

An analysis of evaluations of higher education transformation in South Africa

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Abstract

This article is an analysis of the transformation evaluations of higher education in South Africa. It offers a review of recent literature on conceptions of evaluation research models and practice, and of reform evaluations in education, specifically pertaining to higher education. From this analysis, a framework for the analysis of reform evaluations is proposed and used to review a selection of nine reports published since 1994 on evaluations of changes in higher education in South Africa. The findings are offered as a critical analysis of evaluation practices exemplified by the selected studies. The article develops an understanding of what competent evaluations of education transformation may involve.

This article is based on research sponsored by a grant for senior researchers from the USA-SA Fulbright Commission. The research included a stay at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst from September 2004 to January 2005.

The opinions expressed in the report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Fulbright Commission.

INTRODUCTION

The process of transforming higher education in South Africa¹ has since 1994 involved significant progress with policy implementation. A wide range of commentaries and reports in the public domain offers analyses and evaluations of progress towards the transformation goals stated in the Education White Paper 3 (Department of Education 1997). Examples of policy analyses, reports from think tank sessions, submissions to facilitate debates, and monographs for discussions, can be found on the web sites of, for example, the Council on Higher Education (CHE), Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) and the Department of Education (DoE).

Formal evaluations of progress with policy implementation have been few in number, and mostly limited to evaluations for accreditation purposes, such as the MBA reviews (CHE 2004a). This highlights the need for formal evaluations of changes and transformation projects, especially since analysts such as Cloete (Cloete et al. 2004), Centre for Higher Education Transformation (2003), Fiske and Ladd (2004) and others have argued that the country has moved beyond the phases

of symbolic policy to delivery and progress evaluation. This emphasis on the need for formal evaluation of changes in higher education is also echoed in the ten year review reports by the Council on Higher Education (2004c).

Experiences in the USA with the broad range of education reform programmes have pointed to the value of evaluation work in contributing to increased accountability, and a culture of information and improved decision-making (see Patton's work on utilization focussed evaluation). Various evaluation studies of for example curriculum reform (Grissmer et al. 2000), standards based assessment (Swanson and Stevenson 2002), teacher education renewal, and others indicate the challenges involved in using evaluation methodologies that are relevant, valid and useful for the management of change (Patton 1997).

The relatively new developments in the field of evaluation designs and practices described by Alkin (2004) and others, add to the need to explore how these may benefit the evaluation of changes/reform in higher education. The focus of this inquiry therefore, is on understanding what transformation evaluation is about, and how new developments in the field of evaluation theory and practice may contribute to meaningful evaluations of reform/transformation. The specific focus is on the set of formal evaluation reports of change in Higher Education in South Africa and how competent they are, in the light of international trends in the field.

PURPOSE AND DESIGN OF THIS INQUIRY

The purpose of this study is to evaluate a selection of reports of evaluations of transformation of higher education in South Africa in order to problematise the need for more informed evaluation designs and practices, and to make recommendations for future change/transformation evaluations.

The data for this inquiry consists of a selection of formal evaluation reports on progress towards the transformation goals in higher education in South Africa since 1994. These goals have been described initially in the Education White Paper 3 (Department of Education 1997) and interpreted and extended in subsequent policy documents such as the National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education 2001).

For the purpose of the inquiry, formal evaluations are taken as research where evaluation questions have been used, evaluation criteria and data instruments developed, and judgments of value/progress made. Such evaluations include reports that locate themselves in policy processes with the intention of providing analyses of progress in terms of transformation policy goals.

Excluded from the core database are opinion pieces, reflections, and theoretical and conceptual analyses. These writings are relevant for this research, but not included in the selection of evaluations. Included in the database for the analysis are reports in the public domain, including articles and books on the evaluation of change in higher education since 1994.

For the purpose of this analysis of transformation evaluations, an understanding of relevant transformation theory as well as evaluation theory is offered. From the relevant literature, the concept of transformation evaluation is explicated and some criteria for the review of such evaluations proposed. These criteria are then applied to review the selected data base and to make recommendations for future evaluations.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Towards an understanding of the transformation of higher education

Educational reform/transformation generally involves significant, system-wide changes that are complex and multi-faceted, and policy-driven. Fuhrman (2003) referred to, for example, the various 'waves of reform' in the USA schooling system, including 'A Nation at Risk' known as the 'excellence movement', or the 'standards movement' which are examples of significant system-wide changes (National Evaluation Systems 2001).

Unlike the schooling sector, reform/transformation in higher education is less coordinated. In the USA, for example, the broadest scope for reform in higher education seems to be at the level of state mandated reform, such as the Massachusetts reforms (Berger 2004). Clark (1986) has indicated that such reforms are characteristically decentralised and generated at lower levels, rather than top-down. They also tend to be incremental, relatively small, unplanned change, often market-driven.

El-Khawas (2002) talked about '... a characteristically American pattern' where change initiatives in education are taken by individuals or individual institutions which then become a 'reform movement', when many institutions participate. While 'incrementalism' is the primary implementation model, reforms on a wider scale seem to be dependent on the range of institutions involved and their stated policies (El-Khawas 2002; Clune 1998).

Cerych and Sabatier (1986) describe examples of reform of higher education in Europe. These include reform to widen access, change higher education to contribute to regional development, and the development of vocational/short-cycle higher education. Their analysis highlights the factors affecting achievement and failure of higher education reform, which include goal clarity, level and breadth of change, reform theory and assumptions, commitment to change, control, resources and supportive environment. For Cerych and Sabatier (1986), the adequacy of causal theory is an important factor in affecting implementation of reform policies. Those involved with the reform need to understand the causal link between reform goals and interventions, and should have jurisdiction over links/actions aimed at attaining the reform objectives.

In educational change and reform, language is the conveyor and constructor of meaning (Cossentino 2004). Cossentino (2004) argues that a reform discourse is an enactment of values, beliefs, and ways of being by people in particular contexts.

We use discourses to articulate belief systems and to ‘. . . locate ourselves in terms of both ideology and identity’ (2004, 23). In Cossentino’s argument, reform discourses influence the development of rhetoric. The latter is the codification of a discourse, making the tacit explicit, and is designed to persuade. An example is the possibility that people can talk into existence a new and better way to teach (Cossentino 2004, drawing on Al, Brain and Cimille and Page 1991).

From this analysis, higher education reform may be described as a complex process, representing interacting discourse practices and shaped by policy processes.

The dynamics of education reform evaluation

The field of evaluation research has expanded rapidly over the last ten to fifteen years. Several recently published texts capture these trends, notably the texts by Alkin (2004), Chen (2005), Fetterman, Shakeh and Abraham (1996). These evaluation traditions would include ‘responsive/deliberative democratic evaluation’ (Stake 2004; Cousins and Whitmore 1998; House 2004), ‘theory-driven evaluation’ (Weiss 2000; Chen 1990 and 2005; Greene 1993), ‘constructivist evaluation’ (Lincoln and Guba 2004), ‘utilisation-focused evaluation’ (Patton 1997), and ‘practice-based evaluation’ (Schwandt 2004).

To develop an understanding of the dynamics of reform evaluation, it is useful to distinguish formalised evaluations of reform from policy analyses. The term ‘policy analysis’ is used in cases where issues in policy processes are investigated, such as the relevance of policy goals and actions with purposes of better understanding policy dynamics and processes (Bardach 1996).

In contrast, the term ‘policy evaluation’ is used where the value of policies in terms of set criteria are investigated. Evaluations of policy are more often than not a technical exercise of empirical data gathering and judgment, and the evaluation questions are about implementation effectiveness, assuming technocratic, positivist worldviews and value neutrality. This view is current where the scope of policy evaluation is largely confined to the task of evaluating the rather narrowly defined actual or expected empirical outcomes of given policy goals (Fischer 1995). Borrowing heavily from the methodologies of economics, particularly cost-benefit analysis, policy evaluation focuses primarily on the task of determining whether or not a particular action can be judged successful in terms of specific programmatic criteria. The criteria specified in the policy itself, explicitly or implicitly, are accepted as providing the legitimate, and often the only, grounds for deciding whether a programme fulfils the political goal (Fischer 1995, 6).

Fischer (1995, 18) proposed a framework to represent the logic of policy evaluation based on the distinction between first-order and second-order evaluation. A technical analytical discourse is about programme verification of outcomes, and the organising question is: does the programme empirically fulfil its stated objectives? A contextual discourse is about situational validation of

objectives, and asks the question whether the programme objectives are relevant to the problem situation. Second-order evaluation involves a systems discourse and an ideological discourse. The former is about societal vindication of goals and the organising question is: Does the policy goal have instrumental or contributive value for the society as a whole? The ideological discourse focuses on social choice and the key question is about values: Do the fundamental ideals (or ideology) that organizes the accepted social order provide a basis for a legitimate resolution of conflicting judgments? These questions are central to the ‘post-empiricist’ policy analysis model proposed by Fischer (2003, 191), accepting policy as discursive practice.

The way Fischer (1995) describes various approaches to policy evaluation is useful for understanding the dilemma of the role and forms of policy evaluation in higher education. He describes the traditional approach as taking the empirical findings of an evaluator/analyst and ‘plugging it into decision processes’. The alternative approach as advocated by Weiss (1997) and others, is to reconceptualise the role of evaluation as ‘deliberation’ and ‘enlightenment’ (Fischer 1995, 8). This approach allows evaluation to play a less technical and more intellectual role – evaluation not as problem solving, but as understanding how the supply of information and analysis perspectives could assist decision makers, ‘refining their reflection and deliberation about public problems’ (Fischer 1995, 8).

Approaches to the evaluation of education reform

In the field of evaluation research it is generally accepted that approaches to evaluation and evaluation designs are determined by the conceptions people have of the nature of educational reform (Frechtling 2000). For example, reform evaluations that look at the dynamics of reform as broad-based, and cognizant of connections among parts would use evaluation approaches that get ‘deeply’ into the process of reform, through mixed methods, to provide an understanding of what is happening in the reform in its attempt to address the needs of various stakeholders who have different priorities (Frechtling 2000). These more complex designs require additional and more costly resources, and face more complex challenges of measurement (Frechtling 2000).

In cases where reforms have been thought of as simple input-treatment-outcome phenomenon, the design of the evaluations is relatively straight forward, and included for example typical experimental designs, with measurement instruments used in cause-effect reasoning (Frechtling 2000).

Supovitz and Taylor (2005) describe three approaches to evaluating systemic reforms that reflect differences in conceptions of what the reform is about. The first is a focus on selected components of the system such as equity policy implementation, or professional capacity, and doing high quality evaluations. The second is to ‘decompose’ components of the reform effort and to examine each component individually. Such studies can, collectively, offer a ‘concerted

picture' of the reform. The third approach is to study relevant components of an integrated system simultaneously and is closely associated with theory-based evaluation. The latter is aimed at identifying/describing the hypothesized sequence of influences of a reform effort and to evaluate these influences sequentially (Supovitz and Taylor 2005).

Reform evaluations on the systems level seem to be quantitative in nature, working with sets/clusters of indicators, taking broad/national perspectives, working with standardized measures, and relying on assumptions of homogeneity in variance (Chinapah and Miron 1990). Despite this, Chinapah and Miron (1990) argue that the polarization of methods into qualitative and quantitative is not helpful, and that any successful educational evaluation should incorporate the dimensions of output and process evaluations. 'Genuine evaluation' should adopt an open-ended strategy (Chinapah and Miron 1990). This involves intertwining output and process dimensions and the complimentary use of methods to improve the quality of the information base, the choice of information instruments, and the processing of information, analysis and report writing (Chinapah and Miron 1990).

Indicator approaches to evaluation works with what is called the 'marks of success' of reform in higher education (El-Khawas (2002). These include the survival of the reform over time, the extent of multi-institutional impact, and the role of professional networks that promote wider understanding of the intentions of the reform. In the USA this was evident from an analysis of reforms in student assessment and the use of freshman seminars as strategy to improve learning (El-Khawas 2002).

From the foregoing analysis, some features of reform evaluation may be summarised. Firstly, the *framing* of the evaluation depends on the reform/transformation focus. Framing involves references to purpose, audience, and context. International examples of higher education reform evaluations show the extent to which the purpose and intended audiences are described, and complexities of reform evaluations acknowledged and accounted for. They also seem sensitive to broader policy processes and the changing discourse practices of reform. Evaluations that are framed in meaningful ways also seem to be responsive to the normative elements of policy, which means they also ask questions about values promoted and problematise assumptions of the reform.

Secondly, in terms of *design*, the how of the evaluation is linked to the focus/purpose of the evaluation in explicit ways, and they tend to articulate and problematise reform/programme logic/theory of change on an ongoing basis. Evaluation designs attempt to acknowledge the complexities of reform processes and there is a trend that evaluations increasingly explore the use of recent alternative conceptualisations of evaluation as a social process.

Thirdly, the ways in which reform evaluations are reported seem relevant, addressed to audience needs, as reflected in the forms of *reporting*.

SELECTION OF EVALUATION REPORTS AND ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this review a total of 9 evaluation reports in the public domain were selected. These were studies that evaluated progress towards the transformation goals of equity and redress, democratisation, development; quality, effectiveness and efficiency, academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability (Education White Paper 3, Department of Education 1997).

The process of identifying the evaluation reports for this study involved a systematic search during January of 2005 of South African data bases, including university library catalogues, SA E-publications, NEXUS database, as well as the websites with listed reports by CHET, DoE, and CHE.

The review involved a descriptive analysis of the reports, and evaluative statements about the pool of reports in terms of the following criteria:

- (a) The *framing* of the evaluation – how well is the evaluation contextualised; how the purpose is linked to the transformation of education goals; how well it is problematised in terms of theory and international points of reference.
- (b) The *design* of the evaluation – given the purpose of the evaluation, how appropriate are the design and data processes? How sensitive is the evaluation to the complexities and systemic nature of transformation processes? How competent is the evaluation?
- (c) The *report* itself – What is the technical quality? How responsive is the evaluation to the transformation paradigm? What is the utility value for different audiences? What is the dominant language of the report, and how does it reflect the philosophical and paradigmatic assumptions?

FINDINGS

Descriptive analysis

A descriptive analysis of the selected reports listed in the Annexure, revealed that they cover the range of transformation goals we have for higher education in South Africa, and that the evaluation purposes, designs and forms of reporting vary.

The studies focused on the full range of transformation goals, such as governance (Hall, Symes and Luescher 2002), capacity building (CHET 2002), mergers (Jansen 2002), research performance (Mouton and Dowling 2001), or on progress towards more than one goal (Cloete and Bunting 2000; Cloete, Bunting and Bunting 2002; CHE 2004c; Van Wyk 2004).

The democratization goals, defined as learning for democratic participation, participative governance, access and participation, and transparency, have been the focus of the studies by Hall, Symes and Luescher (2002) and Cloete et al. (2002). The development/responsiveness goals have been defined in terms of capacity building, mobility, institutional mix, responsive programmes, and were the foci of the evaluations by Jansen (2002), CHE (2004c) and Cloete et al. (2002).

Evaluation of progress towards the efficiency and effectiveness goals (appropriate size and shape, standards of academic practice, single system, cost effective management), is included in the reports by Cloete et al. (2002), Cloete and Bunting (2000), and Mouton and Dowling (2001).

The quality and public accountability goals described in terms of flexible learning, social responsibility and community service, have been the focus of the reports by CHE (2004) and Cloete and Bunting (2000). The reports by CHE (2004) and Cloete et al. (2002) seem most comprehensive and cover to a greater or lesser extent all the areas of transformation as outlined in the Education White Paper 3.

The scope of evaluations ranged from system-wide to regional and institutional. Most of the studies evaluated progress across institutions nationally (CHET (2002), Cloete and Bunting (2000), Cloete et al. (2002), CHE (2004c) and Mouton and Dowling (2001) while a few looked at individual or a smaller/regional selection of institutions (Cloete, Bunting and Bunting 2002; Hall, Symes and Luescher 2002; Jansen 2002; Van Wyk 2004).

The kinds of reform interventions evaluated by the various studies were mainly at the level of the institution, and include strategic planning (Van Wyk 2004), actions to increase regional cooperation (Jansen 2002), changes in policies to improve equity, quality and efficiency (see Cloete et al. 2002; CHE 2004c). The study by CHET looked at capacity building interventions based on models adopted by funders.

The purposes of evaluation vary. The statements of evaluation purposes ranged from the assessment of 'lessons learned' (see Jansen 2002; CHE 2004c; Cloete et al. 2002), to assess progress towards transformation (see CHET 2002; Cloete and Bunting 2000), to identify future challenges (see CHE 2004c), and the development of proposals for improvement (Hall, Symes and Luescher 2002).

The evaluation intent of the majority of studies is to 'review transformation' (Van Wyk 2004), to 'assess movement' of the system towards transformation goals' (Cloete and Bunting 2000, or to 'review a decade of changes' (Cloete et al. 2002; CHE 2004c). A selection of studies focused on analysing current status/practices/trends, for example, of research (Mouton and Dowling 2001), and governance (Hall, Symes and Luescher 2002). The purpose of the latter study is to describe and analyse the state of governance, and to establish 'the effectiveness and consequences of co-operative governance. Jansen's (2002) report is offered as a collection of 'research studies', with underlying evaluation intent in research questions about the extent to which mergers and their effects achieve integration. The book by Cloete et al. (2002) is also offered as an analytic text, with the purpose of using a specific framework to describe and review changes in higher education. The report by Mouton and Dowling (2001) was framed as 'a measurement of research performance', but is not clearly linked to transformation goals.

A range of report types have been published. Of the 9 reports under review here, three were published by individual university based researchers, and the rest

by initiative/under auspices of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) or the foundation funded Centre for Higher Education transformation (CHET). The reports have been published in the form of academic articles (1), books (3), or research reports (5).

Analysis of evaluations in terms of framing, design and reporting

The *first main finding* is that the reports reviewed here have been meaningfully framed, that they are purposeful and well contextualised, but in the majority of cases theoretically weak. All the reports reviewed located their evaluations in terms of the realities of higher education in South Africa. The reports by Jansen (2002), Cloete, Bunting and Bunting (2002) for example, made extensive references to the history of higher education, as well as the specific detail presented on the system as a whole, and specific institutions. The Ten Year Review by CHE (2004c) is probably the report that offers the most comprehensive contextualization, with a clear typifying of phases of development in the transformation of higher education in South Africa.

Some reports took issue with the need to ‘unpack’ the meanings of the transformation goals. The best example is the reports by Cloete and colleagues and the reports produced by CHET focusing on defining indicators for purposes of measurement of change/progress.

The majority of reports were weak in their reference to relevant theories and international trends in evaluation practice. Limited outlines of theoretical perspectives are in the reports by Jansen (2002), Cloete et al. (2002), Cloete and Bunting (2000), Van Wyk (2004) and Cloete, Bunting and Bunting (2002). In the report by Jansen (2002) a brief reference is made to international studies on mergers, but recent developments in education change and policy theories remain unaccounted for.

The reports were also weak in their references to recent articulations of evaluation theory and consideration of other evaluation design options. Considerations of the problem of methodological choices appropriate to evaluation design were made in the reports by Jansen (2002) and Mouton and Dowling (2001).

Secondly, as far as the evaluation designs are concerned, the main finding is that the designs were purposeful, good examples of technical rational evaluations, but weak in accounting for the complexities of reform evaluation.

Evaluation designs focused on elements of the system and tend to interpret relations in the system only in discussion sections. This is evident in the emphasis on transformation components such as governance (Hall, Symes and Luescher 2002), or research performance (Mouton and Dowling 2001) where data on relevant changes in other parts of the higher education system are not explicitly accounted for.

While the reports have all drawn on qualitative (such as planning documents,

reports and interviews) and quantitative data (such as institutional and system statistics), there seems to be a weighting in favour of the latter. This is evident in for example the study on equity and access (see Cloete and Bunting 2000). The report by Mouton and Dowling (2001) includes a range of methods appropriate to the challenge of assessing research performance in higher education. It is richer in data, and used non-quantitative, quantitative and case study methods.

Choices of actual evaluation designs and methods are not accounted for or problematised. Reflections on the evaluation design and the use of specific evaluation methodologies, in the majority of studies, are not offered. The exceptions are the reports by Cloete and colleagues which focus on issues of measurement of change through indicators. Cloete and Bunting (2000) for example, stated and criticised the typical line of reasoning in evaluation: National policy goal G1 is satisfied if the system has property P1, as indicated by indicator I1. I1 is assumed to be proxy for P1. If I1 is shown in an analysis to be true, then the conclusion can be drawn that the system has P1 and thus satisfies G1. Bunting and Cloete (2004) have offered criticisms of this approach to evaluation. They pointed out that the analyses they offered in their 2000 report did not account for systemic properties.

While most reports acknowledge that evaluating progress in transformation is complex, the analyses methods lack sophistication. This is evident in the fact that statistical analyses are mostly descriptive with no complex regression analyses utilised. One example is the report by Cloete and Bunting (2000).

Lastly, as far as evaluation designs are concerned, reports are very weak on theories of change, including what is referred to as the 'normative side' of the evaluation. Few of the reports articulated *how* certain policies and policy implementation actions are supposed to bring about the desired effects. In addition, few questions are asked about the value/nature of the transformation processes and interventions themselves, and in none of the studies is there a description of the ways in which such interventions in the higher education system, for example, changes in the landscape, are expected to bring about the change that is evaluated. An example is the report by Hall, Symes and Luescher (2002) which missed the opportunity to indicate how increased cooperative governance should contribute to effectiveness in the system, at least theoretically.

The *third* main finding is that while the reports meet requirements of professional and technical quality, the utility value is limited primarily to policy audiences. Examples are the evaluations of mergers (Jansen 2002), strategic planning (Van Wyk 2004), governance (Hall, Symes and Luescher 2002), and equity (Cloete and Bunting 2002) which have produced findings that are directly aimed at policy actors. Discussion of findings and recommendations proposed across all studies are very constructive with the clear intent to contribute towards change and transformation. Examples include the reports by Hall, Symes and

Luescher (2002) which proposed useful governance models with immediate implications. The utility value of the CHE (2004c) report seems quite extensive, covering various different areas of issues and challenges in higher education.

DISCUSSION

Importance of framing an evaluation

The framing of evaluations in this analysis was found to be purposeful and well contextualised. Except for the Ten Year Review, the framing of all the evaluations clearly primarily targeted policy audiences. This is evident in the purpose statements as well as the language used in the reports, following the discourse of policy documents.

The framing of any evaluation involves choices by evaluators: choices of purpose, audience, reporting, and language. Fischer's (2003) analyses of evaluation as discourse practice emphasises the importance of such choices, and the extent to which audiences are included and excluded. The fact that the formal evaluations of change in higher education in South Africa have been framed for the needs of policy/academic audiences is therefore problematic – it is counter to the transformation principle of increasing access, forging participatory decision making, and developing democratic practice. Evaluators clearly need to be more sensitive to framing evaluations in such ways that civic participation and broader debate is enhanced. Evaluation designs such as the 'deliberative democratic evaluation' advocated by Schwandt (2004) and others need to be considered.

Part of framing an evaluation is benchmarking against international practice. The reports reviewed here were generally weak in doing this. Such practices would have added to greater understanding of the systemic nature of change in higher education and the evaluation of such changes.

The finding that evaluations are mostly theoretically weak on the content/focus of transformation, is significant. While some of the evaluations such as those conducted by Mouton and Dowling, Jansen and others are based on relevant theoretical perspectives, the majority of reports have not accounted for such perspectives. Evaluations that have benefited from some theoretical analyses of what is evaluated, for example, governance models or policy implementation generally offer more substantive analyses and develop a better understanding of the dynamics of evaluation.

Problematising evaluation designs

It is clear from this study that evaluators of transformation in higher education in South Africa work with a very limited repertoire of evaluation designs. These are relatively unsophisticated, and limited to traditional technical rational approaches to evaluation. Descriptive analyses provide limited information about the complex relationships in transformation processes. Fischer (2003) refers to the limitations of

technocratic perspectives and how some emphasis on post empiricist perspectives may be useful. The latter include discursive, interpretive, narrative, and argumentative-based approaches to policy analysis: 'Inherent to these discourse-analytic and interpretive methods has been an emphasis on participatory democracy, derived as much from the requirements of a post-empiricist epistemology as from the values and norms of democratic governance' (Fischer 2003, 17).

The need to problematise evaluation designs is highlighted by the 'technical' application of indicator approaches to evaluation, as evident in the reports by Cloete and colleagues at CHET. For example, the transformation goal of a more responsive higher education system in South Africa is measured in terms of head count and student enrolment (Bunting, in Cloete et al. 2002). Cloete and colleagues have gone a long way to refine indicators of the responsiveness goal, and their work is exemplary of how progress may be made with evaluations using indicator approaches. Such evaluations of progress in higher education towards responsiveness, need however, to problematise the approach itself, and consider alternatives of designs such as 'responsive/deliberative democratic evaluation' (Stake 2004; House 2004), 'constructivist evaluation' (Lincoln and Guba 2004) or 'practice-based evaluation' (Schwandt 2004).

Several authors have made progress towards developing newer and more responsive methodologies for the evaluation of education reform. Riddell (1999) proposed an approach which is called 'creating a varifocal lens' to integrate ways of looking at education reform, and involves linking the educational, economic and political perspectives in an evaluation. Riddell (1999) also provided useful insights into the evaluation of educational reform programmes in developing countries. His paper emphasized the variety of evaluation needs and he developed the argument that basic principles of evaluation need to accommodate these needs.

The need for innovation in evaluation methodology has been explored by various authors. These include the use of role-playing (Rallis 2003), blending fiction and non-fiction in evaluations (House 2003), meta-evaluation designs (Crohn and Alkin 2003), the use of 'emergent design' evaluation (Montrose et al. 2003), the use of narratives in evaluation (Slayton and Llosa 2003), the use of 'Forum Theatre' in evaluations (Dahler-Larsen 2003), and the ways of accounting for cultural and contextual differences in evaluation (Hopson 2003).

Extremely relevant to South Africa, is the call by LaFrance (2003) for attention to the challenges in creating 'indigenous evaluation frameworks' – defining traditional ways of knowing and linking these to contemporary western evaluation approaches and practices. This would question what goes through as 'standard practice' of education reform evaluation, and would be a way of seeking for ways to 'decolonise' evaluation research in favour of context sensitive methodologies that reflect African philosophies and world-views (Odora-Hoppers 2002; Smith 1999).

Considering audience and utility value in evaluation

The evaluation reports analysed in this study, though limited in number, clearly produced relevant and valuable information for the formative stages of the transformation of higher education in South Africa. The finding that the reports in this analysis have a bias towards policy audiences and that paradigmatic assumptions implicit in the evaluations have not been stated or analysed, need to be problematised. Given the intention of transformation processes to increase and broaden participation in the higher education sector, the question is how such evaluations themselves could be better able to broaden participation and contribute to transformation. Evaluations of transformation of higher education need to contribute towards breaking the historical trend of citizens living scripts of acceptance, of exclusion, of non-participation.

In this regard, again, the approaches of evaluations to be responsive and ‘deliberatively democratic’, as espoused by authors such as House (2004), Schwandt (2004) and others, need to be considered. Jennifer Greene (2001, 58) for example, envisions participatory evaluation as collaborative, dialogic and the kinds of inquiry that enable ‘the construction of contextually meaningful knowledge, and that seeks action that contributes to democratising social change’.

Broad participation in higher education policy processes is crucial for the development of the South African democracy. There is a need to problematise the ‘role of citizenry in policy processes’ in the age of expertise and the need of governments to often ‘contain public participation’ (Fischer 2000). The development of scientific views overshadows/downplays the importance of local knowledge in policy debates. Fischer (2000) offers examples of specific methodological practices of community inquiry and participatory research to help grow discourse practices that would be increase citizen participation in policy processes.

The use of language in education reform should not be underestimated. The work of Cossentino (2004) showed how language of reform shapes the reform itself. Language is not innocent – it informs and forms what people know and think – evaluators can not work otherwise – they bring words to the evaluation with them, with specific meanings. The challenge is to see how the sense making of practitioners adds to interpretations of educational reform (see also Waters and Ares 1998).

Several authors have argued about the status and dominance of evaluation findings, and the extent to which such findings gain prominence and official knowledge value. Often, local experiences and subjugated knowledge about social change and transformation are ignored, the kind that is often looked at as naive knowledge, disqualified as inadequate because of their low location on the hierarchy of scientific work, insufficiently elaborated – marginal to the discipline (Foucault 1980, quoted by Lansink 2004, 135).

Fuller and Rapaport (1984) used the concept of indigenous evaluation to refer

to the local social structures and how they may complement or be in conflict with programme reforms. Their study compared such structures in the USA and Israel, and concluded that social rules around for example programme sponsoring need to be accounted for in evaluation design. In this regard, a meaningful example of working towards indigenous forms of evaluation research has been offered by Cram, Kawakami, Porima and Aton at the 2004 meeting of the American Evaluation Association. They presented case examples of evaluation studies which reflected Maorian and Hawaiian worldview and cultural practices, contrasted with Western ways of doing. In concrete terms, these included situation appropriate research protocols, forms of participation, and approaches to data analyses, ‘. . . finding our own explanatory power, own pathways, indigenous norms and meanings . . .’ (Cram et al. 2004).

CONCLUSION

This article highlighted some of the challenges faced with the evaluation of transformation of higher education in South Africa, with reference to framing, design and reporting. It is also an attempt to recognize the difficulties of evaluation and higher education transformation work. From this analysis it is clear that evaluations of transformation of higher education in South Africa need to not only become more competent, but also to contribute, by design, to progress in transformation.

NOTE

- 1 It needs to be noted here that the term ‘transformation’ is used in South African literature to refer to significant, often drastic changes associated with the socio-political ideals of democratisation of the country. Internationally the term ‘reform’ seems to be used when authors refer to significant and system wide change. While these terms differ conceptually, for the purpose of this article they are used interchangeably to refer to significant, national, policy driven changes in higher education.

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ANNEXURE

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION REPORTS ANALYSED

1. Centre for Higher Education Transformation. 2002. *Capacity building initiatives in higher education*. Pretoria: Centre for Higher Education Transformation.

1. Transformation focus and purpose
How well are the capacity building strategies in HDI's working – which of the strategies seemed to have the most promise and under what conditions? Purpose was to review the nature and scope of capacity building programmes initiatives from 1995 to 2001 in the SA higher education system. Also to see how capacity building initiatives support the overall management of change in the higher education system.
2. Scope of evaluation
Framed as a formative evaluation aimed at proposing programme improvement. Scope is to identify and assess different capacity building interventions – case studies based at the University of Pretoria, Technikon Northern Gauteng, Fort Hare, Penn Tech, and UCT. Also assessing the effects and benefits of different funding approaches.
3. Evaluation design
Mainly qualitative, case study design looking at forms, approaches, challenges, effects and elements of best practice in capacity building initiatives. Interviews with senior representatives of four donor organisations; site visits to 5 Higher Education Institutions, and interviews with their senior staff; focus group discussions; document analyses.
4. Main findings
Describing strengths and weaknesses of approaches and dimensions of difference, sustainability, effectiveness of capacity development.
5. Initial critique
Case approach allows for meaningful contextualisation. Issues of human resource capacity building not well problematised theoretically/ internationally. Lack of references to relevant theories, such as human resource development. The linking of human resource capacity development with other systemic and process variables not very convincing. The limitations of case study designs have not been problematised. Full dimensions of formative evaluation have not been capitalised on, e.g. documenting incremental change, self-evaluation options, etc.

2. Cloete, N. and Bunting, I. A. 2000. *Higher Education Transformation: Assessing Performance in South Africa*. Pretoria: Centre for Higher Education Transformation.

1. Transformation focus and purpose
Assessing, in higher education, the levels of participation in the system, responsiveness, governance, and funding. Purposes to assess the movement of the higher education system towards transformation goals; to measure the performance of the system; to analyse the state of higher education system.
2. Scope of evaluation
National, on the level of the higher education system. Focus on the status of the System in relation to the transformation policy goals, with reference to increased and broadened participation, responsiveness to societal interests and needs, and co-operation and partnerships in governance.
3. Evaluation design
Framed as an 'analysis study' and resembles a formative/performance evaluation. Conceptual analysis of governance and institutional types and culture. Mainly quantitative, on the whole higher education system in SA: statistics on the size of the system, enrolments and participation, shape by institution type. Also statistics on outputs across institutions, research expenditure, funding.
4. Main findings
Summarise findings in terms of participation in higher education, responsiveness, governance, and funding. Identify the challenges for South African higher education in terms of the needs for identifying the main higher education policy-driver; Setting a main goal for South African higher education; Reshaping higher education; Implementing a new funding system; Encouraging co-operation and co-ordination; Upgrading the cognitive demands of the curriculum; Revitalising the leadership and staff in higher education institutions; Establishing transformation performance measures both at the national government and institutional levels.
5. Initial critique
Report is framed as a policy analysis and has a clear evaluative purpose. Not strong on theoretical and international perspectives. Evaluation design remains unproblematised. Value in linking a choice of indicators with transformation goals.

3. Cloete, N., Bunting, L. and Bunting, I. 2002. *Transformation indicators applied to two South African Higher Education Institutions*. Pretoria: Centre for Higher Education Transformation.

1. Transformation focus and purpose
<p>Cutting across the goals of increased participation, responsiveness to societal needs, co-operation and partnership in governance. Using indicators to assess progress in transformation at two institutions.</p> <p>Aims are to explore the feasibility of developing instruments to assess change in higher education at institutional level; to assess how institutions are operationalising government's transformation framework; to develop case studies of good practice; to contribute to international debates on institutional transformation.</p>
2. Scope of evaluation
<p>Focus on a range of 12 indicators applied to University of Port Elizabeth and Peninsula Technikon.</p>
3. Evaluation design
<p>Indicator design, with a total of 12 indicators related to the transformation goals of increased participation, responsiveness to societal needs, and cooperation and partnerships in governance.</p> <p>Case studies of individual institutions, and comparative analysis. Data include policy documents, Institutional documents (such as policies, procedures etc.); interviews with 15 senior people per institution; quantitative data from three year rolling plans.</p>
4. Main findings
<p>Two institutions responded to the need for transformation in different ways. Differences are related to institutional histories and contexts.</p>
5. Initial critique
<p>Indicator approach to evaluation not well problematised in terms of theory and international trends. Key evaluation questions and findings not related to theoretical and international perspectives. Meaningful synthesis offered in terms of change models. Models reviewed critically. Rich data from case study approach. Valuable comparative analysis.</p>

4. Cloete, N., Fehnel, R., Maasen, P., Moja, T., Perold, H. and Gibbon, T. 2002. *Transformation in Higher Education. Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa*. Landsdowne: Juta.

1. Transformation focus and purpose
<p>Progress toward goals of access, composition, structure, landscape, leadership Curriculum, Research, Private higher education. Purpose to review the decade of changes in the higher education system in broad context; to trace, examine processes of change the last ten years; to develop new ways of analysing and understanding higher education.</p>
2. Scope of evaluation
<p>Focus on elements of the system across institutions, including funding and students, staff and leadership, curriculum and research, and the higher education landscape and private higher education. Focus is national, systemic, across institutions.</p>

3. Evaluation design
Framed as policy analysis with clear transformation evaluation/formative intent. Descriptive of changes in parts of the education system, including funding and students, staff and leadership, curriculum and research, and private higher education. 'Baseline-data' describes higher education in the previous dispensation.
Extensive quantitative data describing changes in all the focus areas of transformation, including access, composition, structure, landscape, leadership, curriculum, research, and private higher education.
4. Main findings
Reports on transformation progress in the areas of funding, access, staff and leadership, curriculum and research as well the emergent landscape of higher education. Also offers findings of an analysis of change dynamics and limits of policy.
5. Initial critique
Quite a comprehensive report on the full range of transformation goals/issues, well substantiated and with reference to international case examples. Analytic framework forms a meaningful basis for integration of analyses. Transformation elements treated separately with limited emphasis on systemic analysis. Weak on systemic evaluation.

5. Council on Higher Education. 2004. *South African higher education in the first decade of democracy*. Pretoria: CHE.

1. Transformation focus and purpose
Refer to all relevant transformation goals as stated in government policy documents. Purpose is to review the first decade of changes of the South African higher education sector. To describe achievements, critical issues and future challenges. Specific goals are to describe the contemporary state of higher education after ten years of democracy, to analyse and identify continuities, developments and changes, as well as the challenges faced by the system and institutions.
2. Scope of evaluation
Framed as a source text with data about the SA higher education system, and as a national review. Documents the current state as well as changes in implementing transformation policy. Contains evaluative judgments re progress/change in the system towards the transformation goals.
3. Evaluation design
Guided by the range of policy goals. Claims substantiated with data from the sector. Process and historical orientation. Secondary analysis mostly.
4. Main findings
The higher education system has made progress towards transformation to varied degrees. Outline of achievements the first decade, in terms of landscape, equity, efficiency.

5. Initial critique
Content of the report is consistent with it's purpose. Framed as a policy analysis/formative evaluation, with evaluation criteria and indicators not well problematised. Limited international or regional comparison. Theoretical conceptions of higher education change described to a limited extent.

6. Hall, M. Symes, A. and Luescher, T. M. 2002. *Governance in South African Higher Education*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.

1. Transformation focus and purpose
Change in governance in higher education institutions. Purpose to describe the present state of governance in South African higher education; to establish how effectively and with what consequences co-operative governance had been implemented at higher education institutions; to make recommendations for the improvement of efficiency, effectiveness and accountability in higher education governance.
2. Scope of evaluation
Included a representative set of 12 universities and technikons and the development of a set of benchmarks and criteria for their governance practices. These criteria are: the degree of representivity of governance structures; the depth of delegation; and the capacity for implementation, allowing an institution to turn policies into practice.
3. Evaluation design
Case study design, relying on document analysis and qualitative methods. Comparative analysis. Each institution has been rated against the criteria, resulting in four organisational types: 'contested institutions' (self-referential governance and poorly developed systems of delegation); 'management-focused institutions' (inwardly-focused systems of governance with well-developed capacity for administration and the delegation of authority); 'democratic institutions' (broad governance participation and shallow systems of delegation); and 'democratic, well-managed institutions'.
Includes a study of the three major agencies of governance and their guiding philosophies: the Senate and the concept of academic freedom; the Council and the role of trusteeship; and the Institutional Forum, understood within the concept of cooperative governance.
4. Main findings
Range of governance performance across institutions. Developed benchmarks / criteria for governance practice: degree of representivity of governance structures, depth of delegation, and capacity for implementation. Describes appropriate governance approaches for merging institutions.
5. Initial critique
Study very relevant to the need for governance frameworks and guidelines for mergers.

7. Jansen, J. D. (ed.) 2002. *Mergers in higher education. Lessons learned in transitional contexts*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.

1. Transformation focus and purpose
Higher Education restructuring. Specific focus on mergers and how they contribute to redress and impact on curriculum change.
Purposes to investigate the benefits of institutional mergers; to evaluate mergers in terms of their success; the extent to which certain kinds of mergers are more successful than others.
Also to question existing assumptions about change in higher education, i.e. that policy alone can steer change towards desired national goals, that lessons from other countries can be applied to SA, that merger processes are similar regardless of institution type, and the lack of theory about mergers in higher education. Seeks empirical answers to 'political assertions'. Seeks to explain different mergers and their effects.
2. Scope of evaluation
Include analysis of five mergers involving institutions in four provinces. Detail case analyses of mergers. Research questions on how mergers happen, how they generate greater efficiencies, their effects, the extent to which integration is achieved, and why they are so difficult to achieve.
3. Evaluation design
Case study designs, describing in the case of each merger, the context and merger effects. Qualitative and quantitative data, including statistics on student, staff composition, internal policy documents and reports, observation data, interview data.
4. Main findings
Documenting merger contexts, processes and effects in the case of 5 institutions. Clarifies some criteria for successful mergers [p.9]. Develops a conceptual platform for understanding of mergers in higher education.
5. Initial critique
The case study evaluations of mergers are presented with detailed and 'thick' descriptions of individual cases as well as the policy context. Meaningful integration and synthesis of findings. Weak on systemic perspectives of change, and evaluation theory. Research methodology and data limitations also not well problematised.

8. Mouton, J. and Dowling, Z. 2001. *Benchmarking research performance at South African higher education institutions*. Stellenbosch: Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Stellenbosch.

1. Transformation focus and purpose
Focus on progress with research performance of institutions nationally. Purposes to develop a conceptual framework as well as specific mechanisms that could be utilized to benchmark research performance in the higher education sector in SA.

2. Scope of evaluation
National R&D evaluation described in terms of policies, described in terms of R to problematise notions of performativity; to propose an African perspective on education transformation in order to deepen transformation possibilities.
2. Scope of evaluation
Three universities in the same region, looking at institutional planning processes.
3. Evaluation design
Review of planning documents. Conceptual analysis. Evaluation criteria include conceptions of transformation, performativity.
4. Main findings
Equity planning in institutional rolling plans face certain barriers. Transformation is addressed by institutional planning to a greater or lesser extent. Planning and transformation and the emphasis on performativity could be 'deepened' through African perspectives and conceptions of 'Ubuntu'.
5. Initial critique
Limiting notion of African philosophy. Contextual and historical imperatives not well problematised. Evaluation and analysis process not well explicated. Alternative evaluation research methodology not really considered.

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- (Sturkin 1997, 20–30) **book**
(Schellinger, Hudson and Rijsberman 1998) **three-author book**
(Secher et al. 1996, 243) (Note: *et al.* is not italicised)
multiple-author book
(Michelangelo 1999, 122–134) **a translated book**
(UNDP 2003, 14) **organisation as author**
(Anon. 1547) **anonymous author**
(Garcia 1987, vol. 2) **book volume**
(Johnson 1979, sec. 24) **section**
(Wiens 1983) **chapter in a multi-author book**
(Weber, Bulet and Abel 1928) **edition**
(Allison 1999, 26) **journal**
(Wright 1968–1978, 2:241) **multivolume work**
(Barnes 1998, 2:244–255, 3:29) **journal volume number with page reference**
(Tulchin and Garland 2000) **series**
(H. J. Brody, pers. comm.) **personal communication**
(Kurland and Lerner 2000, chap. 9, doc. 3) **part of a document; URL**
(Fischer and Siple 1990, 212–3) **note**
(Schwarz 2000) **unpublished thesis**

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