Voices of Educational Developers on the Enabling and Constraining Conditions in the Uptake of Professional Development Opportunities by Academics at a South African University

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ABSTRACT What are the cultural, structural and agential conditions which enable and constrain the professional development of academics in their role as teachers, which either encourage or discourage them to take advantage of professional development opportunities afforded by the selected South African University (named the University of Higher Learning (UHL) in this paper to protect its identity)? In order to answer the above question, this paper which is part of a wider National Research Foundation (NRF) Research project involving eight universities, sought to deconstruct the narratives of educational developers on the enabling and constraining conditions with regard to the professional development of academics as teachers at a historically White South African university. The study adopted a qualitative case study approach. Ten educational developers constituted the purposive sample for the study. Individual interviews were held with the educational developers using a semi-structured interview schedule. Using the Archerian social realist theoretical framework qualitative data was analysed by first transcribing interview tapes and coding the transcribed data. Content analysis was then used to analyse data thematically. The study found constraining factors which included perceived lack of time, overload and general undervaluing of teaching when compared to research. Some promoting factors included the existence of an established teaching and learning centre as well as the existence of teaching excellence awards. Based on the findings, the researchers conclude that that there are a number of structural, cultural and agential factors promoting or hindering academics' uptake of professional development opportunities and recommend that teaching and learning centres in universities should continue to engage academics to ensure that they prioritise the undertaking of professional development courses. Professional development courses should also be tailor-made to ensure that they answer the felt needs of academics in different faculties and departments.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major changes in higher education in South Africa since the advent of democracy has been the massification of higher education and an increased heterogeneity of the student population. In terms of equity, concerted efforts have been made to ensure that higher education enrolments and success rates reflect the social composition of the broader society. The increased enrolments and diversity in terms of the student population has meant that academics have to change their practice and adapt

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their methodologies to deal with, for example, large classes and a diverse group of students. This has led to foregrounding the significance of professionalising teaching and learning through staff development. A cohort study conducted in South Africa by Scott et al. (2007) indicates that five years after entering university, only 30% of the total first-time entering student intake into the sector had graduated. Citing a more recent cohort study, the Council on Higher Education (2014) shows that for the cohort of students that entered public HEIs, ex-cluding UNISA, in 2006 and enrolled for 3-year degree programmes, only 29% completed their degrees in the minimum expected, or regulation time. In light of these alarming figures, Quinn (2012a:1) observes, *"The national call for improved teaching and learning quality and better throughput has focused the lens on academic staff development; simultaneously academic staff themselves are seeking ways to improve their prac-*

tice and understand their contexts in more ped-agogically informed ways."

In a foreword to Scott et al. (2007: v), a Council on Higher Education(CHE) publication, Dr Lis Lange emphasises the need to develop more responsive methodologies to respond to the diverse range of students in higher education. She observes that, "Many of these institutions face the challenge of looking into both the effectiveness and the conceptual underpinnings of their organisation of teaching and learning, the relationship between teaching and learning and research, and the development of the necessary mechanisms and processes to engage in a critical assessment of the practice of teaching."

Scott et al. (2007) advise that all academic teaching staff should in time gain a basic level of educational knowledge, sufficient for effectively implementing appropriate educational approaches. The authors argue that some level of professionalisation of teaching is increasingly being required of academic staff in developed countries, whose educational challenges are not as demanding as South Africa's. Such a call means that institutions in South Africa have to design appropriate educational qualifications for their staff members. In the same vein, Badat (2010) calls for the enhancement of the academic capabilities of universities to mount effective academic development programmes. Advocating for the professionalisation of teaching, McWilliam (2002: 290) argues that, "In universities, professional development activities provide scripts for turning ourselves into better (more professional) academics".

To actualise the professionalisation of teaching a new crop of practitioners has emerged in universities variously known as academic development or educational development practitioners. Quinn (2012a: 2) indicates that, "In the international literature the terms academic/educational development are most often associated with academic staff development. In South Africa, the term academic development can be used to refer to a number of interlinked areas of work such as student support and development (including foundation provision); curriculum development; institutional development (including quality assurance work) and staff development." For Ndebele (2014), a key component of academic/educational development is the improvement of teaching with the express purpose of improving student learning. The significance of educational development work is recognised by Scott et al. (2007) who recommend that there needs to be a sufficient number of educational specialists, at appropriate academic levels, to provide specialised educational design and teaching services, to provide professional development opportunities, and to disseminate systematic educational knowledge within the groupings of academic staff, departments or programme teams, that are responsible for mainstream provision. Scott et al. (2007: 61) argue that:

There is an important need for a sound level of educational expertise in a number of mainstream academics…sufficient for effectively leading and managing the design and delivery of mainstream courses and programmes, and guiding the selection and work of programme and large-course teams.

The above assertion emphasises the need for professional development courses for academics in universities to assist them gain knowledge and expertise in the dispensation of duties as university teachers.

Role of the Educational Developer/Practitioner in Enabling Participation by Academics in Professional Development in their Role as Teachers

Rivers (2005:1) observes that tertiary institutions "invest substantially in developing and training their academic staff to improve the quality of their teaching, in the expectation that better teaching will improve student learning." Rivers (2005) further observes that research and a plethora of literature has proved beyond an iota of doubt that good teaching produces positive effects on student outcomes and that through numerous academic development interventions lecturers in universities can be assisted to improve the quality of teaching. Effective academic staff development programmes should be "proactive, providing a culture and context that aims to be supportive" (Jacklin and Le Riche 2009). Educational developers play an important role in this regard. One of the roles is that of ensuring that policies governing academic staff development are in place. Programmes will then have to be put in place to ensure that policies are operationalized by way of different activities to ensure that academic staff members are effectively developed. Programmes and policies were

some of the structural factors that this study sought to establish as having effect on academics' uptake of professional development courses.

Educational developers have a critical role to promote the professional development of staff in relation to their duties as teachers which includes teaching activities, curriculum design, and assessment of students. Brew and Boud (1996) advocate for a holistic approach to academic professional staff development in which individual needs, career development as well as institutional needs are all catered for. The positioning of educational developers in a university has to be interrogated in an attempt to determine their effectiveness. Beckton (2009: 67) argues that:

Educational developers must work with staff within the faculties if they are to have any effect, which means that they cannot realistically present themselves as loci of teaching expertise. Even if teaching practices within faculties occasionally leave something to be desired, practitioners are unlikely to respond well to corrective measures that originate outside their own disciplines.

It is clear from the above assertion that educational developers should not prescribe solutions to teaching and learning matters to academics but rather they should work hand in glove with them as co-researchers into challenges in teaching and learning and provide research – led solutions to the identified challenges.

Rivers (2005:2) identifies a number of activities that educational developers could engage in so that academic staff members are assisted to improve their teaching practice. Some of the strategies include:

- Short training courses
- Academic work groups
- Peer evaluation, feedback and support
- Effective use of students evaluation reports
- Long term teaching qualifications.

It is the role of educational developers to engage in needs analysis studies so as to be able to ascertain the nature of short courses required for the improvement of lecturers as university teachers. Different academics with strengths of particular areas, for example in assessment may have a work group established where they research into problematic issues and present findings and recommendations to fellow academics. This will ensure the implementation of local and relevant solutions to unique problems that may obtain in a university.

Lueddeke (1997: 156) also states that one of the crucial roles of educational developers is to offer consultation services in areas such as teaching, curriculum development and quality assessment and they may also be responsible for disseminating good practices by way of workshops or newsletters. In the use of appropriate technology in teaching and learning, educational developers should also be instrumental in assisting academic staff members. Academic Development Centres manned by educational developers should be responsible for providing support for the development of learning technologies in teaching, but whether this includes media services and technical support for ICT or whether the emphasis is on using e-learning in course design varies.

Carew et al. (2008) cited in Ndebele (2014) warns that educational developers need to be aware of, and be sensitive to the fact that they work in complex, and sometimes contested contexts and that the range of their potential roles and identities is highly varied given the diversity of organisational cultures, drivers and needs within contemporary tertiary institutions. In the same vein, Lazerson et al. (2000) pass a cautionary statement that the work of educational developers in universities is not very easy as they have to grapple with deep seated institutional values and behaviour systems. This can be seen in the traditional view of the university that placed more emphasis on research compared to teaching and learning. All reward and promotion systems in the university are based on research endeavours of academics. Educational developers have to find innovative ways of dealing with negative attitudes towards professional development courses in teaching and learning by academic staff members. Quinn (2012c) also states that academics in universities often hold the view that good research translates into good teachers, which may not be necessarily true. Quinn (2012c) further observes that academics who hold such a view may see the duty of academic developers as unnecessary interference with their duties.

Leask (2006) also contends that critical areas for educational developers entail the need to design staff development programmes that empower academics in various academic issues such as deterrence of plagiarism among staff and students as well as dealing with student diversity, among others. This shows that aca-

demic developers assist academics in all aspects of the curriculum in order to enhance teaching and learning. Cook (2001) cited in Taylor (2005: 32) observes that:

Academic developers collaborate with colleagues to build teaching and learning capacity not only among individual teachers, but also through curriculum development.

The above observation buttresses the importance of educational developers as critical in advancing the teaching and learning agenda of any university. Gandolfo (1998) also reveals that academic developers should be instrumental in the integration of technology on teaching.

Gosling (2008) cited in Beckton (2010: 21) offers a more comprehensive view of the role of educational developers as they work in academic development units in universities by stating that this entails:

……….the encouragement of innovation in teaching and learning, implementation of institutional teaching and learning strategies; providing professional development for staff; support for students; promoting the use of learning technologies; and carrying out research into teaching and learning.

What this shows is that the educational developers should operate from an informed point of view in which they offer strategic support in wide-ranging issues pertaining to teaching and learning as well as research into such issues. This shows that educational developers themselves should be thoroughly grounded in the latest developments and trends in teaching and learning so as to work effectively in professionally developing academics. It is also important to note that educational development operations are dependent on contextual, structural, cultural and historical factors in individual institutions hence different from institution to institution.

Taylor (2005) makes an important observation that educational developers are academic leaders. This role is drawn from the role of providing academic leadership that educational developers play. In this role Taylor (2005: 32) states that academic leadership involves critical processes such as 'knowing, teaching and learning in community.' The educational developer has to be knowledgeable in terms of the demands of academic development broadly, specific discipline knowledge as well as teaching and learning theories and practices in order to assist the academics. Learning in community entails hav-

ing the best practices in teaching and learning and the ability to ensure that goals for learning are set and reflection engaged in to feed into the learning programme and improve it. Academics however sometimes do not take up professional development opportunities provided by educational developers hence the purpose of the paper was to establish educational developers' views on the enabling and constraining conditions in the uptake these professional development opportunities by academics.

Why Uptake of Professional Development Initiatives by Academics is Slow

'Hogarth et al. (2004) observe that there are a plethora of factors that affect university academic staff endeavours to undertake professional development courses. Taylor (2000) and Mayes (2001) state that rapid developments in universities such as the use of new technologies, the internationalisation of education as well as increased student diversity make it essential for academic staff members in universities to undertake professional development courses. Despite this, many are keen on undertaking such professional development courses.

Billett (1998) points out that staff attitudes to new technologies may negatively affect their keenness to undertake professional development courses. Quinn (2012) cited in Maphosa (2014) observes that academic staff members in universities generally resist attempts at programmes to professionally enhance their skills in the area of teaching and learning and argues that one of the reasons has to do with change in attitudes. This could be true of older academics who may find it a burden to learn new ways of teaching such as e-learning and the utilisation of latest technologies in teaching. On the other hand, younger academics are often enthusiastic about the use of technologies and may thus be very willing to undertake courses that enhance their professional practice. In underscoring the importance of professional development programmes in enhancing academics' practice, Wills et al. (1997) categorically state that:

If there is to be a paradigm shift in the way educational institutions deliver education, there will need to be a paradigm shift in staff development.

University academic staff members also have competing and equally demanding responsibili-

ties in teaching, research and community engagement and these often take the bulk of the academics' time that they find very little or no time to engage in professional development courses and other sustained academic development courses (Collis and Moonen 2001; Laurillard 2002).

Steel (2004) contends that apart from academic pressures, lecturers' resistance to undertake professional development courses is as a result of undervaluing teaching and learning among their core duties. This is true in institutions where a lot of emphasis is given to research and teaching is not given the same emphasis. Tenure and promotion in most universities are based on research outputs and not on teaching or on professional development courses attended that are related to teaching and learning. This scenario paints a picture where teaching and learning are not considered as important functions of a university. It was important to ascertain, in this study, how the issue of research dominance over teaching was viewed and how this affected academics participation in professional development courses that enhance their teaching.

The issue of institutional cultures and sub-cultures also plays a role in academics uptake of professional development courses and programmes (Land 2001). Land (2001) observes that as academic development units in universities may be new structures and they find some institutional cultures and sub-cultures having already taken root in universities and such cultures may be difficult to uproot and may work against efforts by educational development practitioners. Land (2004) notes what he terms a 'political' culture that may be prevalent in a university, which is marked by conflict. Such a culture may stifle academic development efforts.

Day (1993) argues that academics in universities may not take up professional development courses if there are no professional demands on the need to take up such courses. This shows that professional development courses should be tied to remuneration, promotion and tenure requirements for academics to feel the need to take up such courses. An example could be the need to ensure that all lecturers acquire a teaching and learning qualification as a requirement for tenure or promotion.

Day (1993) further observes that professional development courses offered in universities should be relevant to the felt needs of the academics so that academics appreciate the importance of such courses and participate in them. There is, therefore, need for needs assessment exercises by educational developers before coming up with professional development courses for academics. As stated previously, courses should be properly marketed so that the relevance and importance of such courses is clearly explained to intended beneficiaries.

Institutional management support and recognition also play an important role in academics participation in professional development courses. Maphosa and Wadesango (2014) urge academic developers to mount regular and periodic professional development workshops on teaching and learning to academic staff in the university and to provide platforms on which academics in the university engage in conversation about teaching and learning. Departmental and Faculty systems should ensure that members are encouraged to attend such courses and time is made available. In South African universities, like in many other universities in the world, where large class teaching is common, it becomes problematic for academics to find time for professional development courses as all their time is consumed in preparation for teaching, teaching and assessment of students. It is important in the context of the present study to establish structural factors that enable or constrain academics' uptake of professional development programmes.

Theoretical Framework

This study is premised on the socialist realist work of Archer (1995, 1996, 2000), which itself builds on the critical realist philosophy of Bhaskar (1978, 1979). According to Bhaskar (1978, 1979), like positivism, critical realism accepts that there exists a reality independent of our representation of it but acknowledges that our knowledge of reality is subject to all kinds of historical and other influences.

Bhaskar (1978, 1979), identifies three domains of reality which can be conceptually separated; the empirical, the actual and the real. As Gijselincks (2003) explains, the empirical is what we can observe and experience. But what we can observe does not encompass everything that exists. The actual consists of events which take place when the causal powers of the real

are activated; these can sometimes be observable, but not always (Birkett 2011). The actual thus consists of what actually happens in the world, whether we observe it or not. At the level of the real are the causal mechanisms and structures that produce actual events, a subset of which is then empirically observed (Bhaskar 1978, 1979). These causal powers which exist at the level of the real exert influence when activated. In an interview with Hansen (2005: 61) on a question on what a mechanism was, Bhaskar responded, "A *mechanism* is just something that makes something else happen."As Danermark et al. (2002: 5) show, "… to switch from events to mechanisms means switching the attention to what produces the events – not just to the events themselves."

Social Realism

Archer (1995, 1996), working at the level of the real in Bhaskar critical realist theory developed a social realist analytical framework through which the underlying causal mechanisms at the level of the real can be analysed using the concepts, structure, culture and agency. Using Archer's framework, Archer (1995) presents the social world as comprising of the 'parts' (culture and structure) and the 'people' (agency). Meanwhile, Boughey and Niven (2012) posit that Archer's work is based on an argument against the tendency in sociological analyses to conflate the 'parts' (that is, structure and culture) with the 'people' (agency). Social realist theory contends that structure, culture and agency can be analysed separately as they are separate phenomena that have separate causal affects.

The structural domain in Archer's social realist theory comprises things, which exist in the institution such as policies, committees, educational development centres, as well as more abstract phenomena such as race, gender, social class and knowledge structures in the disciplines. These structures, as Danermark et al. (2002) show, constrain and enable the actions of the agents (for example the educational developers), and in turn, agents reproduce and transform structures. As Kinvinen and Piiroinen (2006: 226) illustrate, "Structures exert causal influences upon subsequent interactions by shaping the situations in which later generations of people find themselves; structures are generative mechanisms that operate, do something."

The cultural milieu comprises how and what we think about things. This includes values, beliefs, attitudes, ideas, ideologies, theories and concepts which are manifest through discourses used by particular people at particular times (Quinn 2012b; Boughey 2010). Agents coming into the scene inherit a set of doctrines, theories and beliefs which dictate what can have an impact on them and these shape what agents can do (Archer 1995). Institutional policy documents that talk to issues of academic staff development would be an example of the espoused culture of the institution on staff development.

Agency refers to the personal and psychological makeup of individuals, their social roles and relates to the capacity people have to act in voluntary ways (Archer 1996). Agents can engage in concerted action to re-shape or retain the structural or cultural features they inherit. Thus, the actions of individuals and groups affect social structures by modifying them (Kinvinen and Piiroinen 2006). Referring to the interplay between culture, structure and agency, Archer (1996) shows that social structures are the outcome of past social interaction between agents which condition the context in which current agents find themselves, and the way in which current agents respond to their context shapes the social structures in which future agents find themselves.

Using examples from the educational development field, Quinn (2006: 52) illustrates how "Agents can have causal influences through the effects of the social groups to which they belong (for example, the Educational Development Unit (EDU) staff as a group); actors (for example, the director of the EDU), on the other hand, have the capacity for causal impact through their individual properties and powers given the roles and positions they occupy and the ways in which they occupy them."

This theoretical framework is used in this study to analyse the structural, cultural and agential enabling and constraining conditions in the uptake of professional development opportunities by academics as seen by agents in the field of educational development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm

The study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a systematic approach to understanding qualities, or the essential nature,

of a phenomenon within a particular context (Baxter and Jack 2008). It was the purpose of this study to undertake an in-depth analysis of cultural, structural and agential conditions which enable and constrain the professional development of academics in their role as teachers from the point of view of educational developers in a particular context. Shavelson and Towne (2002: 99) observe that qualitative studies assist in answering descriptive questions about "what is happening?" and "what or how it is happening?" This is also true of this study which sought to establish the situation on the ground by describing the participants' views. The purpose of this qualitative approach is not to make inferences about the underlying population, but to attempt to obtain insights into particular educational and social processes and practices that exist within a specific location and context (Connolly 1998).

Research Design

A case study design was utilised. Creswell (2007:73) states that in qualitative research, the researcher employs a case study design to explore "a bounded system (case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information." The present study adopted a case study strategy of inquiry to study a single case of educational developers at only one university, with the view of collecting data on their views of academics' uptake of professional development courses. Yin (2003) further explains that a case study design allows the researcher to explore individuals or organizations, simple through complex interventions, relationships, communities, or programs. In the context of this study, the researchers were able to explore individuals within an organisation in pursuit of the issue of promoting and hindering factors of academics' uptake of professional development courses.

Population and Sampling

A purposive sample of ten educational developers in one South African university constituted the sample for the study. In purposive sampling, sampling units are selected for a specific purpose on which the researcher decides (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). In the present

study, the researchers targeted all practising educational developers at the selected university. The university selected for the study was a historically white and advantaged one. It was a well resources university and the academic development unit in the university was fairly well established hence it was a good case to choose. The education developers were considered 'information-rich' sources because of their work which involved working directly with academics in ensuring that they have the relevant teaching skills.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through individual interviews with educational developers and a semi-structured interview schedule guided the interviews.

Interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and analysed. Content analysis aided analysis of interview transcriptions.

Measures to Ensure Trustworthiness

As data were collected and analyzed, researchers employed the member checking strategy to ensure that the researchers' interpretations of the data were shared with the participants. This also gave the participants the opportunity to discuss and clarify the interpretations. Dependability of data was also ensured by researchers independently coding sets of data and then meeting together to come to consensus on the emerging codes and categories.

Ethical Issues

Participants signed informed consent forms after the purpose of the study was explained to them. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. Participants were further informed they had a right to voluntarily withdraw from the study.

RESULTS

Educational Developers' Views on Constraining Factors for the Uptake of Professional Development Courses by Academics

Summary of findings from the interviews with educational development practitioners are sum-

marised in Tables 1, 2 and 3. Table 1 gives a summary of educational developers' views on constraining factors for the uptake of professional development courses by academics. The verbatim quotations below help to present in the educational developers' own words their views on constraining factors of academics' uptake of teaching development opportunities.

Verbatim Quotations on Structure

The following were some of the comments relating to workload;

People are extremely busy. Everyone has got more than enough and then there is also pressure on new academics to be finishing their masters, or doing PhD because that's what's more valuable to the department.

It is quite time consuming to do the Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGD-

HE) and people think that it detracts from their research time particularly, so that's a big one.

Definitely especially new people arriving they are very anxious perhaps about preparing for that first course they have to teach in the middle of February and then they are resentful of these four whole mornings that they have to spend on induction.

One educational developer however disputed the fact that workload had an impact, giving herself as an example of a former lecturer who taught large classes but still found time to do professional development courses. She commented:

I don't think that is the issue, when I was teaching I taught 16 hours a week which is much more than anyone else. I taught every single day and managed to do it, if the desire is strong enough one can still do it because it's just one meeting a week and an assignment.

Table 1: Educational developers' views on constraining factors for the uptake of professional development opportunities

Archerian category		Emerging constraints
Structure	-	Staff overload
Culture	-	Time consuming
	-	Fear of vulnerability due to low sense of expertise in teaching
	-	Privileging of research over teaching
	-	Departmental cultures
	-	Attitude towards teaching and learning centre
Agency	-	Poor spread of disciplinary expertise in the Centre
	-	Unwillingness to take the initiative to engage in professional development courses.

Table 2: Educational developers' views on enabling factors for the uptake of professional development opportunities

Archerian category		Emerging constraints
Structure	-	Well established teaching and learning centre
	-	Probation requirements of staff to demonstrate assessment competence.
	-	Induction programme for new staff members.
Culture	-	Valuing of teaching
Agency	-	Qualified educational development practitioners
	-	Vice Chancellor from a Higher Education background
	-	Institutional colloquium on teaching and learning

Table 3: Educational developers' views on how the uptake of professional development opportunities could be enhanced

Archerian category		Emerging constraints
Structure	-	An academy for educational development
	-	Compulsory HE teaching qualification
Culture	-	Development of scholarship in the field
	-	More incentives for teaching
	-	more informal spaces for conversations of teaching and learning
Agency	-	more contact with academic development units at other institutions by ED practitioners

Verbatim Quotations on Culture

The following are some of the educational developers' verbatim comments on cultural factors constraining academics' uptake of professional development programmes.

A lot of our colleagues don't have expertise or a lot of experience in teaching and while they may feel quite vulnerable as expects in their field we try to help them to recognize that that's okay that's a part of being here in the university but we need to work with that and build on that and develop it.

Again that varies hugely you will get some departments where its definitely very supported and then you will get others where I mean, just as an example I can tell you (name of departments supplied) I think anybody who arrives in (departments supplied) is just told that the Teaching and Learning Unit is rubbish - don't bother to go. Ironically we do kind of get the odd person who we kind of hook in and then they find something but I think it's very difficult for them because when they go back if they come up with any new idea it's just dished because it comes from Teaching and Learning Unit.

You get those odd persons particularly if they are very experienced, they come from other institutions, who kind of rolled their eyes a bit and thought that they didn't need to be there.

In most cases it seems that to have a post graduate qualification in your own field is valued much higher than working with your teaching and learning so the research is often given far higher priority.

Verbatim Quotations on Agency

Educational developers' views on agential factors constraining academics' participation in professional development programmes were captured as follows:

Nobody in the Teaching and Learning Unit is a scientist and we do I think, feel a kind of lack of (knowledge would be a wrong word) but I don't think many of us don't know enough about the sciences to be able to with absolute confidence work with scientists.

Even though we work very hard at respecting and acknowledging disciplinary differences, the scientists find it very difficult to understand initially particular educational dis-

course and so reading the papers, the long papers, 10 to 12-14 pages is very alien to scientists who are used to reading and writing one and a half page with lots of diagrams dispersed on those pages, they find it very hard.

The above quotations serve to show what the educational developers actually said on the issue of factors constraining academics in their uptake of professional development programmes.

Educational Developers' Views on Enabling Factors for the Uptake of Professional Development Opportunities

Table 2 summarises educational developers' views on enabling factors for the uptake of professional development activities by academics**.** The verbatim quotations below help to present in the educational developers' own words on their views on enabling factors of academics' uptake of professional development opportunities. In the domain of structure, the fact that the university had a well-established educational development centre was seen as an enablement for driving the educational development following extracts from interview transcripts illustrate this enabling condition;

Verbatim Quotations on Structure

Some of the Educational developers' views on structural factors enabling academics' uptake of professional development courses are captured as follows:

I think a big strength is the fact that the teaching and learning unit has been in the institution and doing staff development for such a long time. I think it's an established unit and I think people in the teaching and learning unit have developed a great deal of expertise over the last number of years.

You have to show that you meet the outcomes of the assessor course as a probationary requirement so you've got to demonstrate that and the way to demonstrate that is through producing a document, kind of assessors portfolio, one could say that. And so you can do that without doing the assessor course but very few people are able to do that. And so people are in a sense forced to engage with issues of assessment through doing the assessor course.

The views above are in contrast to those of another practitioner who felt that while the re-

quirement to demonstrate competence in assessment compelled academics to enrol for the course, in the process contributing to the uptake of professional development through the assessor course, had reservations about forcing people to learn as she was not sure if learning did take place under coercion. She had this to say:

One belief that I have about learning is that one has to have an intention to learn so it has always worried me that there is some imposition on these adult people to come and do learning and so I am wondering how much learning really happens if people come in resistance and not with an intention to learn. So that's a real dilemma for me because I find it very hard to believe that anyone who is actively resistant will learn - you know they are just not open to it .

Verbatim Quotations on Culture

Some of the views of Educational Developers' on cultural factors enabling academics' uptake of professional development courses are as follows:

We have the academic orientation program which is not necessarily compulsory it's not compulsory but its encouraged that all new staff members go and I think all of those who take part in it are always happy that they did it. It's unfortunate that all don't come but those who do they get to understand what's going on in the university ,what opportunities are there for them, what kind of support is available which they don't get from the information that they get from Human Resources.

Actually teaching is fairly highly valued at UHL .We have less trouble than in some other institutions. Rhodes does pride itself on being kind of a good teaching institution.

The other thing is policies. We have had quite strong teaching and learning policies which were accepted by the institution and all that together shows that teaching is quite important in the institution.

Verbatim Quotations on Agency

Some of the Educational Developers' views on agential factors enabling academics' uptake of professional development courses are captured as follows:

I think a big strength is the fact that the teaching and learning unit has been in the institution and doing staff development for such

a long time. I think it's an established unit and I think people in the Teaching and Learning Centre have developed a great deal of expertise over the last number of years.

We hold institutional colloquia on aspects of teaching and learning at which people who have done our courses talk every now and then.

We have got good leadership in the form of the dean and of course having a vice chancellor who is a kind of person from higher education, a sociologist I think also gives us a lot of advantages that you won't necessarily get, say, when we had a vice chancellor who was a scientist he just pretended to support us. It wasn't kind of real support.

Educational Developers' Views on How the Uptake of Professional Development Opportunities Could be Enhanced

Table 3 summarises views related to structure, culture and agency which educational developers raised as possible measures that could be considered to enhance uptake of professional development programmes.

Most of the suggestions given as shown on Table 3 focussed on the development of the educational developers themselves so they could be better able to support the academics although there were also a few suggestions aimed at the academics.

Verbatim Quotations on Measures to Enhance Uptake of Professional Development Opportunities

I think that it may be useful to have something more intensive and more highly structured like an academy. A week or 2 weeks long or a month long academy that academic developers could go to every now and then. I think that would be a useful thing.

It seems to me that it would be fine to make a professional teaching qualification a requirement like a postgraduate diploma. And I know it's easier said than done because there's always the tension between professional teaching qualification and a research degree but for me that would be one way.

I would like to see more incentives and ways of rewarding more people across the system rather than just those two people.

I would prefer to see a system where you know it isn't just a competition for the best one but different people are recognized for different things, you know, for different strengths in their teaching.

The above are some of the measures participants indicated could be utilised to enhance the uptake of professional development courses by academics.

DISCUSSION

The study found that there were numerous factors that constrained the university academics' uptake of professional development courses. The factor in the domain of structure that academics considered themselves already too overloaded to undertake staff development programmes is consistent with Cloete and Bunting's (2002) observation that the massification of the higher education system in South Africa has resulted in large teaching loads for academics. The large teaching loads impact on the quality of teaching as well as the ability of the academics in universities to undergo professional development initiatives. The study also found in the domain of culture that the university academics were generally reluctant to undertake professional development courses in teaching and learning because of the general view of holding research in high esteem when compared to teaching. This finding corroborates assertions by Steel (2004) that teaching is undervalued in universities as issues pertaining to tenure and promotion are based on one's research capability. In the same vein, Lazerson et al. (2000) pass a cautionary statement that the work of educational developers in universities is not very easy as they have to grapple with deep seated institutional values and behaviour system which can be seen in the traditional view of the university that placed more emphasis on research compared to teaching and learning

In relation to enabling factors found in the study was the realisation that the university in which the study was conducted had made it a policy that a probationer had to show competence in assessment before they could be fully established as lecturers. This invariably forces lecturers to undertake courses in assessment provided by the university's centre for teaching and learning. This finding further supports Day's (1993) argument that if academics are to

be encountered to take up professional development courses in teaching and learning, such courses should be tied to remuneration, promotion and tenure requirements.

The revelation by educational developers in the study that academics felt that the undertaking of professional development courses was time consuming buttresses Laurillard's (2002) view that university academic staff members have competing and equally demanding responsibilities in teaching, research and community engagement, which leaves them with very little, if any, time to work of extra demands of undertaking professional development courses. Whether the professional development courses are short-term or long-term, academic staff members will have the challenge of time. A possible solution would be to conduct short courses during recess when classes are not in session and to provide relief staff to reduce the teaching load for long term formal courses.

The existence of a well-established structure, the centre for teaching and learning was found in the study as an enabling factor for academic staff members' uptake of professional development programmes. Once there is an established centre whose mandate is to drive professional development programmes in the university, it becomes easy for academics to take advantage of the available opportunities. The same view is shared by Scott et al. (2007) who recommend the need for relevant personnel to provide professional development opportunities and take the lead to inform academics on the existence of such programmes as well as assist in the professional development programmes.

A constraining factor, under agency, as found in this study, is when the established centre lacks disciplinary expertise to assist academics in their specific disciplines and how this can discredit educational developers in the eyes of the academics.As Beckton (2009: 67) argues;

Even if teaching practices within faculties occasionally leave something to be desired, practitioners are unlikely to respond well to corrective measures that originate outside their own disciplines.

Similarly in a study by Ndebele (2014) there was a feeling among educational developers that in the domain of agency, the expertise in the Centre did not match the diverse range of disciplines they had to support in the university leading to feelings of discomfort and insecurity when

supporting academics from disciplines different from their original disciplinary homes. Generic courses may need to be adapted in discipline-specific contexts and personnel in teaching and learning centres need to have knowledge in the different university disciplines in order to ably assist academics. The other working approach is to train academics in different disciplines as educational developers so that as discipline experts they are better positioned to assist their counterparts.

The existence of teaching excellence awards was also found to be an enabling factor for academic staff members' uptake of professional development courses. This finding is consistent with Land's (2001) argument that the culture in universities requires a shift. Such a shift should recognise the importance of teaching as one of the core functions of the university in the same light as research. In the same manner in which excellent researchers in the university are recognised and rewarded, the same should apply to excellent teachers.

The issue of departmental cultures was found to be one of the constraining factors of academics' uptake of professional development courses in teaching and learning. Land (2001) observes that departmental cultures may work to ensure that academics have negative views of new centres such as academic development centres. This is consistent with findings by Maphosa (2014) who established that one of the reasons for low uptake of professional development opportunities was mistrust of teaching and learning centres and beliefs by some academics that there was nothing new they would learn from teaching and learning centres.

This also confirms Quinn (2006)'s view that agents coming into the scene inherit a set of doctrines, theories and beliefs which dictate what can have an impact on them and these shape what agents can do. Hence the need to work in a systematic and coordinated manner to conscientise academics of the roles and mandates of the new centres in order to deal with issues of negative attitudes.

CONCLUSION

Using Archer's social realism theoretical lens, the study concludes that there were numerous structural, cultural and agential factors that either promoted or hindered university academic staff members' uptake of professional development opportunities. Structural factors are factors that have to deal with the institution itself as well as departments, centres and units within the institutions. Cultural factors concern themselves with the behavioural and attitudinal issues that shape academics' ways of operating in a university whilst agential factors deal with academic staff members as agents. A holistic approach to factors affecting academics' uptake of professional development programmes assist in adequately addressing issues of unwillingness, resistance and apathy as well as working on the enabling factors.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A limitations of the study was that the researchers sought to establish the enabling and constraining conditions in the uptake of professional development opportunities from educational developers rather than from the academics themselves. The rationale for this however was that as the educational developers were responsible for organising such professional development opportunities they were in constant contact with academics and would therefore have held conversations with academics on why they were not taking up such opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings of the study the researchers make the following recommendations;

- Evidence of competence in teaching and learning should form an integral part of policy on promotion and tenure in universities. This will ensure that the three tier issue of teaching and learning, research and community engagement is taken seriously with equity in universities.
- Professional development courses offered by teaching and learning or academic development centres in universities should be varied and tailor-made to ensure relevance to different faculties and departments in universities.
- Universities should operate with clear staff workload policies so that there is equitable distribution of teaching load and ensure that staff members have teaching loads that allow them to participate in other professionally relevant activities.

♦ Teaching and learning or academic development centres should devise ways of constantly engaging staff to motivate them to make it a priority to undertake professional development courses in teaching and learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

The researchers have identified the following as fertile ground for further research in educational development: Research could be conducted with the academics themselves (as opposed to this study which interviewed educational developers) to find out what they find to be enabling and constraining conditions in the uptake of professional development opportunities as teachers. Research could also be conducted in the domain of culture to establish what ideas , practices and beliefs in a university influence academics' decisions to either take up or not take professional development opportunities.

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