched. In the current study, the phenomenon under investigation was the learning experiences of students and the case was the context of the tutorial which was studied as an adjunct to large class teaching.

The aim of the current study was to investigate the experiences of students who attended a compulsory module as part of their BEd qualification. The data collection techniques employed were the quantitative section of students' course evaluation forms (N = 60) and a qualitative questionnaire (N = 50) administered to a random group of students who completed the module. Fifteen students' evaluation forms were taken from four separate tutorial classes while the questionnaire participants were drawn from a mixed selection of classes. According to Creswell (1994), qualitative data can be dealt with descriptively and in an explorative and contextual way. In the current study, I used the quantitative data in an exploratory way but I triangulated my references with data drawn from the qualitative data set. The study thus used a case study approach by employing a quantitative and qualitative questionnaire technique.

DATA ANALYSIS AND THEORETICAL INTERPRETATION

The first data set (students' evaluation forms) was analysed by using the computer software program, Excel, to generate separate analyses of the different responses. The relevant responses are presented in graphic form referring to: (1) students' experiences of tutors' content knowledge (CK); (2) tutors' pedagogical knowledge (PK); (3) tutors' willingness to assist; (4) students' self-assessed interest in PCK; and (5) students' experience of materials and assessment in the tutorials. The second data set consists of an analysis of the questionnaire section pertaining to tutorials. Responses were recorded on a spread sheet under separate columns and through critical reading and content analysis, common words and expressions were colour

coded. Common patterns of expression were finally grouped into significant themes which are descriptive of the dominant experiences of students. These themes are presented as three primary discourses descriptive of students' experiences of tutorial classes namely: (1) students' experiences of tutors' CPK; (2) their experiences of tutors' engagements; and (3) their experiences of peer-group participation.

Because the focus of the study was to understand students' experiences of an academic module, Shulman's model of PCK was deemed appropriate to interpret the data. In 1986, Shulman claimed that the emphases on teachers' subject knowledge and pedagogy were being treated as mutually exclusive while knowledge of curriculum, students and educational context also operate in the teaching and learning process (Hlas and Hilderbrandt 2010). If teachers are to be successful they have to attend to disciplinary knowledge – 'the what' as well as 'the how' – the manner in which subject matter is transformed for teaching. I have adopted an extended definition of PCK inclusive of the numerous educational practices that occur in the tutorial context. Cochran, DeRuiter and King (1993, 264) define PCK as follows:

> The transformation of subject matter for teaching occurs as the teacher critically reflects on and interprets the subject matter, finds multiple ways to represent the information as analogies, metaphors, examples, problems, demonstrations, and classroom activities; adapts the material to students' abilities, gender, prior knowledge, and pre-conceptions and finally tailors the material to those specific students to whom the information will be taught.

Shulman's model of PCK is an appropriate lens to identify the cognitive learning that students experience when they engage tutors in the tutorial situation. Because students' learning experiences cover cognitive as well as active participatory activities, I find Wenger's notion of 'participation' in a COP useful to illuminate the learning practices that students were able to identify in the tutorials. While there may be a degree of 'participation' in a COP such as the tutorial group, Wenger (1998, 165--72) employs concepts such as 'peripheral, full and marginal' to describe the variations in the degree of participation. I employ Wenger's notion of 'degree of participation' in a group exercise understandable in terms of these three categories of participation. Wenger's notion of a COP was also employed by Singh (2011) in developing a model for in-service staff development where learning is seen as experiencing and doing. In the current study learning has both a cognitive and a practical component and is, therefore, individualistic as well as social. While Shulman's extended model of PCK may intend to include socio-cultural factors involved in teaching and learning, it has as its foundation a cognitivist conception of knowledge. Cognitive knowledge is abstract and valuable but it overlooks the largely complex nature of the learning environment and practice. By using Wenger's notion that individuals participate in practices while interacting with others (peripherally, fully or marginally), a comprehensive picture of involvement becomes analysable. The individual also experiences a sense of 'belonging and commitment' in a learning

situation which implies that knowledge is not primarily abstract and symbolic, but is provisional, mediated and socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

The data presented below were interpreted through the extended conception of Shulman's model of PCK and Wenger's notion of participation in a COP. While the cognitive and the participatory data appear inseparable, for analytical purposes the cognitive data is presented in six graphs and the participatory data as three thematic discourses.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

In this section of the data there are six graphs that are interpreted through the PCK lens.

Students' experience of tutors' subject knowledge

The graph in Figure 1 represents how students' experienced the levels of tutors' subject knowledge. On an ordinal scale of five ranging from very weak (VW); weak (W); average (A); good (G); to very good (VG), tutors are normally expected to be highly placed for their disciplinary knowledge as they are usually postgraduate students enrolled for masters or doctoral studies. In this particular module – History of Education – subject knowledge would be a requirement to teach the course confidently and comfortably. As tutors' knowledge has not been rated as overwhelmingly 'very good', there may be a need for better tutor subject knowledge.
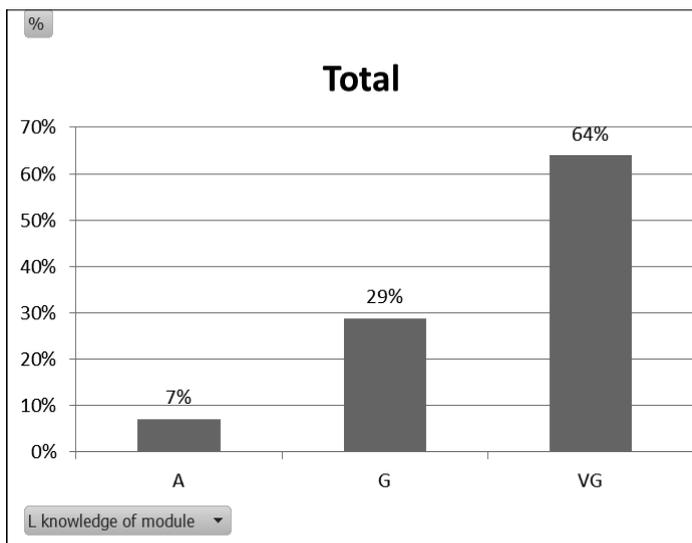

Figure 1: Students' experiences of tutors' subject knowledge

Students' experiences of tutors' pedagogical knowledge

(preparation)

Shulman describes preparation as referring to the tutors' ability to present the subject knowledge in a conceptual, interpretive and in structured segments to the students. Considering students' responses when asked to rate their experiences of tutors' preparedness in the tutorials, only 44 per cent rated them as very good (Figure 2). It may be expected that tutors lack pedagogical knowledge because they view themselves as mainly students with some teaching responsibilities (Simmons 2011), but there also seems to be a need to improve this component of PCK. Thus, tutors' subject as well as pedagogical knowledge cannot be regarded as being beyond reproach.

Students' experiences of tutors' style and ability

Tutors' teaching style and ability can also be categorised under pedagogical knowledge which, as in the case of Figure 2, is not expected to be impressive because tutors are not expected to have extensive experience in teaching. According to Figure 3, 59 per cent of students regarded tutors as having the ability to teach, but more than 10 per cent of students responded between very weak and average. This graph mainly corroborates the data in Figure 2 that tutors' PCK needs improvement.
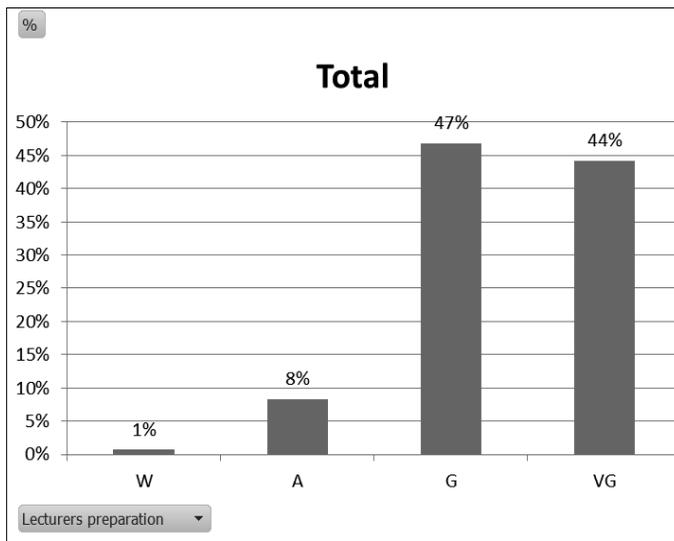
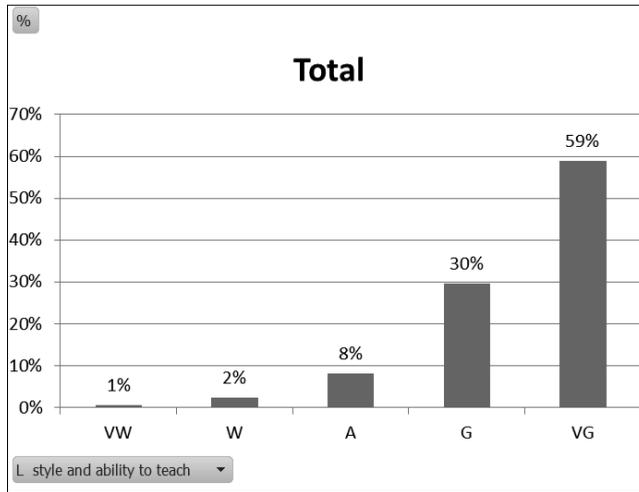

Figure 2: Students' experiences of tutors' preparation

Figure 3: Students' experiences of tutors' teaching style

Students' experiences of tutors' willingness to assist

The graph in Figure 4 indicates a satisfactory attitude (68%) towards the tutors, but although the 16 per cent weak to average responses can be read as a matter of concern, they also give some scope to explore the possibilities to improve tutors' helpfulness. The 68 per cent very good rating may denote some hope and compensation for the relatively poor rating on content and pedagogical knowledge. In the absence of comparative data to make meaning of this graph, its usefulness lies in the positive leverage that it provides to improve the ratings in the previous three graphs.
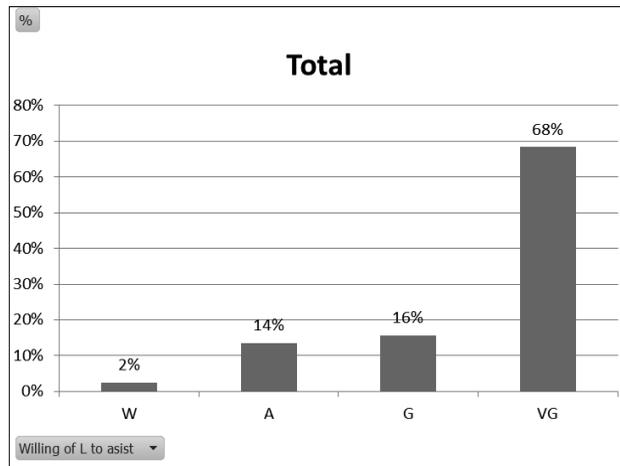

Figure 4: Students' experiences of tutors' willingness to assist

Students' self-assessment of PCK

By any measure, 15 per cent (Figure 5) denotes a low segment of the student group who regarded themselves as having attained a very good level of interest in this module. Although 50 per cent may have assessed themselves as good, 35 per cent ranged between weak and average. As pre-service teachers, this rating can be regarded as an indication that students have not attained the learning outcomes of the module. The graph may also be regarded as a key indicator of overall students' disposition towards the module as part of their teacher training. Needless to say, the graph provides sufficient grounds to express concern for the level of interest that was achieved as a course outcome. It opens possibilities for deeper investigation into why students ranked their interest so low. A positive disposition would be necessary in the module which is aimed at exposing and preparing future teachers to teach in any South African classroom given the historical background of the country's educational system.
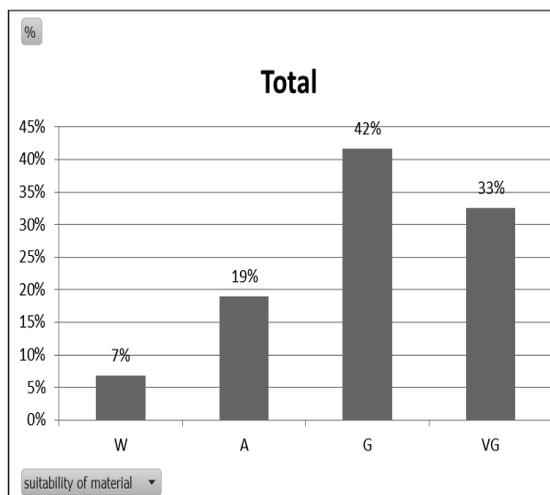

Figure 5: Students' self-assessment of PCK

Students' experiences of the course material and assessment

There is a conceptual relation between understanding the course material (Figure 6(a)) and assessment (Figure 6(b)) as the former informs the latter. Students' responses to both questions represented in figures 6(a) and (b) were more or less in the same range. On the whole it seems that students' attention had not been captured by the course and the assessment experiences also depicted low interest. The course material in the tutorial consists of reading material and a 26 per cent response between weak and average may indicate a poor attitude towards reading. The assessment form in the tutorial was a multiple choice question test and a group assignment that

had to be presented to the class. If the purpose of assessment is to align learning objectives to learning outcomes then these figures indicate that students' experiences with the course content lacked a strong interest. The synergy between figures 5, 6(a) and (b) which deal with students' interest in general, students' experiences of course materials and assessment supports the notion of a mismatch between the intended course objectives and the actual course outcomes.
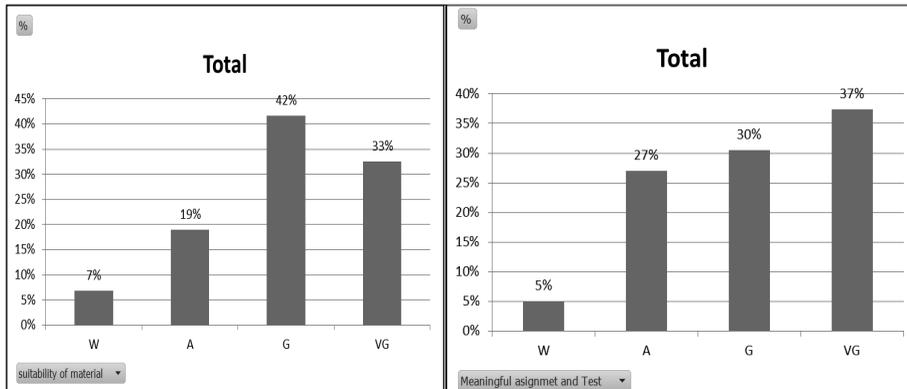
Figures 6(a) and (b): Students' experiences of the course material and assessment

Using the PCK lens to interpret the data relating to the tutors' subject and pedagogical knowledge from the students' perspective is not impressive but rather a matter of concern. Generally tutors were not satisfactorily prepared. Students who are normally easily impressed by the knowledge of postgraduate tutors seemed not to be overwhelmingly impressed (figures 1 and 2). Because quantitative data do not open much scope for interpretation, all aspects of Shulman's model of PCK such as knowledge of students and content of teaching could not be probed. Students' evaluations of the course materials and assessment added to the disconcerting state in which the tutorials were viewed. A general view of the students' experiences, albeit in a limited sample, could be said to be unsatisfactory, thus leaving scope for lots of work to attend to. This is not to say that the data indicated total negativity towards tutorials. The limitations of quantitative data are its lack of depth and restrictive interpretation. In the following section, more qualitative responses will be presented which will deepen readers' understanding of some of the issues raised above.

DISCOURSES OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AND PARTICIPATION

Subjecting the qualitative data to content analysis and using Wenger's notion of participation in a COP, I identified three students' tutorial discourses. Each of these discourses contains both cognitive and participatory analytical categories which enhance an understanding of the nuanced nature of students' experiences. While

the quantitative data set provides a description of students' cognitive experiences of their tutorial experiences, the qualitative data set presents insights into their learning practices based on participation. The three discourses deal specifically with students' learning experiences; students' discourses on tutors; and students' discourses on peer participation. I will now discuss each of these discourses which will be followed by a discussion and conclusion.

'Cognitive-practice' discourse

The first students' discourse identifiable in the data is a '*cognitive discourse*'. Students experienced learning of a cognitive nature of various degrees of intensity. Responses such as 'understanding, attention, explanation, sharing ideas and focus' are all cognitive operations that appear to be a definite discourse that describes students' experiences. Students were also involved and participated in the tutorial to a greater or lesser degree which makes the second students' discourse a '*participatory learning discourse*'. Students' learning through doing was expressed in the data by using the following expressions: asking questions, involvement, discussions, participation and interact.

'Active-deficient' discourse

Two distinct tutors' discourses emerged from the data. On the one hand, a positive discourse and on the other hand, a negative discourse were identifiable. The positive discourse was a tutors' '*discourse of active engagement*' supported by expressions such as: 'engaging, helping, unpacking, explaining and demonstrating'. An element of interactive reciprocity can be detected in this discourse. In the second discourse, a tutors' '*discourse of deficiencies*', students expressed themselves using the following expressions: poor performance, frequently late, not always understand, frequently absent, can't teach and not always organised.

'Peer constructive participation-disillusionment' discourse

Students had to complete a group task in the tutorial which the group then had to present to the class. During this exercise, students were given an opportunity to evaluate their peers. Two distinct discourses emerged around the peers' participation; a '*discourse of constructive peer appraisal*', which is supported by students generally expressing satisfaction with their peers. Twenty students responded that their peers participated equally and fairly. The second discourse was a '*discourse of peer disillusionment*'. In this case students responded that their peers 'did not participate equally, some never participated, no equal participation but I am used to it, some needed help'.

DISCUSSION

The tutorial system that provided the context for the current study tends to confirm that a tutorial system per se does not result in high quality student learning (Elton 2001).

Considering the graphs on tutors' knowledge (64% VG), preparation (44% VG) and student interest (15% VG), it seems that the students were not overwhelmingly impressed by the tutors' performance. A rather mediocre picture of the tutors emerged on the basis of students' experiences. This impression of a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the tutors can be supported by the 'discourse of deficiency of tutors' which is somehow contradicted by the 'discourse of engagement'. Students' experiences in the tutorial seem to have been contradictory, ambiguous and, given the peer discourses of 'constructive learning' and 'peer disillusionment', the outcomes of the tutorial system seem arbitrary and inconsistent. Students' participation falls within Wenger's estimation of peripheral to marginal which supports the notion that learning outcomes in the context of the tutorial seem to be indeterminate and uncertain. However, focusing on participation brings out the active learning that takes place in the tutorial. In Ashwin's study (2005), students saw tutors engaging to explain, critically engaged and exchanging different points of view. In the current study, students identified an 'engaging discourse' which is also constructivist learning.

Without denying the positive learning moments that occurred in the tutorials, students' experiences of the tutorial system can be described as contradictory and arbitrary with no certainty as to its pedagogical outcomes. Tutors' PCK and student participation seem to be crucial variables in appraising the pedagogical value of the tutorial. The question is now: can it be suggested that the tutorial system passed the 'fit for purpose' test, or has the tutorial in its current form reached its sell by date? While the findings of the current study are based on a specific module and a limited sample, they explain some of the concerns raised by students and some of the fears that staff harboured about the value of the tutorial. Given the projection of student registration and its concomitant demands on staff and HEIs, the tutorial in its present form does not match its 'fit for purpose'.

Large class sizes and financial constraints are inevitably going to place increased administrative and academic staff under pressure. Some innovative thinking will be needed to redress the present mode of delivery. More research should be conducted on tutors and their experiences as this study focused on students' experiences rather than those of the tutors. It would be important to know to what extent tutors are reproducing the institutional discourses circulating in the context (Duncan 2012) to close the current disconnect between the views of the students, staff and tutors.

IMPLICATIONS OF TUTORIALS FOR HE

The recent Council on Higher Education (CHE) Task Team Report (2013, 20) that informs the proposed re-curriculation of the BEd degree addresses how to improve graduate output and outcomes. The quality of teaching and graduates is an integral part of the concerns raised in the report. The CHE (2013, 122) report intends to improve substantially the graduate output in terms of numbers and equity, and enhances the quality of degrees and diplomas. Ignoring the primacy of quality assurance in delivery of the programme outcomes would undermine the good intentions of this

report. Given that tutorials have become a permanent feature of HE teaching, their importance cannot be underestimated.

It is generally accepted that tutorials will increasingly be used to absorb the pressures placed on academic staff to manage the often uncontrolled intake of students. Based on the trend at the institution where the current study was conducted, my contention is that the unchecked and haphazard arrangements and appointments of tutoring staff will increasingly exacerbate academic standards and quality that have already been compromised. Needless to say, the traditional way in which tutorials have been viewed in the past should now be replaced with new lenses -- a view that will enhance the status of tutorials and tutors as necessary building blocks in the emergence of a new pedagogical vision. In line with CHE policy and the philosophy of learner-centeredness, tutorials should incorporate blended learning as an appropriate and inevitable component of a future vision. Blended learning refers to courses that combine face-to-face classroom instruction with online learning (Hiralaal 2012, 317).

CONCLUSION

Tutorials have long been used as a pedagogical device to ensure quality teaching and learning. Given the dubious outcomes of the tutorial in an ever-changing educational environment, perhaps the time has come to review its traditional role. The institutionalisation of quality assurance specifically directed at part-time and full-time tutoring staff should receive serious attention from HE teaching and learning and academic support structures. The increasing invasion of information communication technology (ICT) into the private and institutional domain may offer some hope for the future. While there may be a need to attend to upgrading tutors' PCK to allow them to perform better, a more lasting solution may lie in the increasing employment of ICT to close the pedagogical gap between students' learning experiences and tutors' relatively constrained and poor performances. While ICT provides the way for the digitalisation of course content and subject knowledge per se, the migration of students and staff to the achievement of a status of digital competence may require institutional support and large-scale initial input. As argued above, blended learning, which is a combination of face-to-face and online teaching, will increasingly be used to respond to the pressures faced by large class lecture style teaching (Hiralaal 2012; Tshuma 2012). Given the demands of large class sizes and limited resources, a progressive migration towards ICT may become indispensable to make the tutorial system 'fit for purpose'.

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