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Teaching Practicum assessment in post-apartheid teacher education: Is it self-serving or serving students?

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This article investigates common understandings and practices of a group of supervisors assessing students during the Teaching Practicum in South Africa. In the light of this context and the need for a constructivist approach to develop students to be able to teach in diverse contexts, the question that the research intends to answer is as follows: *What are the common foci of supervisors as reflected in their teaching practicum assessment reports?* A randomly mixed sample of 33 narrative reports, taken from 5 supervisors was analysed to gain insight into the assessment report. Findings are presented as five assessment discourses and an argument is presented for the Teaching Practicum assessment to shift towards a student-oriented developmental approach that is neither hierarchical nor judgmental but aims at serving students' professional development that meets the challenges of culturally diverse societies.

Keywords: supervision reports; Teaching Practicum; work-integrated learning; assessment; performative; constructivist

Introduction

Teacher education constantly risks misalignment between course objectives and intended course outcomes. There are two major problems that many countries experience with regard to teacher education: a lack of a coherent philosophy of teaching and learning and the lack of integrating theory and practice in teacher education (Chumei and Chuanjun 2010, 59). The Teaching Practicum becomes the pedagogical space in which to practise and assess the extent of integrating theory and practice. Beck and Kosnick (2002) describe the theory–practice gap in the Teaching Practicum context as ‘two largely separate worlds [that] exist side by side’. These ‘separate worlds’, comments Bullough (2008, 70), ‘are often characterised by distrust and misunderstandings’. The ‘distrust’ and ‘misunderstandings’ resonate well with experiences of the Teaching Practicum in teacher education in South Africa because, notwithstanding South Africa’s shared experiences with other countries, apartheid educational practices continue to persist in the present.

In the South African context, the Teaching Practicum is still relatively untransformed, remaining a continuation of the past. During the apartheid era, state control over the educational system and teacher training ensured the implementation of an educational philosophy and practice which supported the value system of the ruling

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class. For the best part of a quarter of a century, the per capita public spending on Black education has remained virtually static (Kane-Berman 1984, 70). Despite much progress in transforming education after 21 years of democratic governance, the basic conditions of neglect and inequality have not been eradicated (Spaull 2012, 3). Teacher education has a pivotal role to play in addressing the inequalities and inappropriate social relations that mediate education. Given the transformational challenges facing democratic South Africa, there is a need to redress the dominant discourses of supervisors in order to create space for student development which should become the focus of the new discourse.

This study investigates common discourses of supervisors (also referred to as evaluators and assessors) based on an analysis of their Teaching Practicum assessment reports. The purpose of the study is to understand whether the assessment of the Teaching Practicum reflects student learning as opposed to supervisors' knowledge. The study also intends to contribute to the literature that supports a non-authoritative approach to supervision which has been acknowledged as promoting successful learning (Kim and Danforth 2012, 67). The findings are presented as discursive themes and will be analysed for their pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) (Shulman 1986) and its student-centeredness using Goffman's notion of 'frame analysis' (1959).

During the Teaching Practicum, students are assessed by university staff who visit the classroom to observe and report on students. Higher education institutions invariably choose their own approach to supervision and assessment. In the South African context, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) policy on work-integrated learning assessment states that: 'all assessment tools used should be as free of cultural bias as possible, should be based on explicit criteria regarding what is required of students, and be accessible to all candidates' (CHE 2011, 42). An equitable and fair assessment of the Teaching Practicum is a matter of priority but, for many institutions, such equity is still a distant goal. Concerns about discrepant assessment have also been reported in other countries (Bullough 2008).

University lecturers regard the Teaching Practicum as essential and valuable: it provides them feedback on what they teach students in terms of content and pedagogical knowledge. In countries where the Teaching Practicum format is used, it has been described as the most important experience in the professional preparation of teachers (Mackinnon 1989). On the other hand, teaching practice provides the student an opportunity to be inducted into professional practice under the supervision of a mentor teacher and additional visits from supervisors. However, student experiences of the Teaching Practicum provide crucial information on its pedagogical value. In their Zimbabwean study, Chireshe and Chireshe (2010, 522) reported the occurrence of bias and harassment from supervisors during Teaching Practice assessment. The same study expressed concerns that subjective assessment was exacerbated by the fact that there were no clearly defined assessment criteria. This same picture of the Teaching Practicum manifested itself in the South African system and encouraged the CHE (2010, 94) to pay special attention to assessment. Considering the changes in teacher education and the inconsistent ways of Teaching Practicum assessment, this study investigates what supervisors are assessing when they undertake classroom visits. Special attention is given to the alignment between current teaching practice supervision practices and new higher educational policy. This article argues that, in the absence of a common approach to Teaching Practicum assessment, the uneven state of teaching practice assessment may find redress by the

adoption of a context-based developmental approach that is neither hierarchical nor judgmental but constructivist and developmental.

Rusznyak (2012) identified a widespread lack of consensus regarding quality issues in work-based learning and a lack of common understanding of mentoring and assessment rubrics (CHE 2010, 94). Different assessment instruments and practices are often unfair towards students, who might experience supervisors with different expectations and standards of evaluation and so feel disadvantaged when they are allocated to supervisors with negative reputations. Currently, the dominant supervisory model privileges the supervisor as the 'main frame' (Goffman 1959) and subjugates the student to a minor role. During the Teaching Practicum, a hierarchical structure is perpetuated despite developmental objectives expressed in the teaching practice policy. Given that teacher education has to equip the student with both content knowledge (CK) and pedagogical knowledge, the social context in which teaching practice takes place is often taken for granted and, consequently, the primary focus of the activity: students' pre-service professional development, is compromised.

To understand the scope of the Teaching Practicum assessment, its social context cannot be ignored. In this study, the Teaching Practicum is analysed at two levels. First, there is a need to understand teaching practice supervision as an educational activity. Second, the Teaching Practicum is mediated by supervisors from different cultural and pedagogical backgrounds which influence the objectivity of their assessment.

The presence of knowledge content and pedagogy will be viewed using Shulman's (1986) notion of PCK. To analyse the interactional nature of teaching practice, Goffman's (1959) notion of 'frames' provides a useful analytical focus on actors and their action during practice. Based on a qualitative analysis of 33 reports, findings are presented as five supervisory discourses which are discussed in relation to constructing a developmental approach to teacher supervision. An argument in favour of a developmental approach to Teaching Practicum assessment, would first have to respond to the question: *What are the common foci of supervisors as reflected in their teaching practicum assessment reports?* To this end, the rest of the paper unfolds as follows: a presentation of relevant studies on Teaching Practicum and conceptual framework, the methodology and data analysis used, findings and discussion, followed by conclusions and recommendations for a feasible teaching practice assessment approach.

Identifying the research focus: relevant studies on Teaching Practicum

The CHE report (2010, 94) recognises the uneven state of teaching practice. The report acknowledges the lack of consensus amongst institutions as to what should be standard practice. These claims are referenced in a report citing eight institutions that considered their programme to have met minimum standards or were commendable, but judged by the Review panel to be in need of improvement or not to comply (CHE 2010, 94).

Notwithstanding the positive features that students noted in a study on the role of lecturers as mentors, students complained that supervisors provided little or no feedback and they showed discrepancies in their assessment (Du Plessis, Marais, and van Schalkwyk 2011, 34). Paradoxically, in a study by Marais and Meier (2004, 220), the assertion is made that the most outstanding positive experience of students

during teaching practice was the support offered to them by the supervisor teacher. These seemingly contradictory claims reinforce the need for a deeper understanding of the Teaching Practicum. For example, in another study, Geyser (2006, 90) claims that higher education lecturers were urged to adopt a constructive assessment approach: so that the student benefits while being supervised.

The social aspects of teaching practice manifest themselves in the behaviour and social relations of participants. By accentuating the call for a stronger link between stakeholders involved in teaching practice, systemic factors such as subjectivities which may negatively affect student assessment should be addressed (Sosibo 2013, 150). Disagreements between supervisors and students have the potential to render teaching practices ineffective. Studies reported that students' undue submissiveness to supervisors is attributable, in some instances, to supervisors' attitudes towards them: something which can make them feel inferior and powerless (McGee 1996, 20). Supervisors may provoke feelings of inadequacy and undermine student self-confidence. Numerous studies found that inadequacies in supervisors' guidance and training reduce the effectiveness of practice teaching and may lead to negative experiences and memories of teaching practice (Marais and Meier 2004, 223). Students are often confronted with contradictory demands in which they are pulled in different directions (Samuels 2008). Sosibo (2013) recommends that a teaching practice rubric which minimises subjectivity and extraneous expectations should guide the supervision and assessment of students.

When supervisors provide feedback on students' performance in a classroom, the feedback is essentially assessment oriented. The focus is on the pedagogical task at hand: supervision and assessment. In this frame of mind, supervisors assume a dominant position when writing reports. Students may find it difficult to relate to the course content that they receive as subject knowledge in university classrooms when everyday classroom practice is unrelated (Marais and Meier 2004, 222). On the other hand, supervisors have their own academic field of expertise which manifests itself during the Teaching Practicum. Notwithstanding supervisors' influence on the development of student teachers' orientation, disposition, conceptions and classroom practice (Farrell et al. 2000, 35), Ralph (2000, 311) asserts that disagreement between a student and a supervisor is often the direct result of supervisor's inability to match their mentorship style to the student's capacity to perform instructional tasks. According to Reddy, Menkveld, and Bitzer (2008, 143), little attention is paid to teacher education theory and policy either because new policies are being formulated and implemented or because established practices have become dominant and taken for granted. By recognising that the literature acknowledges the mixed experiences of students during the supervisory process, an analysis of supervisory reports casts light on their value and content.

While the South African policy on the Minimum Requirements for teacher educators specify 'professional roles' the United Kingdom's Set of National Standards are based on what a new teacher 'must be able to do' and 'know and understand' (Furlong 2013, 5). A significant difference seems to be the gravitation of the South African system towards a performative approach while the United Kingdom policies reflect different gradations of neoliberal influences by emphasising the technical skills of teaching (Menter, Brisard, and Smith 2006, 282). While initial teacher education in South Africa may arguably still overwhelmingly be grounded in practices of the past, a shift towards a developmental and non-judgemental approach should be encouraged at the level of the Teaching Practicum.

Teaching Practicum supervision: from structuralism to constructivism

Shulman (1986) observes that research in teaching is more concerned with *how* knowledge is being taught than *what* is being taught. This observation opened new ways of analysing what teachers do when they teach. Because the focus of this study is to understand *how* supervisors evaluate students' teaching practice, Shulman's model of PCK is appropriate for interpreting knowledge and pedagogy. Shulman (1986) claimed that emphasis on teachers' subject knowledge and pedagogy were being treated as mutually exclusive while knowledge of curriculum, students and educational context are interrelated (Hlas and Hilderbrandt 2010). If teachers are to be successful, they need to attend to disciplinary knowledge ('the *what*' as well as 'the *how*'), the manner in which subject matter is transformed for teaching. While Shulman's extended PCK may intend to include socio-cultural factors involved in teaching and learning, it has its foundation in a cognitivist conception of knowledge. Cognitive knowledge is abstract and valuable, but it overlooks the complex nature of social context. Incorporation of Goffman's notion of 'frame analysis' as an analytical lens, the gaps in Shulman's model, especially the subjectivities of the supervisor, may be accounted for.

Teaching practice is ideally a dynamic and interactive experience. Supervisory intervention may erroneously depict it as fixed. When individuals engage in a social space, they bring with them who they are and what they know about past experiences. They use certain 'frames' which are, according to Goffman, their culturally determined definitions of an interaction which guides and shapes their behaviour (Bell 2007, 26). Goffman recognises the instability and multiplicity of frames and the way in which they are realised in action. Social interaction consists of frames that are co-constructed, emerging locally and shifting from moment to moment. In the teaching practice context, supervisors adopt frames which inform their roles. They bring to life their subjectivities when engaging the student's classroom action. Based on their understanding and experiences of the classroom, supervisors construct their reports which are avowedly objective and impartial. The construction of supervisors' frames draws on existing memory frames and shifts from moment to moment and so Goffman's notion of the instability and multiplicity of frames was employed to elucidate the iterative and often incoherent structure of supervisors' reports. Supervisory reports are textual representations of student observations: they should be regarded as structured texts written as a snapshot of a classroom situation. Goffman's 'frame analysis' portrays a fluid and unstable view of the subject and therefore assists in developing a theoretical lens that accounts for shifts from structuralism to constructivism. What follows next is a brief description of the methodology that informed this study.

Methodology and data analysis

This study was conducted using data from teaching practice files at a South African university's faculty of education. As a qualitative study, it is based on 33 narrative reports from five supervisors. The reports were randomly drawn from a batch of files in the second term of the academic year, after the first session of the Teaching Practicum assessment. The five supervisors were drawn from full-time and part-time staff, all with many years of teaching experience. Classroom supervisions were conducted at schools falling under the Western Cape Education Department across the intermediate and senior phase ranging between grades four to nine, covering various

subjects. At the institution where the study was conducted, supervisors are not compelled to use any particular assessment instrument, although a structured optional instrument is available.

Narrative reports were selected to gain insight into how different supervisors report on their observations. It is customary for the supervisor to discuss the report with the student, after which the student is given a copy. The sample for this study is relatively small: its value lies in the qualitative richness of description and not its generalisation. Narratively constructed reports provide authentic data which may not be available in a prescribed instrument of assessment which is by its nature, restricted.

A batch of reports was closely analysed to assess structure, length and content. Upon closer reading of individual reports, headings were noted and recorded on a spread sheet. All supervisors adopted a narrative style with their own headings, except one who preferred a continuous narrative without headings. Although there were obvious variations in the five batches, there was an observable consistency in the reporting of each supervisor. Content analysis was used to create categories based on the use of common and similar headings, expressions and words. A colour-code system was used to label similar meanings. Identifiable themes emerged from the analyses which are presented below as supervision discourses.

Findings and discussion

This section presents five discursive themes common to the supervisors' reports. Each theme is viewed through the theoretical lens of Shulman's PCK and Goffman's notion of frames. Differentiation is drawn between CK, the 'what', and PCK, the 'how' which refers to the transformation of subject content matter to teaching material. 'Frames' refer to the subjective and social dimensions that the supervisor brings to the classroom context as revealed in the evaluation and assessment reports. Reference will be made to the performative and constructivist nature of these reports.

Opening discourses

An opening discourse was discernible in the reporting style of all supervisors. The reports reflect different opening sentences, ranging from affirmative statements such as 'good start to lesson', 'nice start', 'stimulating introduction', to descriptive comments such as 'setting scene', 'series of probing questions'; 'vibrant management of homework' and 'logical structure and detail', through to negative comments such as 'could have related to real life'; 'less teacher talk' and 'could have first discussed in groups'.

The opening discourses are reflective of both PCK and frames which reflect the supervisor's experiences during the early stages of the lesson. The descriptive statements are about setting an appropriate scene for learning to take place and how the student is managing the learners. One report recorded that a 'logical structure and detail' was noted with reference to the lesson plan which seems to be pedagogically sound and elaborate. Affirmative statements are effective and satisfying to the supervisor who frames what is happening in the classroom in terms of their expectations. A 'good start ...' is an example of a subjective statement which may be perceived differently by another supervisor. It 'frames' the opening in a positive light with little said about the actual knowledge content being conveyed. Critical

comments made by supervisors are reflective of frames taken from supervisors' experiences. Examples cited above raise concern about content and PCK which are framed by the experiences and knowledge of the supervisor.

The opening discourses espouse subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, but the concerns at the beginning of lessons are personally constructed and diverse. Given the diverse nature of these concerns, the question may be asked: who is supervising 'what' for 'whom'? In the absence of a common set of supervisory functions and criteria, teaching practice supervision would be served better if supervisors adopt a common, mutually agreed upon strategy to facilitate student development. The opening discourses of supervisors seem to be driven by their subjective frames. Given the primary task of teaching practice, which is to provide opportunities for growth in and from practice, much work needs to be done to align practice to policy. A principle of higher education assessment policy is that methods and tools of assessment should be 'valid' and 'appropriate to course outcomes' (CHE 2011, 42). Given the diversity in the opening discourses of the reports, how would these reports meet the validity requirements of an acceptable assessment instrument?

The affirmation of the opening discourse supports the notion that the student's action resonates with supervisors' previous experiences and is therefore judgmental but affirmative. The negative comments in the opening discourse are prescriptive and show the supervisor's assumption of superiority which does not support constructivism. The supervisor should allow for a dialogical relationship in which the student's ideas and reflections can emerge meaningfully. Despite the positive opening discourse, the absence of a transparent set of assessment criteria creates possibilities for subjective reporting (Sosibo 2013), which may not be appropriate for assessment to become constructivist and developmental.

Order and management discourse

A dominant discourse in the texts revealed a concern with 'order and management'. This discourse is primarily insightful of learner activity in the classroom. Phrases such as 'needs more control'; 'good management of class'; 'glad you call learners to order', indicate that there is an excessive concern with 'order and discipline'. Learner involvement is encouraged by the following: 'get learners more involved' and 'learners need to get involved'. Applying Goffman's frame analysis shows that there are moments in which frames are destabilised and confusion is created due to so many activities happening simultaneously. While the dominant frame may be that of the supervisor focusing on the student, there are shifting frames in which the supervisor engages the student teacher and learners. As an assessment concern, the order and classroom management discourse is regarded as a pre-condition for teaching and learning. From a developmental perspective, supervisory reports acknowledge the complexities of 'order and management' which potentially can become the defining criteria in assessment. Given the diverse contexts in which students have to perform their teaching practice, order and management discourses are demonstrably in need of deeper research and understanding. Negative reporting on the ability of the student may lead to feelings of inferiority and powerlessness (McGee 1996). For a constructivist approach, students should develop positively and they should experience the benefits of supervision (Geyser 2006).

Notwithstanding the challenges of 'order and discipline' faced by many schools globally, a constructivist approach engages the student with alternative ways of

teaching and discipline. There seems to be a common notion that ‘control’ is good. By providing the students opportunity to voice their responses to the supervisor’s assessment, a more complex understanding of the teaching process could be gained. The order and management discourse typically would reinforce the existing classroom context and provide little imagination for an innovative approach to teaching. In large size classes that students experience, ‘order and management’ will invariably pose challenges. A constructivist approach will not seek universal solutions because each classroom is unique. It will rather promote the notion that order and management should be internally instilled instead of externally imposed.

Professional discourse

The professional discourse according to supervisory reports covers issues of personal demeanour, relations with learners, language, communication and pedagogical matters. Reports mentioned the following when referring to professionalism: ‘relaxed and confident’; ‘make good contact with learners’; ‘learners did not pay attention’; ‘language level good’; ‘opportunities for learning’ and ‘use question and answer technique’.

Professional discourse clearly espouses an understanding that includes personal conduct, CK and PCK. To be ‘relaxed and confident’ requires the teacher to be emotionally mature and professionally confident: this implies knowing their subject matter and how to teach it. Professional discourse emphasises language and communication competencies of the student. Communication provides the medium in which knowledge content is transferred during teaching practice. A ‘good level of language’ reaffirms the supervisors’ view that the student performs professionally. A professional teacher is one who ‘makes good contact with learners and creates a good atmosphere for learning’ which indicates PCK and an ability to show that learning took place. ‘Do some oral revision’, presumably refers to learning assessment after the lesson.

Professional discourse is at the heart of the education system’s effort to improve knowledge and skills of teachers. The national policy framework for teacher education and development in South Africa acknowledges the centrality of CK and PCK when it states the following in connection with professional training and development:

Both conceptual and content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge are necessary for effective teaching, together with the teacher’s willingness and ability to reflect on practice and learn from learners’ own experience of being taught. These attributes need to be integrated, so that teachers can confidently apply conceptual knowledge-in-practice. (DoE 2006, 16)

Given the wide range of concerns expressed by supervisors, there is a need to establish the meaning and place of professional discourse as a frame in teaching practice. Some references were made to CK, but the reports seem not to treat CK consistently. According to Reddy, Menkveld, and Bitzer (2008), supervisors are generally ignoring new policy guidelines with regard to professional practice and still based their assessment on established practices. A constructivist approach would engage the students with issues of professional judgement and responsibility which should be developed in different situations and contexts.

The learner and learning discourse

A learner and learning discourse constitutes multiple frames that involve supervisor, student and learners. Texts refer to the learner in relation to learning as an activity in the classroom. In this section reference is made to learners, lesson plans and lesson presentations. The dominant position of the supervisor leads them to construct these discourses from their subjective frames: leaving little space for student engagement and development.

With reference to the learner, reports refer to various aspects of learners' involvement in learning: 'ensure learner involvement'; 'get more learners to learn from each other'; 'do not pre-empt the process, ask for learner ideas', 'learners are too passive'. These concerns about learner involvement are mainly pedagogically inspired. 'Getting learners to be able to read and interpret numbers was crucial' indicates a concern for mathematical CK.

The lesson plans provide evidence of planning and preparation: 'Very good evidence of preparation and planning'; 'Lesson plan needs work ...'; 'not enough detail'; 'lots of detail'; 'specify aims'; 'aims not clear'; 'worksheets need to have more questions'; 'aims too vague'; 'too many aims, use general and specific'. The lesson plan is often regarded as a roadmap towards a successful lesson. It is clearly constructed by the student but framed in the report from the perspective of the supervisor.

Regarding the comments concerning the lesson, reports detailed what happened or what supervisors expected to happen. Both CK and PCK are covered through the framing of the supervisor: 'water cycle'; 'use real examples'; 'consolidate knowledge'; 'will there be assessment?' 'use of flashcards'.

Learner and learning discourse emerged from different dimensions. As a category of assessment, supervisors should have a more systematic approach towards learner and learning observation. The focus could be shifted to the student and the question asked: 'How does the student relate to each of the components of this discourse?' A more appropriate approach to reporting would be to identify more directly issues of 'content' and issues of 'pedagogy' from the student's perspective. There seems to be little learner perspective on the lesson plan and more concern for external performative manifestation of the supervision: 'evidence of planning' or 'lesson plan needs work ...'. A constructivist approach would engage the student in their understanding of learning, learner and lesson plan. Instead of being judgemental (with comments such as 'aims vague'; 'worksheets need to have more questions'), a constructivist approach would place the student in a reflective position and encourage self-critique.

Recommendatory discourses

Reports are interspersed with suggestions, advice, recommendations and warnings. These expressions are found in all sections of the reports, with examples of each being: 'perhaps learners could have ...'; 'what about teacher-talk time management?'. 'Need to work on questioning'; 'before reading lesson, get the learners ...'. 'Good demonstration of condensation'; 'tremendously successful lesson'; 'passionate demonstration of teaching skills'. 'Avoid explanations while handing out ...'; 'check spelling'; 'language of instruction is English but code switching is acceptable ...'.

Such recommendation discourse spreads across content and pedagogy. Comments about CK may be restricted or exuberance may be shown when the supervisor is impressed: ‘tremendously successful ...’ and ‘passionately ...’. There is a mixture of positive and negative elements in this discourse which should ideally be discussed with the student to minimise ambiguity. The subjectivity of these comments prevents the supervisor from explaining to the student why, for example, a lesson is ‘tremendously successful’ or a ‘passionate demonstration of teaching skills’.

The recommendation discourse contains personal expressions repeated in most, if not all, the reports. Besides the consistent style identified in each supervisor’s report, all of them revealed a personal style and individual usage of expressions and idiosyncrasies. These are constructed from subjective frames. Examples are as follows: ‘more integration’; ‘overall well done’; ‘remember reflection is important’; ‘good effort’; ‘use of dictionary – very good instructional tool’; ‘relate to real life’; ‘less teacher-talk ...’. These recommendatory discourses impose the frame of the supervisor on the student: leaving little space for the student’s own reflection. A constructivist approach would adopt a critical disposition of the supervisor’s position and ensures that the student remains the main frame in the process.

Conclusion and recommendations

In response to the critical research question: *What are the common foci of supervisors as reflected in their teaching practicum assessment reports?*, the five supervisory discourses discussed in the previous section are reflective of the dominant concerns of supervisors. In terms of Shulman’s (1986) notion of the teacher’s work and delineation of CK and PCK, there is sufficient evidence to show that discursive themes were grounded in both content and PCK. Supervisors’ experience provided the content to make relevant comments based on observation. These reports do not explicitly follow a strict adherence to policy and, by implication, their compliance to assessment principles of transparency and fairness are questioned. These discursive themes are evidence of meaningful content and PCK, but their inconsistent framing and subjective-oriented construction begs an approach that would promote a constructivist and developmental, rather than a judgemental, performative approach that is proposed in this article.

Opening discourses revealed a mixture of affirmations, descriptive statements and critical comments, albeit from a supervisor’s perspective. The professional, recommendatory, learner and learning discourses are spread across the reports. The employment of Goffman’s frame analysis to engage the social context of teaching practice supervision underscores Sosibo’s (2013) concern to minimise subjectivities in the supervision process. The complexities of the order and management discourse, given the context of the current problems in the South African school system, may be insufficiently understood. The professional discourse is strewn indiscriminately across the reports and lacks focus and definition. Taken as a reflection of supervisors’ frame of mind when they approach teaching practice supervision, this study confirms that work-based learning occurs in an uneven area and presents a significant challenge to quality in the higher education sector (CHE 2010, 94).

This study reveals the need to narrow the gap between what educational policy prescribes in terms of student-focused teacher education and what actually happens on the ground. Notwithstanding the value of narrative reporting which this study acknowledges, there is a need to align the aims and objectives of teaching practice

supervision with the explicit outcomes of initial teacher education programmes set to prepare novice teachers who need time, experience and appropriate support to develop as lifelong learners (CHE 2010, 75). The incorporation of lifelong learning as an objective of teacher education should promote constructivism in the Teaching Practicum. The long enduring life of the old model of teaching practice that survives from the past, needs attention, through innovative workshops designed to (re)train supervisors, academic and contracted personnel.

The frame analysis assisted in identifying multiple interests and factors that come into play during the supervisory process of teaching practice, hence the often contradictory experiences of students (Chireshe et al. 2010, 522; Ralph 2000, 311). The student should consistently and consciously remain the main frame. All other frames should become sub-frames, bearing in mind a range of possible interactive frames between supervisors, students and learners. The dominant role of the supervisor should shift from the bearer of authority and knowledge and the student must be seen as the active learner involved in a process of constructive learning. There seems to be a lack of background report on the student and continuous development and scaffolding for the duration of the course should be incorporated. In this regard, appropriate interactive computer software programmes could be developed to make it possible for a supervisor/student/mentor (school-based teacher) partnership to be developed in a non-hierarchical, critical constructivist manner.

Supervision of students during the Teaching Practicum is but a small segment of teacher education. Notwithstanding the positive outcomes of evaluations, by allowing supervisors to perform assessment tasks based on subjectively generated criteria as shown in this study, is inherently unfair. An inherent acceptance of the supervisor's knowledge and commentary may be the consequence of the hierarchical relationship with the student. The CHE policy on work-based assessment states that 'all assessment tools should be as free of cultural bias as possible, should be based on explicit criteria regarding what is required of students, and be accessible to all candidates' (CHE 2011, 42). Given the increasing enrolment of students at teacher education institutions, without urgent intervention and redress, uneven practices in supervision and assessment will continue. Innovative proposals, such as the effective use of Professional Practice Schools and Teaching Schools, may suggest new strategies for teacher education, but do not sufficiently address assessment in work-based learning. The challenge of quality assurance and diversity requires more than uniform assessment instruments. It requires a constructive and *coherent* approach to teacher preparation (Robinson 2014, 125).

While teacher education institutions with challenges common to those in South Africa may be far from achieving a common strategy and instrument of assessment, supervisors could adopt, as a point of departure, a developmental approach to teaching practice supervision. In the absence of a commonly recognised assessment approach for teaching practice assessment, the uneven landscape may be improved by the adoption of a context-based developmental approach that is non-judgmental, is not hierarchical but is critically constructivist. Teaching Practicum assessment should not be self-serving but serve students: the student must always be the main frame of attention.

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