# Unpacking the past: The ambivalent legacy of colleges of education

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## Abstract

The positive memory of teacher education colleges within South African higher education, often leading to a call to re-open the colleges, is usually based on an argument that colleges offered more 'practical' teacher preparation than today's universities. In this article we draw on a variety of historical sources and artefacts, produced for an exhibition on colleges in the Western Cape, to reflect in greater depth on the experiences of college life. We use the concept of embodied knowledge that recognises the interconnectedness of knowledge, being and feeling with context to probe the sources and discuss ways in which colleges built a sense of community. At the same time, we illustrate the ambivalent legacy of these colleges, in their racial inequalities and constrained and often alienating curricula. We conclude by suggesting principles of teacher education that continue to be relevant, even as contemporary approaches to teacher education, and current policies and conditions, preclude a return to the past.

**Keywords:** Colleges of Education; Embodied Knowledge; Memory; Models of Teacher Education; Teacher Education Pedagogy; Theory and Practice in Teacher Education.

## The suitcase

At the centre of this article lies a small, battered suitcase, containing a cluster of commemorative reports, insignia, badges, newspaper clippings, certificates, photographs, minutes of meetings, brochures and notes from discussions with former members of staff at teacher education colleges, historians and librarians. Each of these artefacts, somewhat tattered with age, represents a legacy of a period that has now disappeared in South Africa, namely that of the former teacher education colleges. These items formed part of an exhibition that was mounted in 2006 in the Faculty of Education at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) to document the origins, individual histories and circumstances of the closure of colleges of education founded in successive periods of Cape history. These colleges had either all closed by the early 2000s, had merged to form new configurations within higher education or had been repurposed as Further Education and Training colleges, community colleges, high schools and provincial offices. Between 1990 and 2000, there was a decrease in the number of colleges in the country from 120 to 34. By 2001 all these colleges had disappeared, with 26 higher education institutions being responsible for teacher education (Jaff, Rice, Hofmeyr, & Hall, 1995; Vinjevold, 2001; Kruss, 2008; Parker, 2003).

Against this background, the exhibition sought to address a concern that college histories were slowly being forgotten. Documents collected for the exhibition had lain untouched in the suitcase under a bed for many years, yet the call for the re-opening of colleges had not gone away. This prompted the authors of this article to combine their knowledge and experience in another look at these documents. Our interest in the topic was linked to our own educational background: one of us is the former Dean of Education - at the time of the incorporation of the Hewat and Cape Town Colleges into Cape Technikon (prior to its merger with Peninsula Technikon to form CPUT) - and initiated the exhibition and research for it. The other is a historian of education who has recently written about the history of colleges of education at national level. Opening the suitcase after so many years reminded us of the richness of these sources and the value that they offered for a critical appreciation of not only the past, but equally the present and the future of teacher education.

Through a close reading of the documents and artefacts in the suitcase, all of which offer fragments of former lives, we attempt to re-create what it was that the colleges offered. The sources were unsystematically collected, richer for some institutions than others, depending on what individuals were able to provide. Many who gave documents for the

exhibition also reclaimed them. The sources we use date mainly from the 1980s and 1990s. One or two date from the 1940s, 1960s and 1970s. They encompass histories covering the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Several were written in Afrikaans and were translated; in a few instances we retain the Afrikaans words to convey the essence of what is being described.

The suitcase is therefore not a typical institutional archive. Many of these institutional archives no longer exist or are buried in unknown places and are kept by individuals. And yet the brochures and commemorative editions of some colleges, school rules of others, and newspaper articles recounting histories when institutions closed, provide rich insight into what might have constituted the experience and sense of identification of those involved with them.

Through a process of purposive snowball sampling, the researcher for the exhibition had identified key informants from several of the colleges that were incorporated into CPUT. As these informants gave him documents, magazines, photographs, insignia, gowns and various other items, they also spoke to him informally about college life. The colleges for which there are sources reflect these networks of informants for the exhibition as well as the institutionalisation of apartheid racial categories in education at the time. They include those for teachers designated white and coloured at Athlone (coloured), Barkly House (white), Battswood (coloured), Bellville (coloured), Cape Town College of Education (white), Genadendal (coloured), Hewat (coloured), Roggebaai (coloured), Söhnge (coloured), Wesley (coloured), Onderwyskolleges of Paarl and Oudtshoorn (coloured) and the Oudtshoorn College of Education (white), with limited information on Good Hope College (African). Although the sources are with some exceptions limited to the Western Cape, they do provide insight into the wider experience of colleges that is reflected in the nostalgia of older generations.

While brochures and commemorations are generally in the celebratory genre of the memoir, there are critical reflections in some. These publications were usually written at the end of a period or phase of an institution's history using archival sources at the authors' disposal. The institutional histories are generally periodised in terms of the principalship, the assumption being that the period of duty of that principal coincided with certain changes or developments. Some of these accounts contextualise the histories, others only vaguely.

Participant observers, or people with a close connection to the institution, usually write these accounts. They therefore have strengths and limitations as sources. Through them, one can read of not only the details of what institutional life comprised of, but also

attitudes towards them. Newspaper articles are a little different in that they were commonly written around an event in the life of the institution, such as when the colleges were closed. They then draw on histories of that particular institution. We read these sources not only for the facts of the what, when and where of institution-building, but also and mainly as discursive constructions of daily life in the colleges.

The opening of the exhibition was attended by an enthusiastic crowd of former college rectors, students, teachers, academics and education officials from across the Western Cape. As they listened to the two main speakers, the mixed heritage of celebration and critique of the colleges became evident. Based on his discussions with former college students, lecturers and rectors across the Western Cape, John Lewin likened the unveiling of this exhibition to the unveiling of a tombstone for a person who had died and whom people visited out of affection (Lewin, 2006).

The colleges of education marked a specific moment in the history of teacher preparation in South Africa which to all intents and purposes is lost for new generations. And yet, despite this, colleges keep coming back into public discourse. For many older educators in particular, the past is recruited to argue that colleges offered better teacher education, that they were more practical than universities, that universities are too theoretical, and thus that colleges should be re-opened (see for example *Inside Education*, 2017; McGregor, 2008). Basil May, a former rector and leader of the college sector, in his insider account of the process of closure, went as far as to argue this to be an example of "kortsigtigheid, eiewysheid en 'n gebrek aan respek vir die insigte van benadeeldes" (short-sightedness, obstinacy and a lack of respect for the insights of the disadvantaged) (May, 2016:425).

## The ambivalent legacy

What, we ask lies at the basis of this desire to re-open the colleges? Is there anything that we can learn from this forgotten history to take into the future? In this article we argue that the call to re-open colleges needs to be appreciated within a recognition of what they offered to aspirant teachers. Too often the quite legitimate analysis of their role as institutions that were implicated in supporting apartheid racial inequalities has obscured the experiences of the people who passed through them.

This article attempts to cut across this tired binary between the so-called practical college and theoretical university. This involves analysing what it was that colleges offered to aspirant teachers that could be re-purposed in university-based teacher education today. The article argues that instead of naming these memories as a form of romantic nostalgia,

they should be unpacked to help animate a discussion of how teacher education can be strengthened.

The concept of embodied knowledge helps to cut across the binary. Through it, we recognise the interconnected structures of knowledge, being and feeling and explain the nostalgia for such institutions. Embodied knowledge understands that learning to teach is an intimate relationship between doing and knowing (Ord & Nutall, 2016). We argue that the call to re-open the colleges derive from more than a yearning for a more practical approach to teacher education; rather, it is based on a way of being, or the embodied experience that colleges offered.

However, we are acutely aware of how inter-linked identities and knowledge are with context and politics and that colleges' practices helped to constitute the specific racial identities that were specifically promoted during the apartheid period. In this sense, we show firstly how embodied knowledge was deeply contextual, influenced by its social, political and cultural context. We argue, secondly, that the colleges have therefore left an ambivalent legacy, ambivalent precisely because of the difficulty of disentangling the various elements of embodied knowledge. John Lewin and John Volmink capture this ambivalent legacy in their opening statements at the CPUT exhibition. Whilst John Lewin, a former dean at the University of Venda, college lecturer in Johannesburg and NGO facilitator, saw the exhibition as performing memory work and the colleges as places for which people had fond memories, John Volmink, the keynote speaker, and prominent South African educationist, reflected more critically on the role of the colleges. Their architecture and physical spaces, he said, consisted of two offices – one for the principal and one for the secretary – and a number of classrooms. This revealed their purpose as being "places where people teach", places "at best seen as imparting knowledge, but not as producers of knowledge" (Volmink, 2006). In this, he hinted at a less illustrious past and at how colleges differed from universities and from their new, contemporary purposes. In these two different perspectives, one marked by nostalgia, the other by critical appreciation, the colleges' histories became recalibrated for a new present, marked both by continuity and discontinuity from the past.

What then comprised the key elements of this embodied knowledge? Concretely, how did embodied knowledge become part of the identity of prospective teachers? We argue that it lay in a holistic experience where becoming a teacher entailed the integration of academic and professional learning to create a strong sense of community and identification with being a teacher.

## *Creating community*

One can sense from the reports, newsletters and photographs in our suitcase the various ways in which colleges created "a sense of relationship and community … that it is felt has now been lost in the present in new teacher education arrangements" (Chisholm, 2010:19). At the same time, however, these positive experiences need to be nuanced against deep-rooted historical, political and pedagogical tensions.

A key factor here is to place the size of colleges, as in number of staff and students, against the current massification of universities. A small college was able to bring students together around a range of sporting and cultural activities, integrating these into their academic and professional sense of what it meant to be a teacher. A 1995 national audit considered many colleges as being too small in size, and with the absence of lecture venues, not cost-effective. Average staff:student ratios at colleges ranged from 1:6 to 1:18 (Jaff et al., 1995:10 & 71). When the two colleges of Hewat and Cape Town were incorporated into the Mowbray campus of the Cape Technikon (later the Cape Peninsula University of Technology) in 2001, combined they had less than twenty staff members out of a previous complement of over a hundred. These lecturers were now expected to add postgraduate studies and research to their duties, a challenge all of its own (Robinson & McMillan, 2006). Small institutions had a greater potential for students to feel like part of a team and to build personal friendships.

Participation in sport offered a further way in which college life provided students with an integrated experience of knowing, doing and being. Although the national audit of colleges in 1995 found that sporting and other facilities at colleges were either non-existent or under-utilised, our sources mention the following sporting opportunities at the colleges: tennis, athletics, hockey, netball, rugby, cricket, and feather ball.

The existence and disparity of the sporting facilities had been part of life in some colleges for a long time. In the mid-1930s the (white) Cape Town College of Education, for example, had begun to provide a physical culture specialisation for women in the third year, while the (coloured) Wesley College in Cape Town started specialist Physical Education training for men in 1938, and later for a short while for women. Although facilities were generally limited in colleges training black teachers, Wesley became a training centre for Physical Education specialists. A form of Muscular Christianity aimed at instilling manliness informed the emergence and adoption of this training in the 1940s (Cleophas, 2014). Athletics, rugby and netball were popular at several colleges. Such embodied forms of value-based knowledge and learning were central to sport in formal curricula as well

as extra-mural activities in both black and white colleges. Sporting activities were often associated with the development of leadership skills, through the coaching of various sporting activities (*The Cape Argus*, 1941).

Of course, the facilities for physical education were not shared equally across all colleges, with racial discrimination forming a fundamental constituent of their availability at the different colleges. Physical activity was not confined to formal sport, for one also reads about open air excursions, where students had the opportunity to experience the veld and mountains, and to have picnics together (see for example Balie, 1988).

Students at today's universities may have options to participate in cultural societies; however, for the colleges, cultural activities formed an integral part of the students' lived curriculum. At Genadendal (a German Moravian mission institution that began training teachers in 1838) we have evidence of the first brass band performance in 1956 that then became a regular event at festivals:

> *Music played a central role in their lives. Students were required to play one or other musical instrument so that they could become organists or choir masters in a parish. The violin, organ, piano and bassoon were among the important instruments. (Balie, 1988:93)*

A distinctive moment is described in the same school history, which notes that part of the annual examination in December expected students "to perform poems in Dutch, English and German" (Balie, 1988:94). The act of performing poems is far removed from what the general student teacher would be expected to do today.

In a similar vein, the former (white) college in Oudtshoorn reported that the College provides for a Christian Student society, Debating society, Drama society, Pedagogical society, *Voortrekkers* (training of officers), *landsdiensbeweging*, college choir, *struisiekaperjolle*, individual piano lessons, also in organ, recorder and singing, *volkspele* and first aid classes (Olivier, 1980). These activities, while no doubt enjoyable for students, were completely embedded in the Afrikaner nationalist cultural movement of the time and reflect, in a very stark way, the role of teacher preparation in shaping consciousness and being. *Voortrekkers* was the Afrikaner nationalist version of boy scouts and girl guides, the *landsdiensbeweging* a movement to promote camping, survival and environmental skills, *struisiekaperjolle* the fun and games associated with the "Ostrich-country" college and *volkspele,* the folk dances of Afrikaners. *Struisie* was the diminutive of *volstruis,* the Afrikaans word for ostrich, and referred to "the college in ostrich-country". Several colleges used affectionate diminutives to refer to themselves, and *struisie* (small ostrich) was a diminutive used as an endearment

to refer to a student who attended the college.

Cultural activities were also common in those colleges not dedicated to white nationalism. Thus, Söhnge College boasted of its singing competitions and bioscope showings (Smith, 1979). The Battswood College history referred to its music department, spacious library, a large hall complete with stage and scenery for concerts and plays, dressing rooms and showers and audio-visual education (Battswood Training College, 1966). It was proud of being "a powerful magnet drawing teachers far and near to fraternise, exchange views, study new techniques and formulate new methods of attack" (Battswood Training College, 1966:16). Such activities helped to create a strong sense of community both within and between college students and staff.

In reading about these cultural activities, one is struck not only by their contribution to student teachers' own holistic experience, but also the way in which many of these activities were integrated into the life of the surrounding towns and communities. Unlike today's universities, which are mostly situated in urban nodes, or on stand-alone campuses, colleges were often part of small towns and rural villages. The cultural contribution of college events to the surrounding communities was thus significant. We read, for example, about the brass band orchestral performance that became a regular event at festivals in Genadendal and how the college ruby team beat the town team (Oudtshoorn). Other sources highlight these substantial contributions to local cultural life, even as these can be read as deeply gendered and racialized. Thus, the historian of Battswood writes that:

> *The importance of the Music Department cannot be sufficiently emphasised. It offers an advanced course and produces every year a splendid batch of well-equipped specialist teachers. These not only raise the standard of singing and musical appreciation in schools, but also substantially enrich the social and cultural life in urban as well as rural communities by their enthusiastic direction of musical festivals whenever opportunity arises (Battswood Training College, 1966:13).*

The Oudtshoorn College had "an annual carnival where a *Struislandqueen* (ostrich country queen) and two princesses are selected. Girls also do drum majorettes. Funds collected are given to the Southern Cross charity" (Olivier, 1980). At Söhnge, "Apart from the sport (rugby and netball) an annual operetta was performed, e.g. Princess Juju, The Bohemian Girl; Aladdin and his wonderful lamp; The Escapades of the Fox, etc." (Smith, 1979). At Graaff Reinet, Chapman writes that:

> *The community was fructified by an institution that brought life and colour to an otherwise very ordinary Karoo town. They actively participated in festivals, provided academic lectures, and performed countless musical events, operettas and theatre pieces, carnival processions. At a spiritual level, students participated as lay preachers, Sunday school teachers, missionary teachers and so on (Chapman, 1989).*

A poignant moment was recorded as the (coloured) Onderwys Kollege Suid-Kaapland (OKSK) faced closure, with memories being recorded of the "great heights [that] were reached especially in sports and culture" (*Oudtshoorn Courant*, 1996).

Sport, culture and community engagement offered opportunities for a holistic experience of learning to teach and close identification with specific institutions. This sense of identity was further reinforced through the way in which formal branding set out to foster a uniform identification with the institution. While universities in South Africa may market branded T-shirts and other paraphernalia, this remains informal and voluntary for students. Colleges, however, had badges, blazers, college songs and dress codes, most of which would be foreign to the modern-day university student. The extent to which such practices would enhance pride, or conformity, is a matter that could well be debated.

## *Curriculum and pedagogy*

Up to now, we have shown that the affectionate memories of college life may be more a function of the embodied and holistic experience that colleges offered, rather than with a particular approach to teaching and learning. However, the often-heard argument that teacher education at colleges was better than at universities because it was more practical, also requires a look at the issue of curriculum and pedagogy, and it is to this that we now turn.

Practical curricula were present in all colleges. However, it is important to note that curricula changed over time and that curricula of white, coloured and African colleges were versions of one another. Curricula in coloured and African colleges were generally watered-down versions of those in the white colleges. Curricula were generally divided into academic, professional and practical or vocational components; but the amount of time allocated to each component varied depending on whether the institution trained white or black teachers (Chisholm, 2019:91-107). Far from there being no theory in college curricula, history and philosophy occupied pride of place for a considerable part of the

twentieth century. A particularly pernicious form of theory, Fundamental Pedagogics, entered many college curricula from the 1970s (Gluckman, 1981; Randall, 1988).

If theory was indeed a part of the college curriculum, what then was practical about the college curriculum experience?

Firstly, were the subjects on offer. Besides the more conventional subjects like languages, physical science, history, geography or biology, our sources illustrate how certain colleges offered subjects like art, woodwork, handwork, music, metalwork (for male students) and needlework and domestic science (for female students). Secondly, irrespective of whether the college was for white or black teachers, the range of practical or hands-on subjects was generally a compulsory part of the curriculum in the college, whereas it was and is a choice in the university. In some cases, the range of subject offered by colleges may also have exceeded those which many universities – often for financial reasons - offer today, thus enhancing an experience of student learning beyond the cognitive. Secondly, college curricula were practical in so far as they anticipated what students were to teach. Much of the subject content, in many instances, directly resembled school subjects. Thus, rather than disrupting the knowledge base which student teachers brought to the college, they would have experienced a seamless continuum between their preceding identity as a school pupil to that of a teacher and "a syllabus [that] was essentially a rehearsal for what teachers would do in the classroom" (Soudien, 2003:278).

Thirdly, a well-known aspect of college of education pedagogy was the link with so-called practising schools. They were conceived as a school within which model lessons were presented and teaching was practiced. This arrangement was in place from at least the early twentieth century. Thus, the Cape Town College of Education established a Practising School on the second floor of their Queen Victoria Street building between 1915 to 1931 (Goodwin, 1994). In 1922, the College building in Graaff Reinet made its upper storey the Training School, while its ground floor was occupied by the Spes Bona Practicing School (Chapman, 1989). Based in an agricultural area, a model-farm school was established in 1935 so that students "could become familiar with the organisation and methods of a one-person school from Sub A to Std 6" (Chapman, 1989). In 1926, the Athlone Institute was established in Paarl consisting of a secondary school together with a practising school for trainee teachers (*Paarl Post*, 1999). In Wynberg, Cape Town, Battswood separated into two sections in 1914: a Training and Practising section, with an enrolment of well over 900. A separate principal was appointed for the Practising School, viz. Mr D van der Ross (Battswood Training College, 1966:7). Changes to the spaces occurred over time:

> *During 1947...the purchase of six dwelling houses at the corner of York and Castletown Roads was negotiated. This considerably added to the limited playground space. Four of the houses were demolished. One still stands as a practising school classroom; the other is occupied by the factotum (Battswood Training College, 1966:11).*

The remnants of the practising school are still seen on the website of the current Wesley Practising School. The website outlines its history as being related to two issues: firstly, it was the practising school for the College when it was established and secondly that "the school's guiding philosophy was that … Christian beliefs must be an every-day practice, hence a practising school where Christian life was manifest" (Wesley Practising School, 2021[i]).

Hewat, founded in 1941, had a primary school with one class each from Standards Three to Six attached to it as a practising school (Lewis, 1991:7). Lewis captures the purpose of the practising school well:

> *Attached to the College was a primary school with one class each from Standards Three to Six. Children and teachers had been transferred to Hewat from neighbouring primary schools. The primary school was to serve as a 'practising school' as such schools attached to training schools were called, and the classes were to be available for 'demonstration' and 'criticism' lessons when the College required them. They were housed in the classrooms on the ground floor (Lewis, 1991:7).*

The college curriculum, although there were variations of emphasis across white and black institutions, thus shared key elements. Theory and practice existed in a particular form and relation to one another. And the meaning of 'practice' included the practical experience and anticipation of what to expect in the classroom that aspirant teachers received as part of their training. This was valued, even though it was later assessed to be only a part of modern approaches to the preparation of teachers.

By the mid-1990s, the heyday of the teacher education colleges, the first post-apartheid Ministry of Education (commissioned National Teacher Education Audit) noted significant variation across colleges in both curriculum and assessment. These were described as "ranging from the most progressive to the most conservative" with "some institutions … working from the premise that subject knowledge is open-ended, and discovery methods and critical thinking are promoted [while] in others, a 'transmission' mode is favoured [and] the dominant pedagogy is content-focused and teacher-centred,

and encourages rote learning" (Jaff et al.,1995:67). The same disparities were found with regards to pedagogy and assessment. Whereas some had "introduced teaching and learning methods and readings which promote critical understanding", "it was obvious from the work programmes and prescribed texts in some ex-HOR colleges that lecturers were still using outmoded materials and methodologies and the influence of Fundamental Pedagogics is still evident" (Jaff et al., 1995:68).

The Audit registered a number of criticisms by staff and students of the curriculum at the time that are ironic in the light of nostalgia for a more practical curriculum. In general, college curricula were thought to be overloaded and repetitive, dominated by theory and underpinned by inappropriate philosophies, insufficiently in tune with international trends and ill-attuned to learner diversity. It was devoid of important areas such as special education, English as a second language, vernacular languages, creative arts, drama, computer literacy, library science and health education. According to the auditors a leitmotif repeated in almost all interviews was the view that "the curriculum is too theoretical and should be made more relevant to the needs of the schools" (Jaff et al., 1995:66). In light of these criticisms, the authors of the Audit accordingly called for a curriculum review.

## *Historical, political and pedagogical tensions*

Despite the positive experiences of the holistic curriculum, experiences of college life were far from homogenous and not consistently positive (Soudien, 2003). Deep differences and tensions existed with regard to teaching and learning, as well as access to sport and other facilities.

Interviews with former college students in the Cape reveal a sense of alienation for many from curriculum content: "Lecturers rarely ventured beyond the textbook which was invariably written by an apologist for the apartheid system" (Soudien, 2003:278). Our suitcase sources confirm these memories. On the issue of pedagogy, for example, Lawrence, du Plessis, Christians and Katts (1991), in a history of Hewat college, write most vociferously:

> *A good few, we felt, supported the Nationalist government of the day and the recommendations of the Eiselen-de Vos Commission on Education. Hewat, in those days, was thus an institution whose sole function it was to produce Coloured teachers for Coloured schools. This being so, nothing progressive came out of the College beyond that which the students were required to know to pass their teachers' examination, and even that sometimes*

*had its irritation.*

*One had to draw silly, little all-over patterns for a nagging art lecturer in the art class. There being severe penalties for bunking, one was compelled to listen to dull, inane lectures on South African history which the history lecturer had virtually taken word-for-word from a primary school textbook. Equally dull and inconsequential was the over-blown assertion of the Afrikaans lecturer that 'Die du Toit's het die Afrikaanse taal gemaak.'*

*Most of our lecturers were relics of the 1940s waiting to say goodbye to their teaching careers. These colonial types truly promoted the 'culture of silence': they were the only ones to speak during lectures - we were spoken to: they lectured - we listened; they prescribed - we obeyed. Some saw the students as heathen to be converted...*

*In retrospect one must admit that the academic standards were generally POOR. The work generally was uninspiring and there was no real challenge for the resourceful students. Individual lecturers made an effort to change the situation. Many students gave the bare minimum or just went through the motions (Lawrence et al.,1991:27).*

While sport may have played a key role in the life of the college, access to sporting facilities was determined by an unequal and racially determined provision of resources. In Graaff-Reinet, for example, we read: "Despite the fear that Graaff-Reinet [a white college] would close with the start of primary teacher training in PE in 1971, numbers rose to 430 in 1974 and it looked as if the college had a rosy future. Cricket and rugby fields were built and the main building floodlit at night"(Chapman, 1989). This stands in contrast to two descriptions from former 'coloured' colleges: "In sport, Battswood has always been seriously handicapped by lack of playing fields. No doubt this will continue..."(Battswood Training College, 1966:17).

Hewat facilities were initially similarly limited:

*The grounds were not developed in any way - there were no playing fields. Only the tarred surface in front of the building could be used as a netball court. The hall, a double classroom minus the partition, had to serve as a gymnasium for both men and women students … Later the upstairs cloakroom was transformed into an ablution area by the addition of (cold) showers for the Phys Ed students (Lewis, 1991:7).*

Interestingly, the facilities at Hewat expanded significantly during the 1980s, so much so that it was considered to be one of the most up-to-date training colleges in the country.

It boasted a hall that could seat 500 people, projection equipment, a fully equipped laboratory, gymnasium, library, a demonstration theatre, eight lecture rooms, a woodwork block, domestic sciences and needle rooms and spacious grounds. The grounds were to be developed into rugby, hockey and soccer fields, an athletic track and tennis courts. A swimming pool and Student Centre were also built later. Of all this, its staff and students were justly proud (Lawrence et al., 1991). As a full history of Hewat has not yet been written, we can speculate that this may have had something to do with the growth in the institution itself, following the rise of secondary enrolments from the 1960s in schools designated for coloured children. It may also have been that the rising resistance following the 1980 school boycotts and strikes that was also manifested at Hewat meant that it became a focal point for ruling party efforts to buy legitimacy through improving its facilities. A history of Hewat accessing different sources will probably provide the answers.

Having outlined some features of the ambivalent legacy of colleges of education, we turn now to a consideration of what we might learn from that era for the modern-day teacher education.

## What about the present? Re-purposing embodied knowledge into university teacher preparation in South Africa

In 2021, fifteen years after the exhibition, John Lewin recounted how those he had previously spoken to had described the closure of the colleges and their incorporation into higher education. On the point of pedagogy, he recalled as follows: "They didn't see universities as relevant to primary education. They felt universities were not in tune with teacher education, especially at primary level. They thought universities had a theoretical approach; primary education was more practical, and they were very good at this" (personal communication with one of the authors, Cape Town, 2021). His recollections included the emotional responses of his interviewees:

> *They were heartbroken. They felt that Junior Primary teaching would not be valued. They said they were happy at the colleges. They got to know the students very well and they were involved in activities outside of the college. The atmosphere at colleges was different. They felt comfortable, not lost in a big institution like a university.*

Many of his interviewees may well have been former staff members who had lost their livelihoods in a brutal and radical process of restructuring the landscape of education.

Yet even though many might hanker after the college days, it is impossible to return to this institutional configuration. The past cannot be repeated in a greatly changed present and future that is already being shaped by new modalities of provision in teacher education, both pragmatically and conceptually. At the same time, one needs to consider whether there is something that present-day teacher education might learn from the colleges of education. We focus here on two aspects of the colleges that are prominent in contemporary discourse: the notion of a practising school (or an equivalent thereof) and the debate around theory and practice in initial teacher education.

The formal designation of a practising school may have been lost. However, the concept of such a school has come back strongly into policy considerations in South Africa. In 2011 South Africa officially endorsed the idea of Teaching Schools and Professional Practice Schools. This is clearly outlined in Activity 4.5 of the *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, 2011–2025* (Department of Basic Education and Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011). It argues for strengthening the teaching practice/ school experience component of teacher education programmes through the development of Teaching Schools (TSs) and Professional Practice Schools (PPSs). As the document explains: "TSs are 'teaching laboratories', where student teachers can engage in learning-from-practice, such as by observing best practice, participating in micro-teaching exercises and taking subject methodology courses" (Department of Basic Education and Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011:18), a description that is clearly aligned to the purposes of the former practising schools.

On the surface one might see this policy statement as a rejuvenation of the close relationship between teacher education and schooling, a cornerstone of the college identity. However, there are several caveats. Conditions are very different from an earlier era when the colleges existed as colleges. This is evidenced by the fact that – ten years after the Integrated Strategic Plan was published – only one university (the University of Johannesburg) has established a Teaching School (Gravett & Ramsaroop, 2015). There are also significant differences with the past: one of the most significant being that higher education and schools are now controlled by different government entities - the Department of Higher Education and Training, which operates at national level, and the Department of Basic Education, which operates at the level of the provinces. This differs

from a period when both colleges and schools fell under the jurisdiction of racialised provincial and Bantustan authorities (Robinson, Vergnani & Sayed, 2003; Kruss, 2009; Chisholm, 2019). This change in regulatory framework has undercut a structural link between universities and schools, thus creating a situation where mutual accountability is sustained mainly through goodwill.

The vastly scaled up size of universities from that of colleges is also a factor that inhibits the establishment of practising schools (or an equivalent thereof). Whereas colleges might have found it manageable to work with one or two practising schools, schools cannot be expected to provide demonstration opportunities for student numbers that run into the hundreds. This is exacerbated by the fact that state subsidies to teacher education programmes do not match the costs of in-school support for students by university personnel. And secondly, the world of teacher preparation has changed irrevocably during the past twenty-five years, including with new models and modalities of teaching. In recent years, for example, the internship model of teacher education has started to take root in South Africa. Within this model students spend extensive periods in schools – sometimes up to four years – while completing their degree online with public or private institutions of higher learning. While the concept of a practising school is a very old one it cannot and is not being resurrected in its older form. The past thus appears in reconfigured form.

A second, more conceptual consideration in revisiting the strengths and limitations of the colleges is that of the theory-practice link in teacher education. The view that colleges were more practical is an enduring and pervasive one; yet it both ignores history and is seldom accompanied by a recognition that there might be different models of teacher education, with different assumptions of what it means to learn to be teacher (Robinson & Mogliacci, 2019). In the first instance, theory was never absent from teacher education in colleges. It was implicit in many which adopted approaches prevalent internationally and explicit especially in the later years of Fundamental Pedagogics. And while colleges might well have developed valuable skills and competences in classroom teaching, there was in many colleges less focus on understanding (or even critiquing) theories that underpin approaches to teaching, or on debating the values, purposes and social conditions that inform teachers' pedagogical choices.

The key issue is thus not one of more practice or more theory, but of how theory and practice can be integrated, so that students can make informed and well-grounded choices in their teaching. It is interesting in this regard to note Darling-Hammond, Burns, Campbell, Goodwin, Hammerness, Low, McIntyre, Rothman, Sato, and Zeichner's (2017) study of high-performing teacher education systems in different parts of the world. This

study concluded that the quality of teaching improved when students were supported to engage actively and regularly in teacher research, action research and other forms of practice-related inquiry during their teacher education programme. Such an approach clearly has implications not only for teacher education institutions, but also for how schools are organized, since any integration of theoretical knowledge, situational awareness and practical know-how (Winch, Oancea & Orchard, 2015) assumes an inquiry orientation on the part of both schools and universities. From this perspective, the notion of good practice goes beyond "the teacher as performer" (Jansen, 2003:127) towards an expectation of a deeper understanding of why and how good teaching occurs.

## Conclusion

We end this article by asking what principles we can take from the past into the future, so that the 'good' memories and practices associated with the colleges of education are not lost in the new configurations.

We have argued that the emotional attachments to the colleges were largely based on a holistic and embodied experience of learning to teach. The experience of becoming a teacher entailed not only academic activities, but also cultural, sporting and community-based activities. From this we can deduce a first recommendation, namely that teacher education programmes should include opportunities for student teachers to go beyond the cognitive in their learning. Indeed, it could be argued that cultural and sporting activities can strengthen cognitive engagement with all aspects of being a teacher. Although the emphasis in recent years has been on pedagogical content knowledge –and teacher education programmes in South Africa are generally considered to be crammed with too many subjects—it seems essential that space be made for the affective, as well as co- and extra-curricular activities and engagement in communities (Osman & Petersen, 2010; de Beer, Petersen & Dubar-Krige, 2012).

A second recommendation is to expand the notion of practical experiences of teaching towards a more integrated understanding of the relationship between theories learnt at university and the practice of teaching. Colleges were valued because of their close relationship with schools. The strength of this link currently varies enormously between different South African institutions preparing teachers, with some continuing to re-think and re-work the link on a constant basis and others being close to abandoning it in the face of budgetary and other logistical pressures. Too close a relationship, as Ellis (2010) has argued in the British context where teacher preparation has been devolved to the

school-level, runs the risk of impoverishing knowledge and experience of becoming a teacher (Ellis, 2010). Too remote a link can also be problematic, in that students may start to dismiss their teacher education curriculum as irrelevant to the real world. Bringing the school into the university and taking the university to the schools through research as well as practical and reflective activities that permit constant engagement with the reality of schools and teaching can enrich the process of teacher preparation. The question then is not whether there should be more theory or more practice in initial teacher education, but rather how conceptual and practical tools can best be drawn on to develop competent and thoughtful teachers for our context. This approach goes beyond seeing learning to teach as mastering a set of techniques; rather, it aims to help students to be conscious of the theoretical, contextual and moral choices that lie behind their teaching strategies, a process that Rusznyak and Bertram refer to as pedagogical reasoning (Rusznyak & Bertram, 2021).

In reading and re-reading our sources we can understand the nostalgic atmosphere that prevailed at the opening of the exhibition. It was clear that those who attended were eager to revisit past experiences, and to connect with a way of life that had virtually disappeared. It is noteworthy, though, that present-day students in the building hardly look at the exhibition; for them, it is simply old history. Yet, as we have argued in this article, these students today would do well to also experience some of the characteristics of college life, even if in a very changed form. A holistic experience of learning to be a teacher, and close links with schools, are elements of teacher education that we believe continue to be important, even as online and blended forms of pedagogy take students further away from an embodied experience of learning. At the same time, however, we believe that the research capacity of universities allows for greater innovation in pedagogy than in the past, as well as the generation of new knowledge, both of which are fundamental to building a strong education system in our country. Inasmuch as they reflect a time past, the artefacts and documents collected for the exhibition remind us that teaching is both heart and head, something that modern-day teacher education curriculum and pedagogy would do well to take on board.

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