

INAUGURAL LECTURE

of

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**IN SEARCH OF A CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL FOCUS
FOR TEACHING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**



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IN SEARCH OF A CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL FOCUS FOR TEACHING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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INTRODUCTION

Critics have always questioned the justification of Public Administration as discipline. Its lack of a unifying theoretical framework and its functional focus has resulted in research which is not considered to be reflective of a mature science. The teaching of Public Administration is a relatively new discipline and separate schools and departments of Public Administration in South Africa only exist since the 1960s. However, the current nature of the South African society as democratic and developmental with its emphasis on governance as paradigmatic approach necessitates a re-evaluation of the educational focus and locus of Public Administration Education. The following is an excerpt from the address and focus is placed on the development of Public Administration education, its current focus in teaching Public Administration and concludes by providing a profile of what the current Public Administration student should look like.

A BRIEF BACKGROUND

During the 1990s scholars in Public Administration raised concern for the state of the Discipline and specifically questioned what influenced its research agenda. Kirlin (2001:140) states that "*Public administration must be a profession and a field of inquiry in service to society at large*". Behn (1995:314) argues that any field of inquiry should be defined in terms of the big questions characterising such a field of inquiry. By asking the big questions, scholars will start talking about it, the latest research published on it will be scrutinised and scholars will ask how they, through their own research, contribute to a greater understanding of these questions. Kirlin (2001:140) maintains that the big questions should focus on the consequence and value for the larger society in which

public administration is embedded. However, consensus was never reached about the nature of these big questions in Public Administration and various authors argued different viewpoints.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION EDUCATION

“a fateful question seems posed: does Public Administration, by becoming everything in general, thereby become nothing in particular?” (Dwight Waldo)

The emergence of Public Administration as a specialised academic programme is a relatively new development, even though the practice of it is as old as civilization itself. Even in Biblical times, Egyptian and Israelite kings appointed overseers to direct, control and generally manage the affairs of the king. They were involved in infrastructure development, overseeing the division of food in times of drought, making decisions regarding who should be acknowledged in the king’s palace. They were responsible for the execution of public business on behalf of the king and were held accountable should business fail to impress the king. During the Middle Ages, rulers and kings have appointed specialists to conduct and oversee the general business of government and the state.

From the 17th century onwards France acknowledged and trained officials in what would develop into Policy Sciences in the 1950s. Verheijen and Connaughton (2003:834) describe Policy Science as the study of what government does, why they do it and what difference it is meant to make to society. Thus, even though the French focused on Policy Science, no real distinction could be made between it and Public Administration. In 1729, Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia established professorships for the training of public officials in service to the king, which came to be known as Kameralism. During the 19th century and with the move away from autocratic to democratic forms of government, the focus in Public Administration changed to what was known as *Verwaltungslehre*, promoted by Lorenz von Stein, who is considered to be a founding father of what is studied as administrative law today. However, written in German,

Verwaltungslehre was largely confined to Germany, while in France scholars such as Bonin (1808) and Vivien (1845) published works calling for a separate discipline of Public Administration (Hanekom, 1988:67-68).

European Public Administration developed in close relation to the development of the state. The traditional European Continent approach to Public Administration Education is to see it as Public and Administrative Law, with the United Kingdom being the obvious exception to this rule. After World War II a specific reorientation of Public Administration Education was initiated through the creation of the Institutes d'Etudes Politiques (IEP) in 1945 and the École nationale d'administration (ÉNA). The IEP developed the first interdisciplinary Public Administration programme and a gradual move away from Public Law ensued. Between 1955 and 1970, and specifically after the Fulton Commission in 1968 published its renewed call for professionalism in public service through improvement in managerial and analytical capabilities, more multi- and inter-disciplinary programmes in Public Administration were developed in Finland, Germany, Belgium and the United Kingdom. The first to offer a degree in Public Administration in the United Kingdom was the Sheffield Polytechnic in 1968 with a noticeable applied and vocational emphasis. The purpose was to educate specialists and not generalists, while also ensuring an appropriate emphasis on Managerialism, which was sorely lacking at that time (Jones, 2012:125). A second wave of developments in the 1980s in the Netherlands, Ireland, and Portugal resulted because of the changing entry requirements for public servants in those countries. The current emphasis in the focus of Public Administration seems to be inter-disciplinary and located in general Social and Political Science programmes, with the Balkan countries, including Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia, showing a strong preference for management and economics-based programmes (Verheijen & Connaughton, 2003:836-838).

Scholars generally accept that the first call for a separate qualification in Public Administration was made by Woodrow Wilson in his seminal work "A Study of Administration" published in 1887 where he considered it a necessity that administration

be studied in a systematic and scientific manner. Even though developments in Europe precede Wilson's essay, the first official Public Administration curriculum was taught at Johns Hopkins University between 1884-1896 comprising subjects such as politics, economics, history and law. Van Dijk and Thornhill (2011:7) state that the curriculum was however not taught anywhere else and was soon replaced by a more practical, applied and efficiency-minded administrative management framework. Rabin, Hildreth and Miller (2007:725-726) argue that the development of the Society for the Promotion of Training for Public Service in 1914, as forerunner to the American Society for Public Administration, led to an increased focus on professionalism and an enhanced knowledge base which in turn resulted in a marked increase in public administration programmes offered by higher education institutions.

The curriculum developed during this period and based on the POSDCORB (planning, organising, staffing, direction, coordination, reporting and budgeting) formula would become the fundamental definition for public administration curriculum development and placed an emphasis on teaching management as a series of skills. Two specific universities had a strong formative influence on the teaching of the Discipline, namely Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University and the School of Citizenship and Public Administration at the University of Southern California. During the 1920s and 1930s the Maxwell School absorbed the activities conducted by the Training School of the National Institute for Public Administration who was headed by Luther Gulick and thus bringing practical application as the foundation for Public Administration Education. The founders of the Maxwell School, George Davenport, Luther Gulick and William Mosher, all believed and promoted an educational philosophy that built on administrative professionalism to combat political corruption and administrative inefficiency. The School of Citizenship and Public Administration at the University of Southern California developed both an undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum focusing on the prevailing norms of efficiency and effectiveness by introducing business techniques as part of Public Administration Education (Elwood, 1985:6).

Meanwhile, in South Africa, the teaching of Public Administration at university level was first provided by the Transvaal University College, which was a college of the University of South Africa (UNISA), until it became the University of Pretoria in 1930. Students enrolled for the B Econ (Public Administration) degree, and official lectures in Public Administration at UNISA started in 1955. Public Administration was considered to be part of Political Science and the then University of the Orange Free State, now University of the Free State, was the first to establish a separate Department of Public Administration in 1964. By 1987, 12 South African universities established their own Public Administration departments (Cloete, 1988:95-96) and today only one university, namely the University of Cape Town, still considers Public Administration as part of Political Science. Van Dijk and Thornhill (2011:10-11) argue that the current focus of the Public Administration curriculum is influenced greatly by the fact that almost all the current departments and schools are located within faculties of economic, commerce, law and management sciences.

The location of the schools and departments of Public Administration also has an impact on the combination of subjects included in a formal qualification. With the exception of universities of technology and comprehensive universities, the table below presents an overview of institutions, the location and name of the department or school, and the combination of subjects included in a typical undergraduate Public Administration degree.

Table 1: Current locus and focus in teaching undergraduate Public Administration

Institution	Faculty	School/Department	Degree	Subjects
Fort Hare University	Faculty of Management and Commerce	School of Public Management and Development	B Admin	Public Administration Political Science Economics Human Resource Management
North West University	• Mafikeng Campus – Faculty of Commerce	• Department of Public Administration	• B Admin degree (Public and Development Admin & Local	Public Administration Economics Business Management Industrial Psychology Accounting

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potchefstroom Campus - Faculty of Arts Vaal Triangle Campus – Faculty of Basic Sciences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School of Social and Government Studies Department of Public Management 	<p>Government)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> BA degree (Development and Management) 	<p>Statistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Management Political Science Economics Industrial Psychology Sociology
Stellenbosch University	Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences	School of Public Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BA in Development and the Environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geography and Environment Studies Public and Development Management Sociology or Social Anthropology
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BCom in Management Sciences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public and Development Management Industrial Psychology Economics Marketing Entrepreneurship
University of KwaZulu Natal	Faculty of Law and Management Studies	School of Public Administration	BAdmin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Administration Economics Human Resource Management Local Government
University of Limpopo	Faculty of Law and Management	School of Economics and Management	BAdmin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Administration Political Science Business Management Economics
University of Pretoria	Economic and Management Sciences	School of Public Management and Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BAdmin in Public Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Administration Political Science Industrial Psychology Economics
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BAdmin in Public Administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Administration
University of the Free State	Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences	Department of Public Management	BAdmin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Management Municipal Management Organisational Psychology Political Science
University of the Western Cape	Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences	Department of Public Administration	BAdmin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Administration Political Science Economics Industrial Psychology Management
University of Cape Town	Faculty of Humanities	Department of Political Studies	BSocSci in Public Policy and Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Politics Public Policy Philosophy Economics

Rhodes University does not offer Public Administration in any of its undergraduate programmes, while the Graduate School of Public and Development Management at the University of the Witwatersrand specialises in postgraduate programmes. The combination of subjects is meant to ensure that together with the administrative knowledge and skills, a student is able to perform in a variety of functional fields, such as human resource management, financial management, policy analysis, work study or control. The content of the Public Administration/Public Management modules are generic in nature and include modules in Public Policy, Public Human Resource Management, Public Financial Management, Organisational Analysis, Control, Monitoring and Evaluation, Local Government and the foundations of Public Administration and/or Public Management. The argument can be made that the current focus and locus of Public Administration, whether called Public Administration, Public Management or both, is interdisciplinary with a specific emphasis on management skills.

THE PROFILE OF A PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION STUDENT

Sherwood (2009:27) reasons that there *“is an urgent need to develop a new generation of entrepreneurial leaders who can bring about transformational change. Talented public leaders are needed... It is critical to get young people excited about the responsibilities and opportunities of public service in all its manifestations. The earlier in their careers that exceptional students begin to think of themselves as future public leaders who can promote a better society, the greater the likelihood they will become such leaders.”* This is provided in stark contrast to arguments set forth by the former Minister of Public Service and Administration, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi (2003) who stated that Public Administration and Management schools and departments are unable to produce quality graduates. Furthermore, Mokgoro (1991:30-35) stated that that Public Administration and Management degrees do not attract students who seem to be interested in public service delivery. The reality is that schools and departments of Public Administration and Management continue to fight a battle for professional recognition and students’ choices to apply for their degrees are taken because of the

low academic requirements set for selection and entry into Public Administration and Management degrees.

The above may have detrimental effects on the ability of the state to function in its developmental and democratic context. Denhardt (2001:527) argues that graduates in Public Administration, specifically in undergraduate education, primarily move into technical or analytical positions, such as budget analysts, human resource practitioners or administrative assistants, which necessitate both a functional competence as well as an understanding of their environment and contribution to public service delivery. The emphasis on practice related skills as focus for teaching Public Administration becomes evident.

However, Vil-Nkomo (1997:9) argues that a strictly functional emphasis in the teaching of Public Administration and Management is reductionist in nature and will not enable a student to develop highly specialised knowledge or skills, which implies a lack of in-depth understanding of the complex realities of practicing public administration. Cloete (2010:45) explores the difference between “*learning about*” to “*learning to be*”. Gates and Doubleday (1978:895) reason that higher education should create the balance between *doing* public administration (functional emphasis) and *being* public administration (the leading and serving role in public administration). Van Dijk and Thornhill (2011:6) argue that balance between skills and intellect needs to be demonstrated by public administration graduates. So the question remains – what should the profile of the Public Administration and Management student look like?

Outcomes-based education prescribes a specific focus towards student-centeredness. Coupled with that is the concept of learning as facilitated through teaching. To learn about a phenomenon is to be able to produce facts and figures, while learning to be manifests itself in the physical, intellectual, emotional and ethical integration of the student as a whole being (Cloete, 2010:45) – thus an emphasis on all-round or whole brain development. The deduction from the above is made that the developmental,

democratic context of the public sector, coupled with the current governance paradigm and emphasis on functional skills development necessitates a student who is able to demonstrate a holistic understanding of all the complexities inherent in the study of Public Administration. Cloete (2010:48) describes this as the ability to demonstrate:

- on a conceptual level, knowledge and understanding of oneself and others, of behaviour, culture, history, issues, processes and concepts;
- on an affective level, valuing experience-reflection, accepting, respecting, appreciating oneself and others; and
- on an active level, acting through decision-making, communication and conflict management.

From the above, the argument is made that keeping this profile of a Public Administration student in mind necessitates a re-evaluation of the teaching methods, classroom behaviour and activities and assessment methods used in the contemporary teaching of Public Administration. The purpose of the excerpt is not to explore the principles in achieving student engagement, but suffice it to say that bringing in reflection and asking the question “why this matters to me” should become a cornerstone in every educational activity. Ventriss (1991:8) presents the outcome of such an educational focus as “achieving educated citizenry.” The education of the Public Administration student is much broader than what is currently focused upon and a more trans-disciplinary approach to determining a contemporary educational focus is needed.

TOWARDS A SYNTHESIS

Trans-disciplinarity is the brain-child of Jean Piaget who first introduced the concept at the Interdisciplinarity – Teaching and Research Problems in Universities Conference held in 1970 (Bimpotsos & Petridou, 2012:912). Since trans-disciplinarity developed out of multi- and inter-disciplinarity, the intention is to generate an integrative view of the world and knowledge in order to understand and solve complex problems. Trans-disciplinarity should not be seen as some super-disciplinary approach, but rather as

offering a more holistic and systemic seeing of the world (Bimpotsos & Petridou, 2012:913). Trans-disciplinarity exhibits, according to Klein (2004), three essential characteristics, including:

- an identification of major social problems in which academics advise, but are not drivers;
- practitioners and academics collectively participating in mutual learning; and
- creating a synergy, new ways of seeing and solving problems, which would not have been possible without the contributions of all disciplines.

Steiner and Posch (2006:880) explain trans-disciplinarity as moving away from creating a science of or about people, to creating a science for or with people. Furthermore, trans-disciplinary teaching is not characterised by the subject-object relationship evident in an academic teaching about society, but rather a subject-subject relationship where intense interaction between academic and practitioner is evident. The purpose is to ensure a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of not only the theory of a societal problem, but also its practical nature, thereby contributing to a more innovative and integrated solution or problem-solving activity.

The above seem to be relevant to a network-oriented, governance paradigm in the teaching of Public Administration. Van der Waldt (2012) argues that governance is a product of trans-disciplinarity with Public Administration and Political Science considered as its primary contributing disciplines. Secondary disciplines would include Economics, Sociology, Law, Management Sciences, Development Studies and so forth. The trans-disciplinary approach to teaching emphasises that no one discipline is more important or more valuable than another. The aim is to ensure mutual learning. But the argument is this address is that constructing a contemporary focus for the teaching of Public Administration already implies a more trans-disciplinary approach. Governance as paradigm offers a perspective towards facilitating trans-disciplinarity, while the choices of disciplines involved should be determined by the democratic, developmental and functional realities of the current South African government.

CONCLUSION

The excerpt highlights that in the teaching of Public Administration both theory and practice are considered. Specifically in its practical context, the contemporary democratic, development and functional nature of Public Administration Education should receive attention. Current academic offerings are mainly functional and generic in nature, which do not seem to deliver the required graduate.

The choice to study Public Administration is also not always taken out of consideration for public service delivery, but rather because it is seen as an easy in into the higher education system. The requirements of holistic learning should compel higher education institutions to reconsider its entry and placement requirements for the study of Public Administration. The excerpt concludes by making specific observations regarding the trans-disciplinary approach to the teaching of Public Administration, which has repercussion for the focus and locus of the discipline. Public Administration is indeed as a cross-road and further debate and research is needed to investigate the contemporary focus of teaching such an important discipline.

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