



C E F D C : K C E M

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Teacher education is an essential part of the teacher development process that deals with the art of acquiring knowledge, attitudes, and skills for the teaching profession. This paper discusses the creation of an educational foundations (EDF) knowledge base and the challenges for the tertiary education of secondary school teachers, using the University of Malawi's Faculty of Education as a case study. The University's EDF courses are broadly conceived fields of study, the content of which is drawn from various academic social science disciplines. Challenges include a heavy reliance on cross-cultural borrowing, a lack of indigenous textbooks, and inappropriate teaching and learning strategies in the delivery of course content. In order to address these issues, the authors propose the following measures: a comprehensive curriculum review, the strengthening of information technology resources, and the establishment of professional associations that can network throughout the South African Development Community and African Union regions.

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K : education; foundations; knowledge; teacher education; curriculum review; networking

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Teacher development is a process that deals with the art of acquiring and enhancing knowledge, and cultivating the appropriate attitudes and skills for learning and teaching in a professional manner. Different training and support



The purpose of this article is to discuss the creation of an EDF knowledge base and the challenges for the tertiary education of secondary school teachers in Malawi (a developing country in Africa), using the University of Malawi's Faculty of Education as a case study. The article is divided into three sections. The first section foregrounds the article and presents the ethos behind the EDF courses that form part of teacher training at the University of Malawi. The second section examines critical challenges to the successful transfer of the knowledge content of the EDF courses. The last section concludes with some recommendations.

M

The University of Malawi was established in 1964. Chancellor College is the largest of the University's five constituent colleges with an enrolment of about 2,000 undergraduate and graduate students as of 2002 (University of Malawi, 2000, 38). Almost half of the undergraduate students are enrolled in the Faculty of Education.

The Faculty, which offers Bachelor of Education, University Certificate in Education and postgraduate degree programs, has two departments: Educational Foundations (EDF) and Curriculum and Teaching Studies. The Faculty relies on other faculties of Humanities, Social Science and Science to provide the content of the subjects that the students will eventually teach. In keeping with the overall mission of the University, EDF courses are dedicated to transforming education through the collaborative preparation of professional educators and scholars; inquiry addressing issues, challenges, and problems in education; and effective leadership and service in multiple educational arenas. Graduates are expected to make significant contributions as scholars, teachers, managers, and practitioners.

The EDF courses are closely aligned with the Department's conceptual framework for preparing caring, committed, and competent professional educators and scholars. The courses are broadly conceived fields of study, the content, concepts and theory of which are drawn from various academic disciplines, including psychology, philosophy, sociology, history, administration, and management. The Faculty believes that the knowledge passed on to students by means of the EDF courses help them develop an understanding and appreciation of the 'social, economic and professional aspects of educational, psychological and social theories underpinning pedagogical practice and knowledge of the teachers' roles and responsibilities' (Dove, 1986, 242).

C

K

According to the Government of Malawi (2001), education programs are required to equip students to enter the teaching profession and, as part of their

training, to provide them with knowledge and experience that is relevant to the social, economic, cultural, and political conditions of Malawi. However, the transfer of such knowledge is hampered by several very basic problems.

C O N T E N T S

International borrowing is inevitable and often useful for the development of teacher education. However, models and theories developed in one context should not be imported uncritically to others (Lewin and Stuart, 2003). Looking at the topics listed under the EDF courses, it is immediately obvious that the main theoretical underpinnings are all Western. It is quickly apparent that very little has been done to develop indigenous theories based on local knowledge. There is no problem with students learning Western theories *per se*, but the challenge for Malawian educators is to translate these theories into a Malawian context, thereby developing their own relevant theories that take into consideration the experiences and cultural backgrounds of both rural and urban learners.

L I B R A R Y

Another related challenge is the serious lack of indigenous textbooks suitable for the EDF courses. As a result, the prescribed textbooks are all from the West. And even they exist in insufficient numbers because Malawian libraries are so poorly funded. Often, the lecturers are the only ones who possess personal copies of textbooks, secured during their time studying abroad. Another worrisome development is the number of times that our libraries have been used as dumping grounds for outdated books no longer in use or needed in the West.

As one EDF lecturer lamented:

How do you expect me to do a good job? I have 200 students doing my course and the library does not have any of my prescribed books. I have put my own personal copy on the Reserve Section of the library for students to use. How can students read ahead as well as consolidate the lecture notes? (EDF lecturer, personal communication, 2004).

Lack of key textbooks is a serious challenge to the teaching of EDF courses. Indeed, how can one teach a class of 200 students with one textbook? The lack of indigenous writing can be put down to a host of factors, including lack of funding, high staff workloads, poor conditions of service, and initial training of lecturers.



L

According to Freire (1993), in a banking-type metaphor for teaching and learning, the teacher acts as a ‘depositor’ and students as ‘depositories’, and education becomes a process of ‘depositing’. A teacher ‘deposits’ knowledge in his or her students by ensuring that they patiently receive, memorize and store the knowledge given. As a consequence of this methodology, students lack the ability to think creatively, the drive for transformation and the capacity for critical reflection.

Freire contrasts the banking-type methodology with problem-posing education. In the latter, students are engaged in critical thinking, inquiry, and creative transformation. The teacher assumes the role of a student among students. That is, a teacher learns from students as much as students learn from the teacher and from each other. This methodology seeks to promote teacher–student and student–student communication. According to Freire, in problem-posing education:

The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow (Freire, 1993, 80).

Why does knowledge acquisition in the EDF courses follow the banking rather than the problem-posing methodology? First, EDF courses tend to involve very large classes and as a result it becomes very difficult for a teacher to engage students in meaningful class interaction and communication. With the focus on finishing a syllabus, so that students can write their end of course examination, teaching and learning mainly operate through the medium of lectures where the teacher gives information to students and students quietly take notes and memorize them in order to pass their final exam.

As Dove observes:

Courses which are atomized by the timetable tend to encourage lecture methods y [and]y do not provide an appropriate model of pedagogy. Subject-based examinations likewise encourage atomized learning and hinder the development of an integrated training experience (Dove, 1986, 246).

The knowledge students acquire in this case becomes meaningless because they fail to apply it to reality. When subsequently presented with exam questions that ask them to apply their knowledge, students complain that ‘the exam was too difficult’ and add that they did not recall that information being given to them during the course. Such a scenario fails to free students’ minds; it fails to relate educational theories and issues to reality and it fails to encourage critical

because of a number of new private universities that are in the process of being

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