



Brief for DHET Research bulletin

Research on Initial Teacher Education

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The Initial Teacher Education Research Project (ITERP) is investigating the extent to which initial teacher education programmes offered by universities are adequately preparing teachers to teach in South African schools. This is a multi-faceted programme which examines the curricula for teachers specialising in the Intermediate Phase (IP), tracks the progress of newly qualified teachers in finding employment two years after graduating, and charts how their attitudes towards teaching develop over this period. The project is a joint initiative of the DHET, DBE, Education Deans' Forum, and JET Education Services.

The curriculum component was completed in 2014. Five universities across the spectrum of institutional types (urban/rural, historically disadvantaged/advantaged, university/technicon) were invited to participate. While this cannot be considered a representative sample, together these five institutions produce half of the country's teachers. The maths and English BEd curricula, for both specialist and non-specialists in these two key subjects, were analysed.

The most obvious outcome of this analysis is the tremendous variation within the sample. For example, while four of the five institutions provide a diet of mainly primary school maths for student teachers specialising in maths, one includes predominantly tertiary level maths in its curriculum. Although one would not expect rigid uniformity across the country, this situation indicates a very wide diversity of views regarding how best to educate maths teachers for the primary school.

However, it is the content of the English curricula for prospective IP teachers that gives most cause for concern. For teachers not specialising in English, this subject comprises only around 5-7.5% of total credits in the BEd degree. On one hand, most students studied English First Additional Language, which the Ministerial Task Team on the National Senior Certificate in 2014 branded as being of a very low cognitive level, at school. On the other hand, these students, once they graduate, will be teaching all their subjects in English. One has to ask whether they are being adequately prepared to lift the very low levels of academic study provided by our schools.

Furthermore, none of the five institutions provides a course in literacy instruction. This flies directly in the face of the conclusions of the Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which found that three quarters of Grade 4 and 5 learners in South Africa are functionally illiterate.

Following these findings, ITERP is entering a new phase which will draw teacher educators across the country together to formulate curricula for primary school teachers in training that will address the



pressing needs of the country's primary school learners for effective literacy and mathematics education.

The full set of reports produced to date can be found at www.jet.org.za

Brief biography of the author

Nick, currently senior research fellow at JET Education Services where he was executive director for 16 years, holds a PhD in Mathematics Education and has been a mathematics and science teacher, subject advisor for schools, and policy researcher. He was CEO of NEEDU from 2012 to 2015 and co-edited the book *Creating Effective Schools*.