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Curriculating Powerful Knowledge for Public Managers and Administrators

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Abstract

Public Management and Public Administration are important professions for an emerging democracy such as South Africa. They operate as the interface between state and public and are responsible for enacting many of the government's policies and social initiatives. Concerns about a lack of capacity in the sector suggest that those in these roles may be unable to meet the demands of the workplace. This article reports on a study that responded to calls for the curriculum to address such concerns by interrogating the knowledge structures of Public Management and Public Administration programmes in higher education. Interviews, textbooks and course guides were analysed to illuminate the forms of knowledge being legitimated in curricula. The study found that the focus on knowledge, skills and processes might be at the expense of a focus on the development of particular attributes or dispositions in the knowers. Furthermore, the knowledge level focus was limited in that it was highly contextualised and "light" on theory, raising questions about the acquisition of powerful knowledge needed for good governance and critical engagement in the public sector. The study recommends that both programmes include more conceptual knowledge; exposure to critical powerful forms of knowledge; and the development of particular attributes and dispositions.

Keywords: curriculum; knowledge structures; powerful knowledge; skills; attributes and dispositions; specialisation and semantic density; Public Management; Public Administration



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Introduction

This article interrogates the form of knowledge legitimated in Public Management and Public Administration higher education, given the demands for this sector to take a leading role in implementing the transformation agenda in South Africa (Kroukamp 2011). Furthermore, student calls for decolonisation of knowledge have foregrounded the need for closer interrogation of the nature of knowledge in the academy. For the current study, we drew on a case study to look at what form of curriculum knowledge was legitimated in the first-year Public Management diploma and Public Administration degree programmes at a South African university (Lück 2014). The National Qualifications Framework characterises diploma knowledge as knowledge specific to vocations, professions and industry while simultaneously providing understandings of general theory, and a blend of specific and general procedures and its applications (DHET 2012). In contrast, general and professional bachelor's degree knowledge is balanced, broad and prepares graduates with a disciplinary and study field knowledge base, theory and methodology to show enterprise and responsibility in academic or professional arenas (DHET 2012). Ideally, in terms of these categorisations, the diploma should be largely vocational in focus with comprehensive theoretical underpinnings, while the degree should be more conceptual in nature. The assumption though is that both programmes would give students access to powerful knowledge to become the critical thinkers needed in the public sector.

Young's (2011; 2012) notion of powerful knowledge is useful for considerations of social inclusion through education. Social inequality is mediated by the nature of education that students access as they acquire powerful knowledge and its rules, to contribute to and challenge such rules. Wheelahan (2013) argues that this knowledge provides the grounds for democracy as it questions what is judged to be knowledge and how knowledge is produced, reproduced or disrupted. Nonetheless, the notions of knowledge of the powerful and powerful knowledge (Young 2011; 2012) cannot be conflated. Knowledge of the powerful is knowledge based on who gets to define knowledge (Young 2011). Thus, it could be argued that knowledge of the powerful perpetuates privilege (Young 2011), especially in a postcolonial context such as South Africa. Conversely, powerful knowledge references knowledge that itself wields power as it enables student movement between their everyday experiences and theoretical concepts to make sense of complex scenarios and develop new meanings. Consequently, powerful knowledge will take students beyond the particulars of personal experience and enable access to the knowledge beyond their own realms by giving them tools to "think the unthinkable" (Young 2012, 1).

Context and Rationale

The current study focused on the very critical first year of study (Lück 2014) as it is the year of highest attrition with about 33 per cent of students dropping out of their studies (Scott et al. 2013). While this drop-out rate is generally attributed to the articulation gap between school and higher education that emerges from the entire South African education system's systemic inefficiencies, even within better resourced schools (Scott et al. 2013), the article advocates a critical reflection of the knowledge within curricula as one potential mechanism of inclusion in higher education. In the case study of the first-year Public Management and Public Administration curricula, such critical reflections on knowledge claims can assist in ensuring that students are given access to the kinds of powerful knowledge (Wheelahan 2013; Young 2011) required for dealing with the complex and challenging South African public sector.

According to Badat (2010), the internal thinking, structural and cultural practices of universities – and the broader societal external conditioning thereof – frequently maintain social exclusion. Epistemological and ontological aspects of teaching and learning, pedagogical practices and curriculum development have suffered from a lack of due critical attention. As a result, universities have often not wrestled sufficiently with questions of the development and reproduction of dominant discourses that are shaping intellectual spaces in higher education (Badat 2010). Thus, social justice issues are knowledge and its role; the production of knowledge in the curriculum; the knowledge that is valued in the university; and student inclusion or exclusion in the curriculum through knowledge structures and their emergent practices.

Reflections on the Public Management and Administration sector in South Africa draw on decline and dysfunctionality narratives in public policy implementation (Chipkin and Meny-Giber 2012; Mubangizi and Theron 2011; Van Rooyen 2013), and ways to ameliorate these to ensure good governance (Nzimakwe 2011; Raga, Taylor and Albrecht 2011). Teaching and learning concerns are also foregrounded with the examination of student “preparedness” with Hanyane (2015) arguing that postgraduate students in the field are “underprepared” owing to a lack of insight into disciplinary theory development and research methodologies employed in the field at the undergraduate level. Concerns about the curriculum have been raised about the focus on skills over theory (Kroukamp 2011; Masemurule 2005; Mubangizi and Theron 2011; Van Dijk and Thornhill 2011). Concerns have also been raised about a technocratic and process driven curriculum as opposed to a democratic curriculum focussed on social policy or development theory (Mubangizi and Theron 2011). The Public Management field as it stands has been conceptualised as problematically contextualised and lacking theory (Gildenhuys 2004; Masemurule 2005).

The quest to forge Public Management and Administration as a theoretically strong field is arguably hampered by the fact that it is not a discipline in its own right, but

draws on numerous other fields to build its knowledge. As these fields are, in turn, relatively young and as many are workplace oriented and draw on other fields, it is perhaps unsurprising that there are concerns about its having a weak knowledge base (Muller 2009). Cloete's (1967) description of an interdisciplinary field between social and management sciences, and therefore, lacking a specific language and theory, is still valid half a century later, according to Van Dijk and Thornhill (2011).

Though interdisciplinary studies are certainly important, they can result in a sense of fragmentation if they are not underpinned by a robust theoretical base (Van Dijk and Thornhill 2011). Combining bodies of knowledge can constitute a philosophically holistic approach if sufficiently strongly theorised (Gildenhuis 2004). As a result, Public Management and Public Administration can rather be categorised as a "region" (Bernstein 2000). A region joins independent disciplines which could either be specialised or interdisciplinary, and are overtly focused on the working world (Muller 2009). Singulars, on the other hand, are defined by Bernstein (2000) as disciplines that constitute specialised discrete discourse with sturdy boundaries, practices and hierarchies typically focussed on their own growth. Regions also constitute themselves by drawing on related singulars.

Van Dijk and Thornhill (2011) advocate links between Public Management/Administration and Political Science owing to a shared history and their state function interdependence. But Garcia-Zamor and Khator (1994) argue that Political Science and Public Administration oppose each other ideologically with frequent antagonism between the two. Public Administration draws on Business Management and most other social sciences for direction with the exception of Political Science. They argue that this exclusion protects administrators from a scholarly enquiry of their practices, which is a serious limitation of the field (Garcia-Zamor and Khator 1994).

Post-1990 (after Nelson Mandela's release, the unbanning of liberation movements and the quest towards democracy), the Public Management and Administration field undertook a self-introspection for meaning in the transforming South Africa. A conference called the Mount Grace Initiative was convened in 1991 where scholars considered the nature and appropriacy of post-apartheid public service, public sector training as well as the public administration discipline meant to serve the new administration (Chipkin and Meny-Gibert 2012). Scholars there highlighted the arbitrariness and narrowly apartheid-bases of programme borders and called for shifts to democratised and participatory government and public services to pursue a socially just society with stronger scientific rigour employed in phenomena explanation and analysis (Masemurule 2005). Additionally, it was argued that the narrow skills approach resulted from the dearth of research in the field (Chipkin and Meny-Gibert 2012).

Despite the above calls, the conference did not result in any scholarly regeneration of the field (Chipkin and Meny-Gibert 2012). South African institutions rather began orienting themselves towards western concepts of Public Management and Public

Administration with the more technical managerial approach of the 1980s and 1990s (Masemurule 2005).

Masemurule (2005) argues that Public Management study manuals constitute information gathered from a variety of courses, rather than from peer reviewed studies. However, any academic field with a home in a university needs to both elucidate current knowledge as well as produce new knowledge (Kroukamp 2011), and to do this, scholars need to interrogate knowledge production. There is thus a strong argument in the literature that the knowledge of the Public Management programmes in South African universities needs to provide students with access to powerful knowledge and foster the affordances for innovative and critical responses to a transforming public environment.

In the context of these concerns about the knowledge in Public Management and Administration curricula and the importance of this work in a fledgling democracy, the article provides an analysis of these two programmes within a South African university.

Methodology

Using a qualitative methodology, a case study was conducted of the first year of the Public Management diploma and Public Administration degree programmes at a South African comprehensive university (Lück 2014). Qualitative data for the case study was collected in the form of interviews conducted with seven lecturers and an analysis of eight prescribed and recommended textbooks, 10 study guides, selected PowerPoint (PPT) slideshows and study notes. The data addressed the following research question: “What are the knowledge structures of the Public Management diploma and Public Administration degree programmes?” During the interviews, the lecturers were asked what was most valued in the curricula.

Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) is the analytical frame used in the study and it builds on and extends the work of other theorists, in particular, Bourdieu and Bernstein (Maton 2014). As an analytical frame, LCT asks: “What lies behind the ongoing reproduction, transformation and change of intellectual fields as sites of knowledge production?” (Moore and Maton 2001, 160). LCT understands knowledge claims and practices as “languages of legitimation”, in other words, as the means by which some kinds of knowledge and knowers are legitimated, while others are not. In order to examine the knowledge in the programmes’ curricula, the case study used the LCT tools of specialisation and semantics.

Specialisation refers to the basis by which something is characterised as distinctive and thereby legitimate (Maton 2011). For example, each field, discipline and social practice legitimates itself in its own way, and these specialisation practices therefore determine what “counts” as valid or meaningful in that particular context. Maton (2004) argues that all knowledge claims are *by somebody* and *about something*, and, as a result,

distinctions are made between epistemic relations (ER) and social relations (SR) in this specialisation dimension. ER distinguish the knowledge structures (what you know and claims of knowledge about the world), while SR distinguish the knower structures (who you are and the valuing of a particular lens on the world or a particular disposition) (Maton 2010, 2014). Thus, ER are about the extent to which knowledge of all kinds, from abstract to contextual, is key to legitimation, whereas SR are a measure of the extent to which legitimation is a focus on who an individual is as an ideal knower (Maton 2011), that is, the attributes, attitudes and dispositions that an individual needs to demonstrate in order to be considered legitimate.

ER and SR are two dimensions of knowledge and practice that co-exist empirically but are distinct analytically (Maton 2004). Both ER and SR can be strongly (+) or weakly (–) framed and classified (Maton 2010). As they are not dichotomous ideal types but have relative strengths (Maton 2010), differing variations of weaker and stronger classifications may be found. In this view, four principal code modalities (ER+/-; SR+/-) are possible (Maton 2010). Figure 1 illustrates the specialisation codes of legitimation.

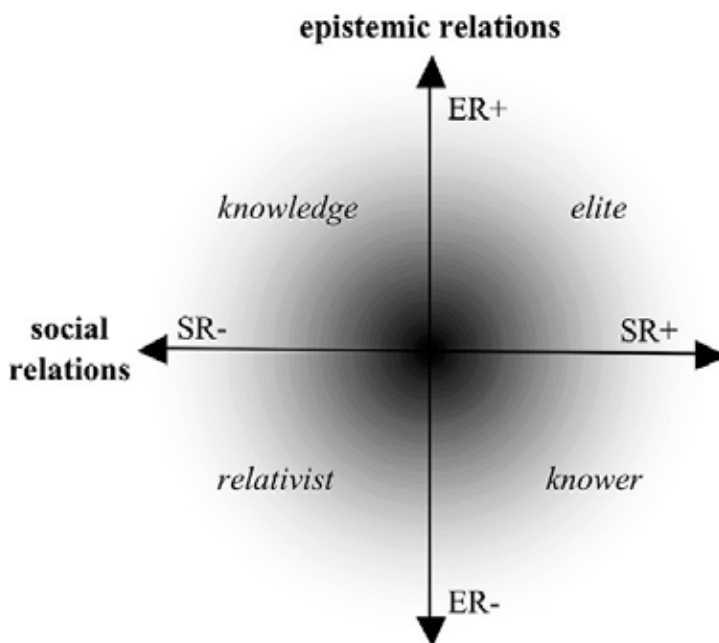


Figure 1: The specialisation codes of legitimation

Source: Maton (2010)

Figure 1 illustrates that the four possible modalities made up of combinations of stronger and weaker ER and SR are knowledge code (knowledge, skills and practices foregrounded); knower code (attributes and dispositions of the knower foregrounded); elite code (both knowledge and knower emphasised); and relativist code (neither knowledge nor knower especially important) (Maton 2010). Although Public Management and Public Administration curricula may assume more than one of these modalities, the fields will generally have a dominant modality (Maton 2010). For example, in the case study, curricula knowledge was analysed in order to identify its main modality. Public Management and Public Administration curricula were thus analysed as to the extent to which they exhibited specialisation by forms of stronger or weaker ER and stronger or weaker SR. This analysis allowed us to examine the extent to which the curricula privileged knowledge or a particular kind of knower or both or neither.

The second LCT tool called upon to analyse the data was semantics, which considers the underlying practices that have been specialised by considering the extent of semantic gravity (SG) and semantic density (SD). The notion of SG is used to analyse the extent to which the meaning relates to a specific context (Maton 2014). The stronger the SG, the more the meaning is tied to a specific time and place of use. The weaker the SG, the more the meaning can be used beyond the concrete particulars of a specific case towards generalisations and abstractions, the meanings of which are less dependent on that context.

Semantic density refers to the degree of condensation of meaning within practices (Maton 2014). The more meaning is condensed within a concept, phrase, gesture or symbol (e.g. a scientific notation), the stronger the SD is said to be, whereas the more explicit and everyday the articulation of the field is, the weaker the SD is said to be. Powerful learning requires that students are moved from everyday accessible concepts (SD–) in clearly articulated specified contexts (SG+) to more condensed (SD+) and abstract concepts (SG–). However, this is often not a uniform shift but rather a process of semantic waves in which the student is gradually moved up and down towards increasing levels of abstract, condensed forms of powerful knowledge. Such condensed, abstracted forms of knowledge allow for meaning to be made of new problems and contexts and for the imagining of other possibilities.

Findings and Discussion

Lecturer interviews and curriculum materials from the Public Management and Public Administration programmes were firstly coded for ER and SR in the specialisation dimension of LCT. The following section summarises the data findings.

Epistemic Relations and Social Relations in Public Management and Public Administration

There was ample evidence of ER+ in the Public Management and Public Administration lecturer interviews, with multiple references to the kind of skills the curriculum seeks to impart, such as responsibilities and decision-making practices:

The Public Office Management module looks at ... an official in the front, front office duties, ventilation, how should the office be laid out, it's very practical. (Interview, Lecturer 1)

The message we try and get across to them is that they need to know the fundamentals of decision-making, the rational process of decision-making as well as ... the dynamics of legislation issues. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

In this explanation, decision-making was conceptualised as a set of procedures which involved “fundamentals” and “a process”, which was ER+ rather than being related to the possession of a particular disposition (SR–). Similar examples of specific skills and processes were mentioned frequently in all interviews with the lecturers across both programmes. The analysis of the textbooks revealed them to be similarly ER+ as they stressed public sector processes and work functions. According to Gildenhuis (2004, 243), “The purpose of studying this chapter is for the student to understand how to manage the resources available to the public sector such as finance, personnel, information, inventory and accommodation”, and Du Toit et al. (2002, 83), “Determining work procedures and methods is also essential so that there are guidelines in terms of which officials can carry out their respective functions”.

Definitions of concepts, for example, “Direct taxes can be defined as those taxes recovered directly from the taxpayer by the taxing authority” (Gildenhuis 2004, 246) were always provided in reference to procedure, “taxes should be distributed among taxpayer in relation to their financial capacity” (Gildenhuis 2004, 250), rather than to the disposition of the knower.

The materials developed by the lecturers (in the form of PPT slides and study guides) also provided ample evidence of ER+ by emphasising processes. The PPT slides displayed process-related skills. For example, the following slide definitions of economic and traditional systems served to underscore the functions and skills needed.

- **Economic systems** – methods and arrangements devised by societies for the exchange of goods and services; to regulate the problems of production and scarcity of resources in order to promote the well-being of society.
- **traditional system** – a system of social organisation in which both production and distribution are determined by tradition – customs and beliefs. eg. barter system, skills passed on through hereditary chain;
- It may be found in less industrialised nations

Figure 2: The functions, skills and techniques for public resources management

Public Resources Management PPT Slide

Evidence of clear ER+ can be seen in the following study guide outcomes, which were clearly ER+: “have knowledge of communication with internal and external clients according to appropriate principles of service delivery” (Public Service Delivery Study Guide); “provide the learner with an understanding of the constitutional framework within which Public Administration and public officials operate” and “role of the elected political office bearers and the appointed officials” (Constitutional Framework for Public Administration Study Guide).

Thus, there was a clear legitimating of a set of knowledge, skills and practices which the students were expected to acquire. Generally, the lecturer interviews and study guides did not focus on the development or recognition of attributes related to Public Management and Public Administration beliefs, norms or values but rather spoke to procedures that needed to be learned.

However, there was an occasional focus in the data on ideological attributes that needed to be developed, for example, values:

Value of community participation in building local democracy so I want them to discuss community participation, what its value is and then how does that apply to local democracies and improving policies. (Interview, Lecturer 1)

But such examples were not frequent and were often downplayed. So where, for example, the issue of punctuality was discussed, it was in terms of learning the steps for improved time-management rather than in developing the kind of identity that would see punctuality as professional behaviour. Similarly, in the textbooks there was some emphasis on SR, but as these were not developed and were not linked to an ideological position or to relations of power, they were weaker. This aligns with Muller’s (2009,

214) argument that a “region may be strong on practice-oriented ‘know-how’ necessary for professional tasks, but without a disciplinary core, the knowledge base will be weak on ‘know-why’”. The fragmented nature of the field (Van Dijk and Thornhill 2011) was seen in the different emphases placed by different lecturers as to the key focus of the modules. While the lecturers were able to list important attributes that those working in the field should demonstrate, they did so in response to a direct question on this issue rather than within a broad characterisation of the field or in relation to what they believed the programme was intended to achieve. The textbooks, study guides and course materials all provided some examples of SR, but these were not foregrounded consistently.

Data from the interviews, textbooks and study guides thus showed relatively strong ER, with very little emphasis on the development or legitimisation of a particular disposition, ideology or view of the world. Thus, it was possible to categorise the programmes as being predominantly a knowledge code (ER+; SR–), whereby success was accrued on the basis of demonstrating a set of legitimate knowledge, skills and practices rather than through the demonstration of a particular set of attributes or “gaze” on the world. Van Dijk and Thornhill (2011, 15) caution that it is such a skills-based approach that leads to students “doing public administration and (not) being public administrators”.

Areas of knowledge that the Public Resources Management module currently addresses include a range of fields, such as:

Logistics ... human resources management, ... programme management, project management.
(Interview, Lecturer 3)

Muller (2009, 214) also notes in his discussion on curricula at comprehensive universities that new disciplines draw on multiple singulars to form new fields or regions that support a domain of professional practice but “rarely have foundational disciplines in their core curricula”. This seemed to be the case in the current study as all the subjects within the curriculum drew on multiple fields, but none of the subjects constituted foundational disciplines.

Semantic Gravity and Semantic Density in Public Management and Public Administration

Having identified both the Public Administration and Public Management programmes as being primarily focused on the acquisition of knowledge with little focus on the development of a particular disposition in its knowers, the nature of this knowledge was then interrogated. For this, the LCT tool of semantics was used as it considers the extent of SG, which is the extent to which the knowledge is tied to a particular context, and SD, which considers how condensed the meaning is.

For the analysis, SG was generally very strong with the focus being on the particular context in which students would be working: “Our final products, in the form of academically qualified public administrators, must be able to apply their acquired academic knowledge and skills in practice” (Gildenhuys 2004, 3), and

... basically we just prepare them as future employees of public officials ... (Interview, Lecturer 4)

Learning was not tied to abstract concepts:

... remember it's a first year module so I don't delve much on theories ... I only go into detail with the theories at the third year level ... (Interview, Lecturer 4)

The main concern for the programmes in the study's data analysis was found to be in keeping with Van Dijk and Thornhill's (2011) argument that they are concerned with an understanding of practice and not theory, making the field vulnerable to an overconcentration on localised practice rather than an engagement with broader concepts. This was also noted as a concern by a lecturer:

I teach what is happening in Public Administration in general because ... it doesn't make sense to the international students.” (Interview, Lecturer 5)

Although Van Dijk and Thornhill (2011) argue for the elimination of dichotomies of theory and practice in curricula and advocate a balanced approach, they also identify the need for scholars to strive towards a more theoretical framework. Such a framework enhances understanding of the link between administration and the public and the synergies that exist between knowledge and action in academic fields because the role of government is becoming increasingly complex. This view was supported by a lecturer who emphasised the need for conceptual understandings:

... conceptual explanation of the issues involved [like]... public resources, ... the market practices, ... the government, the role of the constitution and the legislature ... (Interview, Lecturer 3)

There was also a fair amount of terminology used in the textbooks and in the interviews, which would suggest some degree of SD whereby complex concepts were condensed into disciplinary terms:

I explain what self-management is about ... if they understand the concept and there are a lot of definitions you need to unpack and explain them ... we talk about conceptual understanding of these types of terms ... (Interview, Lecturer 4)

However, on a closer examination of this terminology, it was clear that it encompassed fairly straightforward meanings and did not really suggest a significant condensing of

complex theoretical concepts. Furthermore, there was quite a bit of evidence that where the notion of “theory” was invoked, it was in the everyday sense of “facts” rather than in the academic sense of an abstracted, well-established explanation:

It’s more theoretical ... I mean you can’t tell me green paper is the colour of the page. You know, they need to know exactly what a Green Paper is. The knowledge is important, yes absolutely ... There’s a lot of theory. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

Ja, this is mostly theory so it’s lots of complicated words and stuff like that for first years. (Interview, Lecturer 1)

Though there was some evidence of a need for a theoretical framework to enhance understanding such as conceptual depth in the knowledge required, this was arguably rarely at the level called for in the literature. However, it needs to be borne in mind that this analysis considered the materials of a first-year level of study and that more conceptual depth and abstraction might be attended to in later years of study:

At this level it’s more conceptual ... at the first year I don’t expect them to be that critical but if you are, that’s fine. (Interview, Lecturer 3)

So I don’t go into too much detail because it’s first year. (Interview, Lecturer 2)

However, it could be expected that the first year would lay the platform for expected ways of thinking and provide critical engagement with core concepts. Indeed, there was ample evidence that the first-year courses introduced students to the range of key ideas of the field, such as workplace roles, but this was also done in a fairly neutral and technical way:

So in terms of unit three, that’s where you explain the roles and functions of the executives. (Interview, Lecturer 6)

Where the textbooks addressed complex concerns, for example, “Public Administration as an activity” in Chapter One of the prescribed textbook for Ethos of Public Administration by Du Toit and Van der Waldt (1999), there was scope for fairly significant SD. However, our analysis suggested that the level of engagement remained fairly “everyday” and developed little by way of ensuring a specialist understanding. For example, the chapter includes as study objectives:

You should be able to: describe Public Administration as an activity, state in one sentence where Public Administration is carried out, ... describe the two types of functions of modern governments and explain the primary goal and criterion of government services. (Du Toit and Van der Waldt 1999, 7)

In the discussion about “Public Administration as a Discipline”, the study objectives were again at a fairly simplified level and thus weaker SD: “You should be able to describe administration as a general system that is found in any institution/organisation and that results in products and services” (Du Toit and Van der Waldt 1999, 39).

The textbook also described the various paradigms that had been dominant in Public Administration over the years and the impact that these paradigms have had (Du Toit and Van der Waldt 1999). This was also potentially the place where the students would be introduced to some of the powerful theories underpinning the field with the inclusion of denser disciplinary concepts which would have strengthened SD. But the knowledge was at a relatively low level as it entailed a description of facts with weaker SD. Procedural knowledge was also strongly evident as the textbook included descriptions of products, services and functions performed by a government that remained at a level of reciting of neutral facts and had little by way of critical engagement or conceptual depth. For example, the prescribed book for Regional, Metropolitan and Local Government by Gildenhuys and Knipe (2006, 1) explained how government institutions were shaped by the constitution: “The student should understand the Constitution as the ultimate law organising the government institutions and the common affairs of a nation”, and it showed how the Constitution determined “the authority and functions of the government” (Gildenhuys and Knipe 2006, 5). In all cases, such discussions were primarily in the form of reporting seemingly neutral facts or processes, rather than engaging in conceptual deliberations.

In addition, in the Self-Management Study Guide, weaker SD characterised the module as students were required to “explain what self-management means”, “manage time more effectively” and explain “training as a concept”. These concepts were largely described as neutral facts to be memorised rather than complex concepts open to critical engagement. In Public Decision-Making, students were introduced to concepts that potentially entailed some depth of understanding: “What is a decision?”, “The nature of decision-making” and definitions of “Policy” and “Policy Analysis” to “Steps in systematic decision-making” and “The policy-making process” (Public Decision-Making Study Guide). But the focus was predominantly on the “steps” and “process” of such issues, rather than much in the way of abstraction or condensation (Public Decision-Making Study Guide).

The Regional, Metropolitan and Local Administration Study Guide appeared to indicate an increased SD, for example, “The overall purpose of this module is to provide students with the required knowledge of the theory on the right of existence and the functions of sub-national authorities in a state from a South African perspective”. While much of the focus seemed to remain at a fairly low level requiring memorisation of structures, there was some evidence of encouraging students to grapple at a more complex level, for example, “Discuss the right of existence and the functions of sub-

national authorities in the contemporary state” (Regional, Metropolitan and Local Administration Study Guide). The study guide mainly dealt with the processes of authorities rather than any engagement with conceptual understandings.

Conclusion

The current study was undertaken to consider what kinds of knowledge and knowers were being legitimated in the first year of the Public Management diploma and Public Administration degree programmes and whether students were being given access to powerful knowledge. The type of knowledge and knower that is legitimated in these programmes is particularly significant as the programmes prepare students for public service, which Kroukamp (2011, 20–21) emphasises as being especially significant in order for South Africa to become a country that functions well and eradicates inequities.

The study findings have characterised the programmes as regions drawing on a variety of other disciplines and fashioned by the practices of the working world. The curriculum was structured as a knowledge code with knowledge, skills and processes strongly emphasised and a weaker emphasis on developing or legitimating particular attributes and dispositions. As a result, SR were backgrounded in the programmes and the conclusion is that demonstrating a specific workplace demeanour and disposition was not crucial for success. There have been a number of calls for the professional fields of Public Management and Public Administration to play a role in promoting democratic and participatory public services and to demonstrate a concern with the fostering of a just and equitable society (Kroukamp 2011; Van Dijk and Thornhill 2011). However, the need to develop a disposition related to such ideologies was not much in evidence in the programmes analysed, which tended rather to focus on the acquisition of knowledge. The literature indicated that the Public Administration degree was theoretically and conceptually stronger in comparison to the Public Management diploma. Although this was evidenced in this case study, the level of knowledge was significantly lower in the Public Administration degree. Furthermore, the facts and not theoretical conceptualisation mainly comprised knowledge, with an emphasis on skills development rather than the acquisition of powerful knowledge.

These lower levels of knowledge reduced the possibilities for contributing to knowledge creation through further postgraduate study or other research, with a low probability of the students becoming active in the field of production (Bernstein 1999) and developing and strengthening the discipline here. In addition, as the field draws on regions with their own unstable knowledge base and on singulars that are relatively young, the study finding was that this weakened the knowledge base of the programmes.

The field was further fragmented by lecturer understandings that were localised and module specific and not of a holistic view of the constitution of the field. A lack of

conceptual base and a permeable field could also result in knowledge shifts due to lecturer preference.

The question now is the response of the programmes to the above research findings. To enable a consistent discussion on the multiple disciplines the programmes draw on, lecturers need to demonstrate awareness of these disciplines in their teaching, as there was proof in the study of only one lecturer doing this explicitly in her class. To pursue the discussion about the development of a holistic theoretical frame, there needs to be ongoing interrogation of the effect of disciplines on the field. This would enhance the development of a philosophical base of the field and a critical examination of the role of the sector in society.

This would entail shifts in the material and the textbooks, as well as shifts in academic identities from being the teachers of core skills to critical members of a complex field. To enable students' epistemological access to "powerful knowledge" (Wheelahan 2013; Young 2011; 2012), more conceptual knowledge would have to be included in both the diploma and degree programmes. Finally, the academy would need to take seriously the calls to ensure that Public Management and Public Administration programmes move beyond context-dependent skills and begin to include an exposure to critical powerful forms of knowledge, also called for by student movements, and the development of particular attributes and dispositions.

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