

THE DEMISE OF DESIGN PROGRAMMES WITHIN THE PUBLIC FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CASE FOR NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper investigates the demise of design and related programmes within the public Further Education and Training (FET) system of South Africa. Policy documents regulating the provision of these programmes will be interrogated and the various changes which have occurred in the FET system, especially in terms of restructuring, will be highlighted. These changes have had adverse implications on design education, evidenced in the introduction of the National Curriculum Vocational (NCV) programmes and the unclear status of the 'old' Nated programmes. The paper concludes by advocating for non-formal education as a possible antidote for the poor availability of design and related programmes within the 50 public FET colleges.

Keywords: *FET, non-formal, design, education*

Introduction

The Further Education and Training system is complex and intertwined, however, this paper will only focus on public FET college training, which is comprised of 50 multi-campus institutions spread out across the country. There has been a concerted effort since 1994 to reform the FET system from its Apartheid legacies when the institutions were known as 'technical colleges'. The first minister of education in democratic South Africa, Professor SME Bengu, in the foreword of the White Paper on further education and training (DoE 1998, p. 8), projected that:

A successful FET system will provide diversified programmes offering knowledge, skills, attitudes and values South Africans require as individuals and citizens, as lifelong learners and as economically productive members of society. It will provide the vital intermediate to higher-level skills and competencies our country needs to chart its own course in the global competitive world of the 21st century.

Furthermore, it was pronounced that one of the hallmarks of the new system would be its ability to offer training opportunities to out-of-school youth and adults, while also giving a second chance to those who failed to complete the General Education and Training strata (DoE 1998b, p. 14)¹. Although there have been noteworthy changes and triumphs within the FET system since 1994, the poor provision of design education within the public FET colleges is a serious concern and threatens the overall growth of design education at postsecondary level. It should be noted that private FET colleges also play a prominent role within the postsecondary education landscape. Commentators speculate that the prominence of private FET provision is twofold, firstly, it is due to "the poor quality of the public [FET] system which is unable to accommodate increased demand", and secondly, because people "perceive" private education and training to be more aligned to the needs of industry than the public equivalent, especially in design and related programmes (Akoojee 2005, p. 16).

¹ General Education and Training refers to the education offered from pre-school (grade R) up to grade nine.

Design programmes in the 'old' Nated curriculum

The old 'technical colleges' used to cater for six vocational fields, namely, Business Studies, Engineering Studies, Social Services, Art-music, General Education and Utility Studies (Sooklal 2004, p. 106). The Art-music field was divided into three disciplines; Art and Design, Photography and lastly Music and Dance. The colleges offered Department of Education (DoE) accredited Nated programmes from level one to six (commonly known as N1 to N6). Non-Nated courses were not accredited and were "offered by colleges in response to skills needs, especially those of industry"; these were known as non-DoE programmes (DoE 2002, p. 107).

Examination of the non-DoE programmes was the prerogative of the colleges. N1 to N3 was the equivalent of NQF level 2 to level 4 (grades 10 to 12), which falls under the secondary schooling system. N4 to N6 fell within postsecondary education and according to the NQF provided "possible continuity between FET and higher education" (Sooklal 2004, p. 107).

The enrolment percentages among the various FET vocational fields were rather lopsided. During 2000/2001 the most popular courses were in the Business Studies and Engineering vocational fields, which enjoyed 44% and 46% of enrolments at public FET colleges respectively² (Sooklal 2004, p. 107). The remaining 10% of enrolments was split amongst the remaining vocational fields, whilst the picture within private FET colleges followed a similar trend. Only colleges within the Western Cape, Free State, Gauteng and Eastern Cape provinces offered Nated Art-music programmes, notably with miniscule enrolment percentages (please see *figure 1*). The number of provinces offering non-Nated or skills based Art-music programmes were three, namely, Free State, Northern Cape and KwaZulu Natal. Only thirteen of the fifty public colleges were offering Nated and/or non-Nated Art-music programmes, spread across six of the nine provinces (DoE 2002, p. 22). The public FET colleges located in the Mpumalanga province, the Limpopo province and the North West province did not have any arts related courses within their offering.

Figure 1: number of enrolments within the Art-music vocational field per province in 2000/2001

	Eastern Cape		Free State		Gauteng		KwaZulu Natal		North West		Western Cape	
	Nated	Non-Nated	Nated	Non-Nated	Nated	Non-Nated	Nated	Non-Nated	Nated	Non-Nated	Nated	Non-Nated
N1-N3	70	0	120	16	503	0	38	0	5	0	404	16
N4-N6	118	0	71	0	155	0	0	0	0	0	156	0
Total	188	0	190	16	658	0	38	0	5	0	560	0

Source: DoE (2002 p. 63-86)

It should be kept in mind that these figures do not specify the exact registration numbers within the three disciplines in the Art-music vocational field and by which college. However these numbers reveal how students were seemingly attracted to the Nated programmes between N1 and N3. Only Eastern Cape had more enrolments in the post N3 phases. A simple explanation of this phenomenon could be that students who registered for N1 to N3 wanted to improve their practical portfolios in order to increase their chances of accessing university training. The FET colleges in this instance simply acted as a bridge between secondary education and universities. This information also gives valuable insight into the specific needs of the students,

² It should be noted that these demographics also influenced the type of courses the colleges would offer. Some colleges would go as far as placing a disclaimer on their prospectus' stating that: "The College reserves the right to only offer programmes/subjects that are justified by learner numbers and cost effectiveness" (*Ekurhuleni East FET College 2010*). This was mainly due to the state subsidies attached to enrolment numbers, which would be more if the enrolments were higher.

which seem to gravitate more towards using FET level training as a launch into university tuition, rather than seeing it as an end in itself.

During 2000/2001 the pass rate for the Art-music programme was at 86%, the highest amongst the six vocational fields and a respectable 28% above the national pass average of 58% in all the vocational fields (DoE 2002, p. 38). Factors contributing to these first-class numbers have not been scrutinised, but one can speculate that among those reasons was the staff commitment and the student composition. Because of the perception that the arts are a 'talent' field, only students who have the passion and particular interest for the various disciplines will most likely enrol, which will obviously have a positive impact on the performance.

The actual content of the Art-music courses varied from college to college. The Art & Design course was commonly referred to as visual arts. This course was offered from N3 to N6 (post grade 12). Students were required to complete twelve subjects in total, four during each level. Drawing and History of Art were the compulsory majors, whilst students had the option to select any other two subjects from the following roster: Graphic Design, Photography, Painting, Ceramics and Graphic Processes. These subjects were replicated in all the levels³. After completing their allotment of subjects, students were awarded a certificate, but had to gain eighteen months practical experience before a diploma was conferred to them.

Phasing out the 'old'

The FET Act of 1998 strongly recommended that these Nated programmes be transformed and restructured to respond better to the human resources, economic and development needs of the country. In 2006 it was announced by the education ministry that the Nated courses were to be discontinued. The intent to change these courses had been displayed three years earlier by then minister of education Professor Kadar Asmal (2003), who, at the opening of the newly merged Central Johannesburg College, stated:

We cannot continue to offer the same old programmes that were offered by technical colleges thirty years ago. We should lay to rest the Apartheid assumption that students who choose to go to colleges are inferior and should therefore be offered uninspiring programmes. We need laboratory and aviation technicians. We have to develop mining and medical technicians. We need to open new avenues for our young people.

However, this denial of the 'old' programmes was reversed during 2009 when the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) revealed that, as a result of pressure from industry, they had decided to re-introduce some of the Nated courses. Mary Metcalfe, the Director-General of Higher Education and Training, noted that her department was not prepared to fund any of the revived Nated courses, pointing out that industry would have to subsidise the colleges for offering the courses (Gower 2009). This sounds feasible for major industries seeking skilled recruits, but such a proposition would be difficult for the arts/design industry. It would be unrealistic for design studios/companies or art galleries to consider supplementing the costs associated with training an Art and Design college student.

Furthermore, questions arise as to whether it is necessary to bring back the Art-music courses as they were, or if it would be more realistic and progressive to implement new arts related courses into the current NCV mix. These new courses would need to address the current needs and challenges of the creative industries; possible programmes could include: Art/Design Management, Art/Design Education, Art/Design Marketing etc.

³ It should be mentioned that the researcher attempted, without any success, to solicit examples of the actual subject content from the concerned college.

However, such innovation would be stifled by the prescriptive nature of the FET curriculum⁴. As it stands, public FET colleges cannot develop their own content in response to the needs of industry. However, some colleges still offer the Art-music Nated courses, the most prominent being the Central Johannesburg College in Gauteng, the largest public FET college in the country by student numbers (Asmal 2003). The announcement by government literally saved the jobs of Art-music lecturers at the college, who were due to teach their last group during 2011. In practice, the process of phasing out these 'outdated' courses has been gradual and immensely criticised.

Design programmes in the National Curriculum Vocational

In 2006 then Minister of Education Naledi Pandor introduced the National Curriculum Vocational (NCV) as the new curriculum framework governing FET colleges⁵. Some of the major changes brought by the new curriculum include the introduction of one of the eleven official Languages,⁶ Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy, and Life Orientation as compulsory subjects for all students enrolled at an FET college⁷. The NCV is comprised of the National Certificate (Vocational), which has eleven study fields: Civil Engineering and Building Construction; Electrical Infrastructure Construction; Engineering and Related design; Finance economics and Accounting; Hospitality; Information Technology and Computer Science; Management; Marketing; Office Administration; Primary Agriculture; and Tourism. These study fields reveal the overall neglect of arts/design programmes within the new curriculum.

Provision for Visual Art and Design has been made for grade 10 to 12 learners. Although these levels fall within the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), the actual subjects are considered as part of the FET phase. The idea is that learners will start specialising in a specific field whilst still in secondary school and the postsecondary phase will simply build on the foundations already laid. But there is a mismatch, because students who start doing arts/design in secondary school cannot continue with those disciplines at public FET colleges, since they are currently not available. Another major challenge with these FET phase subjects is that public schools do not have adequately trained teachers to teach these specialised learning areas, and even more troubling, the proper materials and equipment needed to coordinate these subjects are often lacking. The problem is further compounded by the current situation where the subject specialists mandated with training and supporting educators to rollout this arts curriculum do not possess the necessary skills and subject content to affect tangible change. This skills vacuum is induced because there are not enough specialised arts education programmes being offered by the institutions of higher learning and there is limited or, in most cases, no mobility for arts graduates desiring to access education courses or vice-versa.

Reasons for the omission of arts/design programmes within the NCV revolve around the apparent lack of economic viability and industry alignment of the fields. However, design does feature, albeit slightly, within the new framework through the Graphic Design and Multimedia subjects. The Graphic Design subject is part of the Marketing course and is offered as a "recommended optional subject" (DHET 2010a, p. 44). Multimedia is also offered as a non-compulsory elective subject in the Information Technology and Computer Science programme (DHET 2010a, p. 36). Both these subjects are offered in NQF levels two, three and four. The Department of Higher Education and Training had signaled that these subjects would be offered in level two as

⁴ A prominent official from a large public FET college in Gauteng, who did not want to be identified, noted that he desired to implement a music education and management course within his college but could not do so because of current restrictions with regards to curriculum formulation.

⁵ Other policy documents that inform and compliment the NCV include the National Policy on the Conduct, Administration and Management of the Assessment of the National Certificate (Vocational) 2007 and the National Norms and Standards for funding Further Education and Training Colleges 2009 (DHET 2010a, p. 2).

⁶ The curriculum prescribes that the language must be on First Additional Language level. However the document further highlights that "the language chosen must be the language of learning and teaching of the institution" (DHET 2010a, p. 35). By default, the language to be used will most likely be English at most, if not all, of the public colleges.

⁷ Students are expected to obtain a minimum 40% for the Language, 30% for Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy and 40% for Life Orientation (DHET 2010a, p. 45).

from January 2011, but training lecturers in the new curriculum has been a challenging process for the department. The implementation dates for these subjects on level three and level four were set for 2012 and 2013 respectively. Colleges cannot officially offer the courses before the lecturers have undergone the necessary training within the new curriculum.

During the start of 2011, only ten lecturers representing seven of the fifty public FET colleges had received initial training in the Multimedia subject. These colleges were Vhembe FET in Limpopo province (Makwarela campus), Orbit FET in North West province (Rustenburg campus), Ekurhuleni East FET in Gauteng (Springs campus), Capricorn FET in Limpopo (Polokwane campus), South West Gauteng FET in Gauteng (George Tabor campus, Soweto), Port Elizabeth FET in Eastern Cape province (Russell Road campus) and College of Cape Town in Western Cape (Crawford campus)⁸. Worryingly, only five of the nine provinces were represented during the training. The training was a collaborative effort between the Department of Communications (DoC) and the National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa (NEMISA)⁹. The DoC pledged funded a follow up ten day workshop hosted by NEMISA for the ten lecturers during the course of 2011. This skills shortage also presents an opportunity for universities that have specialist multimedia or graphic design departments to assist in training FET lecturers.

Since it has been established that the DHET is inflexible with regards to curriculum, it becomes important then to look at the subject guidelines for these two subjects, only the level two subject guidelines will be reviewed. The formulation of these documents was heavily influenced by market and industry related forces. Firstly, the Graphic Design subject has nine learning outcomes on level two (see *figure 2*). These topics cover the basic theoretical and practical components of design, which have been weighted 40% and 60% respectively. After completing these topics students are expected, amongst other outcomes, “to effectively use basic design processes to compose concepts in a graphic design field” (DHET 2010b, p. 4)¹⁰. Some of the learning outcomes of ‘topic 2’ demand that the student “recognise and develop fundamental drawing skills; develop the ability to use drawing media for self-expression; demonstrate creative use of drawing techniques and processes; experiment with a range of mixed media techniques; and experiment with drawing as a tool to promote ideas” (DHET 2010b, p. 6).

Within the ‘elements and principles of design’ topic students are introduced to the history of art and design, where they “should be able to describe the history of art and design during the late 19th and 20th centuries and explain how previous design movements impact modern design and art movements” (Ibid). Other components of ‘topic 2’ expose students to terms such as line (and it’s various qualities), shape, mass, texture, colour, space, balance and form (Ibid). The ‘three dimensional design’ topic has basic parallels with the sculpture subjects, where students have to consider the importance of form. And finally the ‘photographic manipulation’ topic directs students to apply or illustrate the fundamentals of photography such as colour, positive and negative, and duplication.

Figure 2: Subject and learning outcomes for Graphic Design level 2

No.	Topic	Weighting
1	Elements and principles of graphic design	20%
2	Formal drawing and observation skills	10%

⁸Upon consultation with one of these colleges in Gauteng, the college conceded that it would be unlikely that classes in the multimedia or graphic design subjects would be made available to students during 2011, due to the challenge of staff development in these disciplines.

⁹ NEMISA is a non-profit private higher education institution established in 1998 as part of a government project that sought to train previously disadvantaged individuals, especially women, in “technical skills applicable to the TV, radio and broadcasting industries” (NEMISA 2011).

¹⁰ As part of the practical examination students are required to submit a Portfolio of Evidence (POE), within a structured environment. This POE must be accompanied by research compiled in a ‘workbook’ (DHET 2010b, p. 4).

3	Desktop publishing and digital design concepts	10%
4	Layout and typography	10%
5	Photographic manipulation	10%
6	Three dimensional (3D) design	10%
7	Multimedia	10%
8	Presentation animation	10%
9	Play-out and production	10%
	Total	100%

Source: DHET (2010b, p. 5)

The curriculum document also highlights some the critical resources necessary for teaching the Graphic Design subject, namely, physical, technological and research infrastructure, and appropriate human resources. The physical resources refer to a building or site that can adequately accommodate students and is suitable for teaching and learning. The technology and research resources refer to: “computers, scanners and printers for students to complete assignments, case studies and projects; software programmes; sufficient electrical power to connect computers, printers and scanners; access to the internet to do research; daily newspapers” etc (DHET 2010b, p. 9). The human resource needs refer to a lecturer who should “have a qualification in Graphic Design; be a subject matter expert; be a competent lecturer; be a life-long student; be in possession of a NQF level 5 teaching qualification; and be conversant with OBE methodologies” (Ibid). Currently, most of the public FET colleges possess only a few of the requirements tabled by the DHET, namely, the large building facilities and appropriate technological equipment. The major negative is with regards to the human resource needs, where existing lecturers are untrained in the graphic design domain.

The curriculum for the Multimedia subject is structured according to that of Graphic Design. The theoretical and practical components are weighted the same and the physical, technology and research, and human resource needs are almost identical. Differences can be seen in the subject outcomes and subsequent weighting (see *figure 3*). Furthermore, multimedia seems to be an extension of graphic design, requiring in-depth engagement with computer related design.

Figure 3: Subject and learning outcomes for Multimedia level 2

No.	Topic	Weighting
1	Principles of multimedia	15%
2	Concept and types of storytelling	10%
3	Rendering and typographic skills	10%
4	Sound production and editing	15%
5	Photographic techniques and editing	20%
6	Introduction to desktop publishing and layout	10%
7	Production and editing of 2D and 3D animation	20%
	Total	100%

Source: DHET (2010c, p. 5)

A case for non-formal education

It is clear from the evidence provided above that the prominence of design/arts programmes within the NCV is rather precarious. Although provision has been made for graphic design and multimedia, it is unfortunately

not comprehensive enough as they have been merely included as recommended optional subjects. Public FET colleges exist to compensate for the chasm between secondary schooling and university training, but the poor status of design and related programmes in this arena further stifles the potential for the growth of design education as a whole. But more critically, it means that design education will remain a privilege for those who can access universities and select private institutions.

In order to broaden the accessibility of design education, the researcher posits that non-formal design education can be an effective tool in this regard. Coombs and Ahmed (cited in Reynolds 2006, p. 8) define non-formal learning as “any organised, systematic, educational activity, carried on outside the framework of the formal system, to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children”. Tight (2002, p. 72) adds that non-formal training, to its advantage, “takes place under the auspices of organisations that do not need to adopt the more restrictive frameworks and accreditation systems of the formal sector”. In other words, non-formal training has the advantages of formal system without the red tape that typifies it, as evidenced in the rigidity of the FET curriculum. Within this context non-formal education can take the guise of partnerships between industry/specialised bodies and organisations/institutions located in the periphery. Ideally, these institutions can include public FET colleges, as they already have the basic infrastructure and mobility to maximise such partnerships. An example of the potential of non-formal training is the relationship that existed between Funda Community College¹¹ in Soweto and Vega School of Brand Communications in Johannesburg.

The relationship with Vega began in the late 1990s as a mini exchange programme when some of the senior students from Vega went to Funda for a full day workshop in drawing, printmaking and painting. After the workshop the students were required to produce a digital artwork promoting some of the interesting results derived from the workshops, of which they had a month to work on. The same would apply to Funda students who also visited the Vega campus to receive workshops in digital media and would have to produce an artwork of the experience in their preferred medium. Subsequent to this exchange was the formal opening of a Vega satellite school on the Funda grounds offering courses in various communication streams. The project was called the Imagination Lab, which also offered learnerships in advertising and various other design streams. The true value of non-formal educational activities such as the one cited above is not in offering accredited courses to students, but is rather found in presenting structured learning under the auspices of a professional body with the express aim of transferring critical skills and knowledge. Besides its shortcomings, the old technical college system had scope for such dynamic and responsive courses through the non-Nated programmes. Through the non-Nated courses, colleges had the freedom to conceptualise and offer courses that responded to the immediate needs of industry and most importantly, the needs of the students. Therefore, it is distressing that the scope for such creativity is lacking within the NCV curriculum regulating the public FET colleges.

Conclusion

This paper outlined the existence of design/arts programmes within the previous technical college system and the current NCV framework for FET colleges. It is evident that the new NCV curriculum does not place considerable value on design education. Only graphic design and multimedia have been included as recommended optional subjects in the Marketing and Information Technology and Computer Science courses respectively. The current constraints within the NCV framework are a serious obstacle for the provision of design education within the postsecondary phase. The poor visibility of design education in the NCV threatens the growth of design education and closes the door of opportunity for aspirant students located in the

¹¹Funda Community College was a champion of non-formal education. Since its formulation in 1984, the school has had fruitful partnerships with the University of South Africa and the University of Witwatersrand using the non-formal training strategy (see Sidogi 2011).

periphery. It is posited that this vacuum can be augmented using non-formal educational strategies. These strategies can include reciprocal partnerships between the various design industries and organisations/institutions such public FET colleges that have a footing within the marginalized areas, where design education continues to be undernurtured and in most cases non-existent. More importantly, this vacuum presents opportunities for universities with strong design departments to engage with their most immediate public FET colleges to foster mutually beneficial partnerships, where the universities share their skills and best practice teaching methods with the educators at the FET colleges. In-turn, universities will profit by creating a pool of potential adequately prepared students from the FET colleges. Ultimately, strengthening the provision and quality of design education at public FET colleges can, amongst other benefits, result in the sustained growth of design and related industries in South Africa.

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