Holistic curriculum development: tutoring as a support process

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In many programmes, tutorials have proved to be an effective way of providing both academic and personal support. The tutor's role in these involves different aspects of teaching and learning. In this article I explore the value of tutoring as a means of supporting the holistic curriculum development process. I reflect on the reason for introducing a system of tutoring for students in curriculum studies and the results of its implementation on students' academic performance, in order to contribute to a better understanding of this kind of intervention. A summary of empirical data on the implementation of the tutor system and feedback on the system and tutors' reflections on the process are provided. Finally, the outcomes of the implementation of tutoring on the students' performance at the end of the academic year are discussed.

Keywords: academic performance; first-year students; holistic curriculum development; tutoring

Introduction

A Curriculum Studies module for first-year student-teachers in an undergraduate teacher training programme was the result of reconceptualising and redesigning a core module, previously taught only to second-year in-service student-teachers. The reason for implementing this new module at first-year level was for students to gain a dynamic understanding of curriculum studies at the beginning of their professional training, before they are introduced into school practice. The content was changed from a concern with "didactic strategies" only to one that also includes curriculum theory, philosophy and epistemology. The content included transformative curriculum development and philosophy (for example, globalisation, nationalisation and culturally inclusive curricula); curriculum epistemology; various educational and curriculum models; assessment theories and facilitation strategies. As an interim measure, in the first year of introducing the new module, both first- and second-year students were required to enrol for this module.

Six lecturers in the department presented the different sections of the newly introduced module so that each of the sections would be presented by experts. The module co-ordinator appointed a liaison tutor to help with administrative aspects and deal with student questions relating to basic content and administrative problems. Despite this support, the failure rate of the first- and second-year students during the first-year of implementation was 32.5% and the students described their experience of doing the module (content and assessments) as "very negative". Questionnaires inviting reflection on the module (2005) were administered to the students in addition to the official assessment questionnaires provided by the Centre for Teaching and Learning at the university. Because of their confidential nature, these official student

feedback questionnaires could not be used for this study. These question-naires, however, made it clear that a new approach to teaching and learning and disseminating content needed to be implemented, in order to address the failures that had occurred and the students' negative attitude towards this important core module.

The value of tutors in supporting holistic curriculum development

I argue that transformation in the context of curriculum development can be effected successfully if approached holistically (Roux, 2006). This holistic approach requires the inclusion of all stakeholders' voices (i.e. voices of students, tutors and lecturers) involved in curriculum development. Transform-ative curriculum development, as a means of reducing the discrepancy between curriculum developments and the changing needs of curriculum stakeholders, seemed to be one way of dealing with transformation in teacher education. The point of departure was the assumption that humans "are transformative beings and not beings for accommodation" (Freire, 2000:36). In support of this view, it could be argued that the human activity of cur-riculum development is also transformative in nature. This activity could be described as the transformation of curricula by all stakeholders "... so it ceases being an empty space to be filled by content" (Freire, 2000:33). The voices of stakeholders, as well as the redefinition of curriculum content, contact sessions and support structures, influence the processes for transform-ative curriculum development.

Tutoring and support to students can also be seen as an appropriate means of supporting holistic curriculum development and including students' voices in the transformation of the curriculum. The concept 'tutor' and its means of support are interpreted differently in the literature (Stuart, 2002; Topping, 1998; Wilson, 1996). The role of the tutor may involve different aspects of teaching and learning and it is possible that tutors and students may have different expectations regarding the role of the tutor in a specific module. According to Roghoff (1986; 1990 in Wood & Wood, 1996:6), "tutors serve to bridge between a learner's existing knowledge and skills and the demands of the new task". Tutoring as peer-assisted learning, has many pedagogical advantages that support active and interactive learning and communication. Tutors, however, are not "topic experts" (Wood & Wood, 1996) but peers of students. Limitations in their experience of tutoring and their expertise are a given. Their role is to create a learning environment different from the main lectures; they should not act as 'lecturing teachers'. To achieve success, lecturers, tutors and students need to work together to create a shared knowledge and a shared text. Tutors' continuous support is important but the method or approach the tutor uses should foster independence and critical thinking, rather than dependence on the tutor, and the creation of shared knowledge should constitute "curriculum development".

The introduction and the process of the tutoring initiative

As indicated earlier, the failure rate (32.5%) of the students in the first-year (2005) of introducing the new module, compelled the module co-ordinator to implement innovative teaching and learning strategies. A small section of the module was changed, because of the teaching load of one of the lecturers. In 2005, there were 104 second-year students, 26 of whom failed (25%), and 125 first-year students registered, of whom 49 (39%) failed. This means that of the total students (229) registered for the module in 2005, 75 failed. The question was how to improve the students' ability to be successful in the module. The module co-ordinator suggested implementing tutoring as an option and part of the programme in 2006. The qualitative data from the questionnaire administered in 2005 also gave valuable information on the need for the tutoring initiative in 2006.

The research question was: *How can teaching and learning in Curriculum Studies support the processes underlying transformative curriculum development to the benefit of students as future teachers*?

The questionnaire designed at the end of the module in 2005 aimed at detecting problem areas regarding content and lecturing as well as issues of teaching and learning. The process was repeated in 2006 with the next first-year student group as well as the students who repeated the 2005 module. The reason was mainly to identify problem areas in teaching and learning and to initiate further changes if necessary.

The results of the questionnaire were communicated to all the students at the end of 2006, before their final examination.

Questionnaire (2005)

The methodological stance of this small research study was, first, exploratory and, second, evaluative (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). A qualitative methodology appeared necessary to gain an understanding of the matter and to meet the aims of the study. The questionnaires, which were presented in Afrikaans and English, were qualitative in nature and could be answered in the language of preference (*cf.* Du Preez, 2006). In 2005, 84 first-year students completed the questionnaire ($F = 79$; $M = 5$); as well as 78 second-year students ($F = 75$; $M = 3$). In 2006, 98 first-year students ($F = 94$; $M = 4$) completed the questionnaire.

The language of instruction, as well as the class notes and academic articles, was in Afrikaans and English since the lecturers were either English or Afrikaans speaking. One aspect worth highlighting is that the students' performance and failure rates were seen as a whole. The questionnaire was not designed to detect problem areas related to gender, language, culture or ethnicity. These are important aspects and should be explored in further or follow-up studies. In this study I focused mainly on issues and problem areas regarding teaching and learning performances and holistic curriculum development.

The three questions posed in the questionnaire in 2005 and repeated in

2006 were:
1. How do you feel about the module with regard to the division of lecturers and content?
2. How would you change the technical functioning (general organisation, etc.) of the module?
3. Was the work covered in this module academically challenging? Please explain your answer.

Although the summaries of the open-ended questions in Tables 1 to 3 (2005 questionnaire) are self exploratory, a short analysis will be presented on the remarks and justifications given by the students in answer to the questionnaires.

The values in the tables indicate the number of students who completed the specific question. The three indications, positive, negative, or unsure, were options on the questionnaires and students had only to mark their choice in every case. In addition, space was provided for comments after every question. Students added comments in more than 80% of the received questionnaires.

Short comments (Table 1)

This question received the most attention and attested to earlier complaints made by the students on the number of lecturers presenting the module. Some of the respondents used the words "*confused*", "*disordered*", "*disorientated*" or "*bewildered*" to describe their feelings regarding the content and lecturers. Comments on the content were mainly on the '*high*' standard of the articles and their relevance for teaching practice. This is a very important aspect as the outcome of the module was mainly to introduce students to the core aspects of curriculum theory. Several respondents (7 out of 65) and (11 out of 44) also used the first question to assess and reflect upon the relevance of the content presented in Curriculum Studies to their future careers as teachers. Most of these responses indicated that the number of lecturers presenting the content rather than the content itself was not the main reason for the confusion. Suggestions made in the comments were that the content should be presented more coherently; that the number of lecturers should be reduced (to one lecturer) so students could build a relationship of trust and also adapt to the style and conduct of the lecturer.

Short comments (Table 2)

The change to technical functioning was a very important aspect and could be rectified immediately. The fragmentation was again defined as the result of the number of lecturers presenting different sections of the work. Students who addressed the anthology of the content suggested that all the various lecturers' work should be combined into one book, since they were not always sure what work linked to which presenter (lecturer). Only a few students complained about the language of the content and articles. This was probably because many of the academic articles and several book chapters in English or Afrikaans could not be translated for copy right reasons. From the feed-

Table 1   Question 1 — Division of lecturers and content 2005

Indications	1st year students n = 73	%	2nd year students n = 45	%	Clustered motivations: for being positive, negative or unsure	1st year students n = 65	%	2nd year students n = 44	%
Positive	7	9.6	8	17.7	Too many lecturers and content	28	43.0	23	52.2
Negative	39	53.4	9	20.0	Too many lecturers and content led to confusion	25	38.4	21	47.7
Unsure	27	37.0	28	62.2	Relevance of content too fragmented and too much	7	10.7	11	25.0
					Content not immediately relevant to practice	7	10.7	4	9.0
					Module extremely good			3	6.8

Table 3   Question 3 — Is the module academically challenging 2005?

Indications	1st year students n = 73	%	2nd year students n = 45	%	Clustered motivations: for being positive, negative or unsure	1st year students n = 68	%	2nd year students n = 44	%
Yes	69	95	35	77.7	Workload too heavy	20	29.4	9	21.4
No	3	4	8	17.7	Content level of difficulty and challenge	14	20.5	8	19.0
Unsure	1	1	2	4.4	Not familiar with new Curriculum Studies	6	8.8	9	21.4
					Not able to apply content in practice on my own	3	4.4	8	19.0
					Too much single-handed reading and self-study (articles)	4	5.8	9	21.4
					Language used in lectures and notes			2	4.7

Table 2   Question 2 — Should there be any change to the technical functioning 2005?
             (Open-ended question only)

Clustered motivations on change		1st year students n = 68	%	2nd year students n = 40	%
Wouldn't change anything		7	10.2	0	0
Fewer lecturers		34	50.0	22	55.0
Content and presentation	Fragmented	7	10.2	7	17.5
	Anthology	5	7.3	4	10.0
	Language	3	4.4	1	2.5
	Quantity	3	4.4	4	10.0
	Relevance	3	4.4	4	10.0

back it was clear that the liaison tutor, who gave a great deal of attention to explaining articles to students, played an important role. Suggestions given by the students were mainly about preparing them to deal with "abstract curriculum theory" and for the module to be more practical and applicable to their domain.

Short comments (Table 3)
The module was rated academically challenging by the respondents. One of the reasons given was they "*had to do a lot of independent reading and self-study in order to grasp the contents*". Five of the 69 respondents indicated that the module was "*extremely interesting*"; "*stimulating*" or "*good*". A further comment was that the students stated they "*enjoyed the situations*" created in which they could "*argue about issues prevalent in education*". Students who indicated that the module was "*extremely difficult*" indicated the teaching methods as the main reason for confusion. These comments gave some indication that the content of the module should not be altered but a new mode in presenting the content should be investigated.

General remarks on the 2005 questionnaire
As indicated, most respondents made a link between the number of lecturers and the content and the feelings of confusion they experienced (Du Preez, 2006; Table 1), and offered suggestions for improving the organisation of the module. Students also indicated that the lecturers should aim at preparing the respondents to deal with abstract concepts more adequately and indicated that they were confused because they had been unable to translate theory into practice. This matter was addressed seriously in the re-assessment of the module. Use of articles or chapters could not be changed. However, the copyright reasons which lay behind using prescribed articles or chapters, in their original form, were explained to the students. The importance of their becoming accustomed to using relevant and quality articles as early as possible in

their tertiary academic programme was also emphasised. However, the fact that Afrikaans and English students complained about the academic use of the language, either because it was not their home language or because of the use of an academic genre (be it articles or class notes) was taken seriously in understanding and developing a new mode of teaching and learning.

In order to overcome these challenges the tutoring initiative was introduced in the module in 2006 since it was clear that the whole teaching and learning strategy at all levels needed to be addressed. The first step was to reduce the number of lecturers presenting the module from six to three, with their acquiescence. These three divided the different sections into their working schedule. Although the students had rated the content of the module as "*difficult with a heavy workload*" (Tables 2 and 3), only one small section on Curriculum and Transformation was withdrawn and three sections on Educational and Curriculum models were added. These models are applied in private schools in South Africa and the reason was to give students the ability to explore and critique different educational models (*cf.* Table 6). This process of reduction and inclusion added value to the module and underlined the commitment of the lecturers to including the voices of all stakeholders in curriculum development.

Tutoring initiative part of a continuous curriculum development

The introduction of tutors to curriculum theory made it possible to define and address issues in the realm of praxis. Theory served as a frame to view and understand application in practice (Roux, 2006). To help students digest theory, tutors were used to mediate the tension between theory and practice. In the tutorials, students were allowed to relate content to, and explore challenges for, praxis on their own. In order to "encourage greater engagement with internalization and understanding of the subject" (Edwards & Thatcher, 2004:197) a student-centred approach was introduced to replace the traditional lecture-centred approach. The traditional approach of concentrating mainly on lecturing, group work in contact sessions and Web-CT-based PowerPoint slides, had failed in the previous year (2005). The difficulty students experienced in understanding curriculum theory was a hindrance to effective teaching and learning. The "collaborative tutorial model" (Henning, 2001:3) which was introduced had a significant impact on the students' understanding of theoretical aspects. The introduction of a reflective mode and an inquiry-oriented approach towards the content required students to reflect on what they had learnt. This application seemed to have a direct impact on the success rate of the module and the specific outcomes of the tutorials in 2006.

Training and organising the tutors (2006)

According to Henning, (2001:4), "new tutors should be trained to understand the characteristics that make a tutorial successful and be offered a variety of strategies they can apply with flexibility to achieve these characteristics". Contact sessions were scheduled with the tutors at fixed times before the

tutorials. During these sessions tutors became active learners themselves and reflective enquiry was encouraged (Richert, 1995:5). Tutors were given the selected articles and content on the module that the lecturers had identified as "problem areas", based on their experience in the previous year. Possible strategies, questions raised in the main lectures, but not answered satisfactorily due to a lack of time, as well as concepts and theory that needed clarification, were discussed during these sessions. The appointed tutor co-ordinator (MEd student in Curriculum Studies) helped with the organisation of the programme, student groups, venues and the tutors' weekly programmes. During the first month the role of the tutor co-ordinator developed into more a "liaison officer" between tutors and students, and lecturers and tutors. She also visited every tutorial class and answered questions on academic matters raised by the tutors during their sessions with the students. Facilitating academic matters became an important part of the tutors' contact sessions. It can be argued that a tutor co-ordinator should also be able to adopt the role of a part-time lecturer in order to facilitate academic activities.

Gidman, Humphreys and Andrews (2000) indicated that tutors favoured small-group tutorial arrangements rather than individual tutoring, because all students felt that they received the same level of support as their peers. With the introduction of the tutor system the decision was made to divide the students into 10 tutorial groups. Ten postgraduate students (two MEd students and eight full-time BEd Hons students) were selected at the beginning of the academic year and participated in the tutoring programme. In retrospect, the exercise in 2006 was a gamble because none of the tutors had experienced the newly developed Curriculum Studies module introduced in 2005. However, the module co-ordinator was confident that the tutors would be able manage the content of the first-year module. It was also the first time that tutoring had been introduced in the department on such a large scale. The fact that only postgraduate students were tutors gave the tutorial system credibility among the first-years and especially among the students who had to repeat the module. Tutors, however, were also made aware of the unnecessary expectations that first-year students might have of the tutor sessions. Stuart (2002: 370) indicated that "[c]onscientious tutors also try to counsel students in difficulties or offer remedial classes" or tutors may be raising students' expectations unnecessarily by offering personal tutorials.

Outline of the tutoring programme

There were three contact sessions a week for the students in this module during the first semester of 2006. One of the contact sessions was allocated to tutoring classes only. Students were organised in groups and allocated to specific tutors for the whole semester. Students were not allowed to change their tutor because the progress of the tutors and the students was monitored. The students were grouped according to their language proficiency and preferred language (Afrikaans or English). This system seemed to create equal opportunities for students in both these language groups. Students could make their choice of language known before they were allocated to a specific

language group. Discussions in the students' preferred language seemed to greatly enhance their conceptual understanding of theory.

After every tutorial session the tutors had a reflection session with the liaison tutor where they gave feedback on the comments students had made during the tutorials. They also discussed problem areas and identified unresolved difficulties that were to be dealt with in the next main lecture. This was a very important aspect in the tutoring system as the lecturer was immediately made aware of the shortcomings students had identified.

Organising the tutorials

Wilson (1996:272) argues that if tutors do not listen, problems and failure will ensue. Therefore, if tutors enable the students to identify problems through effective listening, summarising and identifying the outcomes of the module in a specific section of the work, they help them to apply the theory in practice. The tutors' approach reflected the shift to a student-centred teaching approach in their tutorials. A common experience was that, although tutors themselves had different approaches to understanding content and theory and perceived the content and theory differently, they enhanced their own learning through peer teaching and tutoring (see the reflections of the tutors in this regard). Tutoring approaches adopted were selected by matching the system to the needs of the students (Roux, 2006). Immediate feedback was given in the next contact session in the tutorials and the support systems gave students the confidence to handle the theoretical framework (Topping, 1996; 1998:53; Page, Loots & Du Toit, 2005). In practice, tutors adopted a variety of personal tutor roles which generally involved roles as facilitator, advisor, critic, friend, assessor and student. Tutors normally try to balance assistance with facilitating academic content (Gidman *et al.*, 2000:403). An important issue that was observed was that tutoring meant different things to tutors and students and that there were different expectations of teaching and learning experiences. Some tutors fulfilled both an academic and a pastoral role of tutorship (Gidman *et al.*, 2000).

Tutors were given a free hand to handle their student groups according to the needs analysis of the specific tutorial. Tutors were advised to allow the students to speak out and to reflect on the problems and issues identified in the main lectures. They were encouraged to refrain from dominating the discussions in the tutorials and to be flexible enough to use a style that assisted the students to reflect on their own understanding of the theoretical components. In order to monitor the progress of the students, the tutors were expected to mark weekly assignments so that they could establish a profile of the students in their tutorial classes.

Outcomes of the intervention on students' perceptions and performance in 2006

The questionnaire put to the first-year students in 2006 at the end of the module were the same as in 2005 but with an extra section on the tutoring. The students repeating the module had to complete an extra question on their

experiences and attendance of the tutorials. They had to indicate if their marks had improved.

First-year students: 2006
Short comments (Table 4)
There was very little comment on the three different lecturers presenting the module. Students who repeated the module did mention the cohesion between the content and the number of lecturers. Respondents again stated that the work contained too much difficult academic terminology which added to the challenges of the module.

Table 4   Question 1 — Division of lecturers and content

Indica-tions	1st year students n = 98	%	Clustered motivations: for being positive, negative or unsure		n = 79	%
Positive	41	41.8	Content and presentation	Very difficult	9	11.3
				Academic language	3	3.7
Negative	9	9.1		Good and interesting	6	7.5
				Quantity	1	1.2
Unsure	48	48.9		Relevance and viability	8	10.1
				Fragmented	3	3.7
			Confusion	Connection between many lecturers and content and feeling of confusion	2	2.5
				Confusion connected to different lecturers and not content	4	5
				Fragmentation of content only	2	2.5
			Tutorials	Tutorial lessons facilitated division of lecturers and content	13	16.4
				Language problematic	6	7.5

Short comments (Table 5)
There were still a number of students who felt that fewer lecturers should be presenting the different sections of the module. The tutor system for first-year students appeared to be successful. However, students were unhappy with the assessments. The module co-ordinator tried to enhance a culture of learning and assignments were assessed every week. These assessment marks gave valuable information regarding the students' progress. Problem areas could be identified and discussed during tutorials or the next contact session (lecture). It appeared that the language used during lectures was still a matter of contention.

Table 5   Question 2 — Should there be any change in the technical functioning (Open ended only)

Clustered motivations: for should there be any change		*n* = 83	%
Would not change anything		18	21.6
Fewer lecturers		7	8.4
Appreciation for tutor system		14	16.8
Content and presentation	Change in practical applications in tutoring	4	4.8
	Academic language can be simplified	8	9.6
	Assessments should change	5	6.0
	No relevance of the module	1	1.2
	Change the order of the content	6	7.2
Lecturers' language should change		13	15.6
Interaction section on Web CT should change		11	13.2

Table 6   Question 3 — Is the module academically challenging?

Challenging	*n* = 98	%	Clustered motivations: Factors contributing to academic challenge	*n* = 94	%
Yes	95	97	The high standard of academic language use	19	20.2
No	2	2	Language is text and articles	5	5.3
Unsure	1	1	Not familiar with Curriculum Studies (new)	10	10.6
			Unsure what is expected from me	6	6.3
			To much time and effort in module	3	3.1
			The content was difficult	18	19.1
			It is higher cognitive (abstract) thinking	17	18.0
			Interesting	9	9.5
			No rote-learning	5	5.3
			Too much work	3	3.1
			There is irrelevant content in the module	1	1.0
			It is extremely relevant and stimulating	3	3.1
			Learning from other education models and not only OBE is stimulating and interesting.	47	50.0

Short comments (Table 6)

A small number of respondents articulated the academic challenge of the content as "*confused, disordered, disorientated and bewildering*". These respondents related their feeling of confusion to the number of lecturers and many different sections addressed in the module (Table 2). A large number of students still regarded the module as academically challenging, which was in line with the purpose of the introduction on the new defined content.

Table 7   Students who repeated the module in 2006
Question: Did you benefit academically from attending the tutorials?

Clusters: Benefited from tutorials	*n* = 22	%	Remarks on question
Understood content better	12	54.5	Work was discussed better than last year. I knew what was happening this year.
Kept on track with contents	5	22.7	The content did not change form last year the application did well. I could only attend the tutorials and it helped a lot.
Raised marks	3	13.6	I passed this year with a distinction. I had no trouble understanding the tests and assignments.
Content was more applicable	2	9.0	The tutor knows what was going on. It was very important information which helps me a lot in school practice. The section on the different school models was the best. It broaden my understanding of different education models.
Promoted interaction on contents	2	9.0	The tutor was always well prepared and could relate to any question.
Tutorials are time-consuming	1	4.5	I have to work twice as hard as last year with all the small assignments.
Experienced everything good	3	13.6	I am happy that the work was organised different than last year. I wish it was like this last year — I would have passed. The number of lecturers is better than last year and I appreciate the change. One could relate to situations and content better.

Short comments (Table 7)

The assessment of the tutor system was positive in this section of the questionnaire. Only one student indicated that the tutorials were time-consuming.

More than 50% of the respondents indicated that they understood the content better than the previous year. Comments of their experience of the tutor system indicated that the tutor system was successful.

Remarks on the 2006 questionnaire

First-year students' remarks were more positive and indicated fewer problems than expected regarding academic standard and content. Of considerable interest were the remarks of the students who had repeated the module and who drew a comparison between the 2005 and 2006 modules with regard to content structure, administration and the tutor system (*cf.* Table 7). The inclusion of other educational and curriculum models in the section seemed to be a big success with remarks such as "*I liked the debates*". This was a good example of drawing theory into practice (Table 6). The tutorials had also assisted in breaking the fast pace of the module by creating a reflective space: students had the time and opportunity to address difficulties that had arisen during the main lectures. In contrast with their performance of the previous year, the students who repeated the module and attended the tutorials were all very successful in their final exams. In 2006, 172 students registered for the module and only one student, who repeated the module but did not attend classes or tutorials, and 14 first-year students failed: 15 out of 172 (8.5%). This was an improvement on the 2005 failure rate of 32.5% (75 out of 229). The success rate of students (improvement of 24%) indicated that the implementation of the tutor system was academically justified.

Reflections of the tutors on the tutor system (2006)

At the beginning of the module, reflective journals were given to each tutor so that they could reflect on each tutorial they presented. Moon (1999:157-158) argues that the purpose of reflective journals is to reflect on learning material and to empower students, in this case the tutors. The reason for the introduction of reflection was also to establish a good rapport with the tutors and to identify good practices and shortcomings in the tutorial system. This was a sound underpinning for holistic curriculum development and an opportunity for the lecturers to reflect on the success or shortcomings of the teaching and learning as well as the curriculum.

Tutor co-ordinator

According to the reflective journal of the tutor co-ordinator, the 2006 contact sessions were better structured than those in 2005. Although there were still complaints about the medium of instruction, both in the lectures and the class notes, all these complaints could be addressed during the tutorials. As a result of the tutorial system it appeared that the students had fewer academic problems and were more relaxed than the students in the previous year. The workload of managing the tutorial system, tutorial groups, tutorial discussions, student groups, and marking students' assignments, persuaded the module co-ordinator to appoint a student assistant to assist with the administrative work. The tutorial system required weekly assignments to be

marked and handed in to the tutorial co-ordinator. Unfortunately not all the tutors and students adhered fully to this system, with the result that assignments were sometimes handed in late or marks were not finalised on time.

Tutors' reflections

The reflections indicated that the tutors enjoyed the tutoring and found it valuable to be involved with first-year students. English-speaking postgraduate students, in particular, were eager to help the first-year students because they wanted them "*to cope better with the language difficulties*". The tutors felt it was important to help them avoid the pitfalls they had encountered in their own first academic year. The tutors reflected that the tutorial material was both informative and challenging and noted that first-year students had even consulted dictionaries together in order to understand the terms and contents. First-year students were shy at the beginning, which prompted tutors, on their own initiative, to use ice-breakers to encourage open discussion and free talk. The outcome was that excellent group coherence was established amongst the members of the different tutor groups. Some tutors applied facilitation strategies that suited them personally instead of the strategy developed during their training sessions (Henning, 2001). Tutors indicated that group-work was the core of their sessions and they complained that some venues were not suitable for their facilitation strategies.

In the next section a few of the comments from tutors will be discussed to strengthen the argument that the reflections and strategies supported and empowered the tutors.

On content and assignments

- First-year students tended to grapple with theoretical content which influenced the way in which the tutor had to structure the tutorials.
- Some first-year students were ill-prepared and created undue pressure on the tutors.
- One of the assignments was not well explained in the class notes and students were not sure of the task. Poor marks meant students had to re-do the work. Tutors took the initiative and set a rubric to aid the marking and to note the students' errors and performance. The result of this initiative was that rubrics were drawn up for every assignment and were recommended for the tutorials in the following cycles of the module.
- In their reflections, tutors revealed that they were sometimes also 'unsure' of their own level of knowledge and advised the students to make appointments with the tutor co-ordinator and/or lectures before the next tutorial.
- Students reflected on the facilitation strategies and the theoretical underpinning far better than before and participation and discussions during the tutorials ended in vigorous discussions.

It is interesting to note that the tutors took the liberty of altering some of the activities and made them more accessible to their groups. During the 10 weeks of tutoring, the tutors got to know the students' academic abilities and anticipated how they would react during discussions.

Personal experiences of the tutors
All of the tutors reflected positively on their experiences during the tutorials. They understood their role as tutors and facilitators as their first priority. Tutors mentioned that they were well aware of a progression (academically and personally) in their own ability to be "tutors". The "*sense of teaching and learning was still there but on a different level … reaffirming first-years of their own confidence in their choice of a career but it also allowed us to look back at where we once were — gaining insights into just how much we actually learnt in the BEd programme — a programme often being criticised by many*" (Reflection: Tutor 2, 2006).

Conclusion
The experiences and development of the tutoring programme and processes provided some answers to the research question on how tutoring can support the process underlying transformative curriculum development. The ongoing redefining of the curriculum and the tutoring programme changed the initial purpose, at the end of 2005, of increasing the pass rate of first-year students in this highly challenging academic module, reducing the student numbers who had to repeat the module, and enhancing academic achievements. The success of the tutoring programme is not only the increase of 24% in the pass rate, but also the development of a holistic and transformative curriculum. The notion of "human activity" as part of curriculum development and the transformation of the curriculum is an ongoing process (Roux, 2006). As indicated by Page *et al.* (2005), to be involved in a tutoring programme is an ongoing and daunting task that cannot be static. The success thus far of this tutoring programme is ascribed to the dynamic nature and involvement of all the stakeholders and the holistic curriculum development in which the emphasis falls on understanding the theoretical framework required for such a development.

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