

Approach towards the Professional Development of Academics as Espoused in Institutional Policy Documents at a South African University

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ABSTRACT How do institutional policy documents espouse the approach towards the professional development of academics in their role as teachers at one South African University? In order to answer the above question, the researcher conducted a document analysis of the case study institution's documents relating to the teaching and learning agenda focusing specifically on the development of academics as teachers. Using the Archerian social realist theoretical framework, the paper analyses the cultural, structural and agential mechanisms in relation to the professional development of academics as espoused in institutional policy documents at a University. The findings from the document analysis suggest that while an espoused culture exists, structure and agency do exert an influence on the extent to which this espoused culture is translated into reality. The documents show the need to strengthen agency that will work in the domain of culture to effect a paradigm shift in terms of seeing the development of academics as teachers as an integral aspect of an academic's career. In addition the documents suggest a strengthening of the structures responsible for supporting the professional development of academics. The study recommends strengthening of synergy among the various structures and agents that deal with staff development to avoid duplication and the re-inventing of the wheel.

INTRODUCTION

Referring specifically to the African continent, Teferra and Altbach (2004), reveal that in virtually all African countries, demand for access to higher education is growing, straining the resources of higher education institutions. Students have had to be admitted into institutions originally designed for fewer students and enrolments have escalated, "The pressures of expansion and "massification" have added large numbers of students to most African academic institutions and systems" (Teferra and Altbach 2004: 26). The increased enrolments have meant that academics have to change their practice and adapt their methodologies to deal with, for example, large classes, and a much more/increasingly diverse group of students, foregrounding the significance of staff development. This has

also had implications on the character of the university as new agents such as educational developers gain prominence in higher education to play a role in enabling academics handle diversity among other issues. Large classes at university, as Lewin and Mawoyo (2014: 58) show, "...create physical distance between lecturers and students and may intimidate students. The physical distance of large classes is also intensified by the fact that most lecturers do not provide opportunities for students to ask questions in a lecture, nor do they follow up on assignments like teachers in school do. This is corroborated by the CHE (2013a: 6) which notes that with the massification of higher education, "Assessments became more standardised and amenable to machine marking, allowing for little in the way of development of individual student learning and thinking over time." This study looks at the approach towards the professional development of academics at a former historically disadvantaged South African University in order to prepare academics to respond effectively to these challenges as a result of massification. The University is referred to in both the paper, citation of documents and the reference list as the University of Higher Learning (UHL) to protect its identity.

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In order to place the institution's approach to professional development as espoused in institutional documents in context, an overview of the national framework relating to the professional development of academics is necessary and is given before looking at the case study institution's documents. Academic development, also known as educational development is a field of research and practice that aims to enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning in the Higher Education (HE) system, and to enable institutions and the HE system to meet key educational goals, particularly in relation to equity of access and outcomes (Council on Higher Education (CHE) Framework for Programme Accreditation 2004b). According to Ndebele (2014), a key component of academic development is the improvement of teaching with the express purpose of improving student learning. In light of the CHE Framework for Programme Accreditation (2004b) and Ndebele (2014) cited above the assumption is that the on-going development of academic staff is a priority for Higher Education Institutions, that given the pressures to change the teaching and learning practice of academics, the provision of staff development for teaching is critical and is therefore given priority and that institutions show their commitment to professional development in their documents. In addition, the Council on Higher Education (2013b: 8) notes that, "In any education system, the quality of the teachers profoundly affects the quality of student learning. In addition to disciplinary expertise, university teachers need skills in pedagogy, curriculum development and assessment, as well as a number of other skills and attributes.

Professional Development of Academics as Espoused in National Policy Documents

In response to the new democratic order and to the changing higher education context a series of policy documents, commissioned research work and communiqués have been developed by the South African government to put into effect the new vision for Higher Education. According to the Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2004a), from the standpoint of South Africa's apartheid legacy, higher education transformation poses challenges in terms of three critical policy goals which have particular implica-

tions for the governance, management and financing of higher education:

- ♦ Equity and democratisation.
- ♦ Effectiveness (including the relevance, quality and appropriate quantities of programmes and outputs).
- ♦ Efficiency.

In terms of equity and democratisation concerted efforts have been made to ensure that higher education enrolments and success rates reflect the social composition of the broader society in all higher education institutions (HEIs), in all fields of study and at all qualification levels within higher education. The logical result of democratisation has been massification, as large numbers of previously excluded youth and adults entered HEIs. Resources were made available to individuals from historically disadvantaged social groups, to provide them with fair opportunities to participate in higher education through, for example, National Student Financial Aid Services (NSFAS) and the National Research Foundation (NRF). The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 began to put in place mechanisms to monitor standards in the higher education sector. It should, however, be noted that although resources were provided, they were in most cases not enough. As Lewin and Mawoyo (2014) show, in most cases, lecture facilities were not constructed with such large numbers in mind, making acoustics challenging in such venues. They further argue that students who sit far away from the lecturer (because of large classes) may not always hear what is being taught, and because of the large student numbers, there is insufficient time to accommodate inclusive discussion in the lecture.

The HE Act (1997: 11-12) provided for the establishment, composition and functions of a Council on Higher Education (CHE). The CHE was mandated to advise the Minister on any aspect of higher education on its own initiative; advise the Minister on any aspect of higher education at the request of the Minister and specifically through its Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) to among other things;

- promote quality assurance in higher education;
- audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions;
- publish information regarding developments in higher education, including an annual report on the state of higher education, on a regular basis;

- promote the development of student support services (Higher Education Act (1997: 11-12).

Although the Higher Education Act does not seem to specifically isolate educational development issues, the Education White Paper 3 (1997: 17) does refer to educational development implications. The paper argues that in order to improve equity of outcomes, the higher education system is required to respond comprehensively to the articulation gap between learners' school attainment and the intellectual demands of higher education programmes. The following quotation sums it all up;

It will be necessary to accelerate the provision of bridging and access programmes within further education, but the learning deficits are so widespread that systematic changes in higher education programmes (pedagogy, curriculum and the structure of degrees and diplomas) will continue to be needed... Thus academic development structures and programmes are needed at all higher education institutions to promote the development of teaching skills, curricula, courseware and student support services as a mainstream programme development (Education White Paper 3 1997: 17).

This meant that institutions of higher learning would have to put in place academic development and support structures to support curriculum development, the extended degree programmes, and a paradigm shift in terms of pedagogy and teaching methodology. The creation of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in 2009 in South Africa has meant that there is now a government department that is dedicated to dealing only with higher education issues. The Department of Higher Education and Training Strategic Plan (2010-2015) also emphasizes that the transformation of HE institutions will be intensified at both the academic and student level, including the demographics of participation and the promotion of a culture based on professionalism, innovation and personal accountability. Furthermore Education White Paper 3 (1997) indicates that the Department of Education is to ensure that the new funding formula for higher education responds to such needs for academic development programmes including, where necessary, extended curricula.

Following its establishment, the Council on Higher Education has commissioned research and published several documents on the higher

education system in South Africa. In a foreword to Council on Higher Education Monitor No. 6 written by Scott et al. (2007: v), Dr Lis Lange emphasizes the need to develop more responsive methodologies to respond to the new type of student 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 as common sense and academic excellence and the effects this has on the educational processes and its outcomes". This is supported by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2013a) which argues that in addition to disciplinary expertise, university teachers need skills in pedagogy, curriculum development and assessment, as well as a number of other skills and attributes, yet at many universities, there are limited opportunities and incentives for university teachers to acquire such skills. To this the researcher adds the need to manage diversity. Meanwhile Scott et al. (2007: 4) concur that, diversity in the student intake, particularly in respect of inequalities in educational background, challenges the validity of traditional, unitary educational processes and argue that the current student performance patterns support the contention that, where there is substantial diversity, a unitary process cannot realise the potential of the full spectrum of the intake, and inevitably favours certain student groupings over others. In the same vein, Lewin and Mawoyo (2014) aver that classes can be spaces that reproduce inequality and differentiated access to knowledge on the basis of diversity in terms of gender, language, schooling biographies and a lecturer who is conscious of these differences adopts diverse pedagogic strategies that provide equal learning opportunities to all students. All this means that educational developers, have to work hard with academics to promote a shift from the traditional teaching methods to responsive pedagogy.

Another Council on Higher Education (CHE) resource, ITL Resource No 5, indicates that the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has assigned to the HEQC as the Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA) for higher education and training (HET) formal functions with

respect to the quality assurance in the Higher Education system. In terms of the ETQA Regulations (1998), the HEQC is responsible for ensuring the integrity, validity and reliability of assessment in the HET system. Citing the example of assessment, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) Resource (2004c) notes that assessment should therefore be recognised as an essential and integral part of teaching and learning and that the realisation of such a role for assessment in HE is dependent on a concerted effort to professionalise the assessment practices of academic staff, which includes encouraging theoretically informed discussion and research. Here-in lies the role of an educational development practitioner who has to work with the academics to generate such discussions.

Yet another document from the Council on Higher Education that speaks of the professionalisation of teaching with reference to assessment is the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) Framework for Delegated Functions (2008). Contrary to the basic education system where all assessors have to be certified and accredited, the HEQC, as shown in the Framework, does not subscribe to the notion of accrediting assessors or maintaining a national database or register of trained 'competent' assessors. The HEQC is of the view that this is a responsibility of higher education institutions and that institutions should demonstrate their strategy/mechanisms for capacitating both new and experienced academics regarding progressive assessment practices. However, while the HEQC does not want to impose on the type of training to be conducted on assessment, the Framework warns that it is important that institutions put in place systems to ensure that the quality of training accords respect to the academic standing of its academic staff and is consistent with the depth and breadth of conducting assessment in higher education. It is up to institutions then to demonstrate steps taken to professionalise teaching in their own policy documents.

A recent national framework likely to impact greatly on the professionalisation of teaching and learning in higher education in the years to come is the Criteria for the Second Round of Institutional Audits of (2011) developed by the Council on Higher Education. According to the Draft Criteria for the Second Round of Institutional Audits (2011: 4), the second round of audits is intended:

To support pedagogic and curriculum innovation as well as the professionalisation of teaching and learning and the recognition of academic staff involved in teaching and learning. The HEQC will interact with institutions about their approaches to teaching and learning; the notion of student experience and the manner in which institutions support academic staff members and facilitate their development in the area of teaching quality and facilitating engaged student learning.

As institutional audits are taken very seriously by the higher education sector, this move by the Council on Higher Education is likely to cause universities to start giving greater attention to professionalisation of teaching and learning and the recognition of academic staff involved in teaching and learning and hopefully elevate teaching and learning to the same status as research.

A synopsis of the policy framework in this section shows that the Department of Higher Education and Training is committed to developing quality in higher education and in this regard educational development is seen as one avenue in which this agenda can be pursued. Several of the policy documents and frameworks discussed give pointers on how educational developers should gear themselves for the new challenges facing higher education. Scott et al. (2007: 61) call for the need for a sufficient number of educational specialists, at appropriate academic levels, to lead educational management and development at national and institutional 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.

Scott et al. (2007) also call for an expectation 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. Badat (2010: 3) advocates for increased support

for creative academic development programmes that provide meaningful opportunities for students who have been under-prepared by the schools for the rigours of a university education and calls for the enhancement of the academic capabilities of universities to mount effective academic development programmes. Having looked at the context around the professionalisation of teaching in higher education, the researcher now conceptualises Margaret Archer's social realist concepts of structure, culture and agency, which will be used to analyse the University of Higher Learning (UHL)'s approach towards the professional development of academics as shown in institutional documents.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine, using the Archerian social realist framework, the extent to which the case study institution espouses its approach towards the professional development of academics as teachers in its institutional documents. Specifically the study sought to;

- ♦ Explicate the role of structure in promoting the development of academics as teachers
- ♦ Determine the institutional culture in relation to the professional development of academics as espoused in institutional documents
- ♦ Analyse the way agency is enacted in institutional documents to implement the university's educational development agenda and
- ♦ To examine the interplay of culture, structure and agency in the development of academics as teachers at the case study university

METHODOLOGY

Grounded within the qualitative paradigm, this study used document analysis to analyse the way one South African University espouses its approach towards the professional development of academics as teachers. An analysis of documents constituted a major technique used in this study. The main data sources for this study were official government publications, including, but not limited to acts, annual reports,

policy circulars. Reports of commissioned research inquiry into higher education and training on behalf of the Council on Higher Education were also utilized to get an overview of the national picture. Documents pertaining to the conceptualisation and implementation of the agenda for the professional development of academics at the case study university were also used. Content analysis was used to isolate emerging themes from the documents in the domains of structure, culture and agency (explained in the next subsection) with regards to the professional development of academics as teachers.

Analytical Framework: Structure, Culture and Agency

The study uses Archer (2000)'s social realist analytical framework, to analyse the cultural, structural and agential mechanisms in relation to the professional development of academics as espoused in institutional policy documents. In order to understand Archer's concepts of structure, culture and agency in relation to the Higher Education context in general and the University of Higher Learning in particular, it is essential to relate them to Roy Bhaskar's (1978, 1979) critical realism. 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 conceptualizes three domains of reality which can be conceptually separated; the real, the actual and the empirical. According to Boughey (2010: 4),

The empirical stratum is that of experience and observation and is the layer from which all our explorations of reality must begin. Since human beings experience and observe the world in different ways, this layer is acknowledged to be ever changing, constructed and relative. The second layer in Bhaskar's ontology, the actual, consists of events which take place in the world. The actual and the empirical co-exist since we experience events as they happen. The final layer, the real, consists of structures and mechanisms, both natural and social and which have an objective existence and from which events at the level of the actual and observations and experiences at the level of the empirical emerge.

It is apparent from the quotation that the empirical is what we actually observe. However we are not able to observe everything that exists. There is infinity of events that do actually occur but are never empirically observed. The actual refers to what actually happens 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 (Ndebele 2013). As Gijssels (2003: 6) shows, "To discover and conceptualise causes means to dig into the nature of reality and to discover and conceptualise possible tendencies and their actualizations, not to deduce causal relations between empirical events". The three domains should however not be seen as mutually exclusive. The domain of the empirical (what we experience) is only part of the domain of the actual (what happens) which is in turn only part of the domain of the real. The real does not only consist of what we experience or even what happens, it also includes the mechanisms that cause things to happen.

Archer (2000) takes Bhaskar's critical realist notions of a stratified reality and focuses specifically on the social world. She provides a model of social reality as comprising three milieus; structure, culture and agency. According to the NRF Educational Research on Social Inclusion and Exclusion Submission document (2010), in higher education, the structural milieu comprises things, which exist such as policies, committees as well as more abstract phenomena such as race, gender, social class and knowledge structures in the disciplines themselves. The cultural milieu comprises how and what we think about things. This includes our values, beliefs, attitudes and ideologies. The agentic milieu comprises people. "Agency refers to the personal and psychological makeup of individuals, their social roles and relates to the capacity people have to act in a voluntary way" (Boughey 2010: 5).

Both Archer and Bhaskar believe that social structures exert causal influence on social interactions, while the actions of individuals and groups affect social structures by modifying them. "Morphogenetically understood, structure pre-dates action which, in turn, reproduces or transforms the structure and, therefore, pre-dates that particular form of structure in the production of which it participates" (Kinvinen and Piironen 2006: 225).

Looking at the Higher Education and Training context using the concepts of structure, culture and agency helps us better understand why and how the HE landscape in South Africa in general and at the University of Higher Learning in particular has developed since the demise of apartheid. New structures (such as polices, for example, the Higher Education Act), committees and councils, for example, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) had to emerge following the advent of democracy in 1994 and a new culture had to emerge and new agents (for example, directors of academic development centres) came to the fore, who had to try and transform the existing status quo. Gijssels (2003: 11), argues that, "(Re)New(ed) social structures emerge from the work of agents, and the work of agents is enabled and constrained by existing social structures that are themselves elaborations of previous structures, mediated by human agents." Thus the challenges facing the higher education sector can be found to be partly emanating from inherited structures and cultural entrenchments leading to enthusiasm by some and resistance by other agents to the transformation agenda. Having looked at the analytical framework, the researcher now turns to the professional development of academics as espoused in institutional policy documents at the case study university.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Professional Development of Academics as Espoused in Institutional Policy Documents

The Case Study University has a clear vision and mission. The vision and mission drives the agenda for teaching and learning, research and community engagement areas of operation. The University of Higher Learning's 2009-2013 Strategic Plan gives the following vision, To be at the centre of tertiary education for rural and regional development in Southern Africa and the following mission; As a comprehensive institution, the University of Higher Learning offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in fields of study that are responsive to the development needs of the Southern African region, using appropriate learning methodologies and research.

Structure

The structural domain in Archer's social realist theory as already shown in a preceding section 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. The University has the following structures that are responsible for governance and management and overseeing issues around teaching and learning, curriculum development, assessment and quality assurance; Council, Executive Management Committee, Senior Management Committee and Senate and its sub-committees.

Council

In terms of the University of Higher Learning (UHL) statute, the University has a Council representative of all structures. The Council is the highest policy-making body, and consists of members responsible for the governance of the university, including making rules for the conduct of employees and students. It consists of external and internal members. The external bodies represented include: Local Traditional Leaders, Human Science Resource Council, Human Rights Commission, Business Unit in South Africa and Donors. The University Registrar is an Ex-officio member and secretary of Council. All policies including policies related to the professional development of academics such as the staff development policy have to be approved by Council.

Executive Management

The Executive Management (EM) is composed of the Vice Chancellor, 2 Deputy Vice Chancellors and the University Registrar. The Executive Management Committee (EMC) meets fortnightly to discuss university operational issues. In order to improve efficiency which has a direct impact on quality arrangements, the EMC keeps a decision register for facilitating implementation and follow-up. Under this structure,

the DVC academic is the key agent in driving the teaching and learning agenda including pushing for interventions to professionalise teaching (UHL Self Evaluation Report 2010).

Senior Management Committee

Senior management is composed of Directors and Deans; One Director position for teaching and learning has just been filled in 2012. The Senior Management Committee meets monthly (UHL Self Evaluation Report 2010). The Senior Management Committee together with the Executive Management Committee are key structures and agents and the extent to which they enable or constrain positive change towards the professionalisation of teaching depends on how they fulfill their mandates and enact their roles in the institution. For example, reporting to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) Academic, the director of the Educational Development Centre is a key agent driving both the teaching and learning and the educational development agenda.

Senate

Senate is accountable to Council for the control and regulation of teaching, learning, research and community engagement at the university. It is the body charged with academic governance and planning and is made up of the Vice Chancellor, two Deputy Vice Chancellors, Council representatives, Deans of Schools, Heads of Academic Departments/ Centres/Institutes, Elected members of academic staff, directors, students representatives from each of the eight schools, and resource persons while the University Registrar is the secretary. The DVC Academic, Director Centre for the Educational Development, Deans of Schools and Heads of Departments in schools form the key agents driving the agenda to professionalise teaching and learning in this committee.

The following are directorates and committees of Senate which are directly linked to the teaching and learning agenda incorporating teaching and learning, curriculum development, assessment and quality assurance and the professional development of academics in their roles as teachers:

- Executive Committee of Senate (SENEX),
- School Boards

- Staff Development Committee,
- Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance Directorate
- Educational Development Centre (just established)
- Senate Teaching and Learning Committee (just established) (UHL SER 2010)

Senate meets four times a year and receives reports from all committees and School Boards. The University of Higher Learning uses a school system instead of a faculty system. All policies related to teaching and learning (including academic staff development and induction) are submitted to school boards for deliberation and input before they can be presented to Senate. The staff development committee has been the main committee driving staff development initiatives in the university through Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) funding. Up to until 2010, the Staff Training and Development Unit provided orientation and induction to all new staff members through the staff orientation and induction policy of the university. This Unit also ensured that all academic staff members attended workshops, seminars and conferences that related to their specialisations. It also encouraged lecturers to enhance their knowledge and teaching skills through further education by paying a percentage of their fees. Furthermore, lecturers are sponsored for conducting research that contributes to their understanding of educational processes and enables them to make professional decisions concerning teaching and learning. With exception of the provision of funding, these activities are now being transferred to the Educational Development Centre which is being established. The importance of training in teaching for university lecturers is underscored by Maphosa and Mudzielwana (2014) who note that one has to be initiated into the field of teaching in order to understand and appreciate the use of appropriate pedagogical and andragogical approaches.

Over the past five years, academic staff members have attended assessor training courses to be trained as assessors through coordination by the staff training and development unit. Opportunities exist for all staff members who need to be trained as assessors to undergo the necessary training. Regular review of the effectiveness of assessment policies, strategies and practices are carried out by the Quality Assurance

Directorate on behalf of Senate. Statistics on Staff Training and Development indicate that in 2009, 57 Academics and in 2010, 47 Academics were trained in assessment and moderation of student learning, curriculum development and materials development (Educational Development Centre Annual Report 2012d). As there was no capacity to conduct the training in the university, another University was subcontracted to offer the short courses and was paid through the skills development levy. As Remmik (2013) shows, the university hoped that sending academics for professional development would result in increased reflection processes, knowledge, skills and conceptions through which the lecturers carried out their professional practice.

In addition to the Staff Development Committee, at the level of structure, one School, which uses problem based learning (PBL) put in place its own staff development agenda where all new staff is given a rigorous three day induction on problem based learning. On the whole staff development initiatives in the university appear to have been mainly voluntary and dependent on individual department and lecturers' interests. This could be because there was no central coordinating structure in the university." The establishment of the Educational Development Centre (EDC) is meant to take over a coordinating responsibility and drive staff development initiatives across the university. The establishment of the EDC seems to be an acknowledgement by the university, as Remmik (2013) argues, that the quality of teaching in higher education has become a global issue in recent years, and the need to improve both pedagogical thinking and teaching skills is now acknowledged to be essential. The UHL Institutional Audit Report (2011: 34) comments that, "There is, however, as yet, very little evidence of a sustained, appropriate and effective academic staff development programme across the University." The newly developed EDC's business plan puts forward a five year plan for a sustained staff development programme in the university

Curriculum development, implementation and quality assurance is driven by the Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance directorate (IPQA) which reports directly to the Vice Chancellor. Also, IPQA is a member of Schoolboards, SENEX, Senate, APC and library committees where various issues related to teaching, learning, curriculum development, assess-

ment, quality assurance and staff development with regards to these areas form part of the agenda. According to UHL Self Evaluation Report (2010), the Quality Assurance conversations are standard agenda items for the Quality Assurance and Promotion Board, School Boards, School Quality Assurance Committees, Senate sub-committees and the Senate.

Planning and quality assurance are interrelated and represent mutually reinforcing activities which allow the institution to plan for and monitor its performance. However as evidenced by critical success factor one of the Strategic Plan (2012 -16) the IPQA does not seem to have a clear mandate of what it is supposed to do. Critical success factor one (Strategic Plan 2012-16) calls for a clear conceptualization and articulation of the mandate and resources of the Directorate of IPQA at UHL to ensure its effectiveness and concludes that to this end, the IPQA Directorate in consultation with other UHL structures will develop a concept paper leading to a Business Plan which specifically outlines its work. For a key directorate like the Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance Directorate to operate without a business/ strategic plan, in my view, spells disaster for the university quality assurance processes. While structures appear to have been put in place, one wonders why this has not led to morphogenesis. However the fact that structures are in place means the pace has been set for agents to act. As Gijssels (2003: 11), shows "Morphogenetically understood, structure pre-dates action which, in turn, reproduces or transforms the structure..." It is now up to the new agents in the new Educational Development Centre to work with the University community to produce the desired results.

The other major factor which has foregrounded the need for educational development in the domain of structure is the mandate to convert to a comprehensive university. According to the University Strategic plan (2012-2016: 1) Strategic Objective one, The University, has been mandated to become a comprehensive university offering a combination of academic, professional and career-focused programmes at both the degree and diploma levels. According to the mission of the university (Strategic Plan 2012-2016), as a comprehensive institution, the case study University is expected to offer a range of undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in fields of study that are responsive to the de-

velopment needs of the Southern African region, using appropriate learning methodologies and research. The Strategic Plan (2012-2016) acknowledges that the University recognizes the challenges involved in becoming a comprehensive institution. This requires a fundamental rethinking and restructuring of the curricula given the need to ensure articulation between diploma and degree programmes, changing the traditional academic orientation of the staff and providing the necessary infrastructure and resources. The strategic plan goes on to indicate that converting to a comprehensive university requires a fundamental re-engineering of the academic architecture of the University, in particular, its qualifications structure, programme profile and the human capital. In addition to these structural arrangements, the researcher wishes to add that for real change to take place there is need for a shared set of values, beliefs around this new concept of comprehensive university. Herein lies the role of the new Educational development centre, together with other key agents, to empower the academics through relevant staff development initiatives.

Culture

The cultural milieu in Archer's theoretical framework 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 2012). Because the espoused values and beliefs of an institution are often expressed in the policies, the policies are also discussed under this section on culture. Prior to the establishment of the Educational Development Centre, the University of Higher Learning had in place sections that ran student and staff development programmes, as it was the institutional belief that these could enhance capacity for success in teaching and learning. It is however the apparent lack of coordination, subsequent fragmentation and duplications that deprived staff and students of benefitting optimally from these initiatives. (Educational Development Centre Business Plan 2012-2016). Up to 2010 there were four major parallel initiatives operating within the University, yet with a similar objective namely to address the challenges of students' academic under-preparedness. These were student devel-

opment programmes within the Student Counselling Unit; programmes that were being offered under the domain of government funded Extended Degree programmes; and a module in the English Department, which addresses the 'short falls' in students' suitability for tertiary communication expectations. There is also the Staff Training and Development Unit under the Human Resources department responsible for funding staff development activities in the university (University of Higher Learning HEQC Self Evaluation Report 2010). While some benefits have been derived from these initiatives, it is, as already shown the apparent lack of co-ordination, subsequent fragmentation and duplications that have deprived staff and students to optimally benefit from these initiatives. This fragmentation is not peculiar to this university only however, as Remmik and Karim (2012) report in their findings that university teachers' teaching skills development is mostly their own responsibility, and many higher education institutions have not created support systems for university teachers' professional learning.

According to University of Higher Learning HEQC Self Evaluation Report (2010), the university has identified the following key quality improvements in relation to teaching and learning; developing training programmes in curriculum design, assessment methods, teaching and learning for staff; training of student tutors, language proficiency and appropriate teaching and learning technologies. The professionalization of teaching as Maphosa and Mudzielwana (2014) show enables university teachers to understand the role of assessment in teaching and learning and to apply appropriate assessment techniques. Although teaching and learning forms part of the core business of the university, the valuing of teaching and learning in terms of incentives is however not clear. For example there have been annual research awards in the institution but no such awards existed to reward excellent teaching. This valuing of research over teaching is also noted by Ndebele (2014) who found that educational developers felt the valuing of research caused academics to prefer conducting research as opposed to engaging in professional development activities in their role as teachers.

Several policy documents have been developed in the university that speak to teaching and learning, curriculum development, assess-

ment and have implications for educational development and the professionalisation of teaching and learning. Although using critical realist terminology, these policies can be classified as structural mechanisms; they depict the university's espoused culture and are therefore discussed as part of culture. These include the Teaching and Learning Policy (2009b), Induction Policy (2011), Assessment of Student Learning Policy (2009a), and the Monitoring and Evaluation of Teaching and Modules Policy (2009c).

The UHL Teaching and Learning Policy (2009b) postulates that the University is responsible for the acknowledgement and reward of effective teaching, ensuring that students and lecturers are familiar with the implications of the chosen approach to teaching and learning and making available sufficient, suitable resources in support of teaching and learning. The policy encourages all academic staff members to obtain recognition for their professional expertise as teachers, and seeks to support all staff in obtaining recognized teaching qualifications in Higher Education. In the same vein, Maphosa and Mudzielwana (2014) emphasise the need for university academics to be adequately prepared for the teaching of the disciplines in line with appropriate philosophies and methodologies of teaching noting that deliberate efforts to professionalise teaching will go a long way in ensuring that teaching is improved and student attainment enhanced.

Also in the domain of culture, according to the University's Teaching and Learning Policy (2009b: 3), the university seeks to empower its students through the following:

- ♦ *All learners should be treated with respect*
- ♦ *Learners need to be engaged for learning to take place*
- ♦ *The development of teaching and learning should be a collaborative enterprise.*

A staff development related policy, the Induction Policy (2011) seeks to ensure that all new employees have skills and competencies relevant to their role and can apply these in the workplace. According to the policy, the aims of job induction is to enable the individual to understand the duties and responsibilities of the position and assist the individual to understand the expectations of them in the form of outcomes, standards, performance evaluation and operational plans, set with their line manager. As shown in the induction policy, the universi-

ty portrays itself as a caring institution that strives to provide a supporting campus environment for both staff and students. According to the University Induction Policy (2011: 3), for example, “The University of Higher Learning recognises the importance of ensuring that all new employees begin their work with the university in a positive and supportive environment.”

According to the Induction Policy (2011) (which now needs to be reviewed since the establishment of the Educational Development Centre) it is the responsibility of the Staff Training and Development Unit to make known to the university community available training services, and provide the new members with staff training and development policies and procedures. This has already begun to create constraints at the level of structure with the establishment of the Educational Development Centre which also has as its priority academic staff development. The problem could be that most people in units such as the Staff Training under the human resources departments do not have in-depth and scholarly understanding of the academic project which means their training opportunities often don't meet the important developmental needs of academic staff. There is therefore need both at the level of structure and agency to clarify the role of these two entities so that the Educational Development Centre's mandate in terms of the academic project is not questioned.

Another policy document that supports the professional development of academics in their teaching and assessment roles is the Assessment of Student Learning Policy. The UHL Assessment Policy (2009a) recognises that assessment, teaching and learning are integrated, rather than separate activities, and that assessment is used to improve the quality of teaching and learning, not only to judge the achievements of students. In other words, assessment should be used formatively as well as summatively. Staff development with regard to assessment is assigned to Deans and Heads of Departments who must arrange for assessment and marking workshops on a regular basis in order to try to improve reliability at all levels of assessment. The Assessment policy urges schools to ensure that all academic staff is familiar with the development of course outlines, especially course aims, outcomes/learning goals and criteria for assessment and that they develop plans and suitable

activities to foster ongoing conversations around current practices in assessment. It is through deliberate training that university teachers are able to apply appropriate assessment practices in different learning contexts (Maphosa and Mudzielwana 2014). The fact that use of assessment as a means to improving teaching and learning is fore-grounded in the policy rather than simply as a summative tool does imply a culture of reflection through formative feedback in the lecture rooms.

The Monitoring and Evaluation of Teaching and Learning Policy (2009b) which seeks to promote a culture of critical reflection, preambles with the rationale that the academic profession upholds the values and practices of constructive feedback, self-evaluation, peer review and ethical professional conduct in all aspects of academic work, including curriculum design and delivery. This move to promote critical reflection is supported in the literature by Remmik (2013), who cites a study by Cilliers and Hermans (2010) which reports that lecturers admitted that participating in pedagogical courses makes university teachers more critical about their own teaching methods. The courses increased awareness about how people learnt and the participants understood the importance of reflection and learning about different options for reflection. According to the Induction Policy (2009: 3), the University is committed to continual improvement of the quality of its activities and achievements (including quality programmes, courses and academic staff) in order that it can fully realize its Vision and Mission. The purpose of the policy is among other things to,

- ♦ *Maintain and improve the standards and overall quality and soundness of all programmes and courses;*
- ♦ *Receive and respond to peer, expert and student feedback on the quality of programmes and courses*

The policy also gives a voice to the students on curriculum issues and provides for student feedback on courses/modules. The student evaluation questionnaire instrument is designed to obtain student feedback in relation to key aspects of course design and delivery. The University is to use student evaluation questionnaire results for quality assurance purposes and these are intended to inform decisions on course/module development, the overall process

of monitoring the effectiveness of courses and staff development of academics on identified training needs from student feedback.

Although several teaching and learning and quality related policies and procedures are available in the university, these do not seem to have filtered down to the academics who are the implementers of the curriculum. This is picked up in the Institutional Audit Report (2011: 28), "The Panel noted a lack of understanding and knowledge of quality-related policies among staff. For instance, most of the staff interviewed confused the internal programme reviews carried out for viability and relevance with the external reviews carried out by the HEQC on selected programmes nationally (that is, the National Reviews process)". All this means that although structures seem to have been put in place, agents such as the Educational Development Centre and quality assurance practitioners need to develop a framework to enable access to the espoused culture in these various teaching and learning and quality related policies. Underscoring the importance of educational developers in supporting teaching development, Abdulghani et al. (2013) state that high quality professional training programs for faculty members is important and can produce promising learning and teaching practices. These authors believe that educational practitioners should play important roles in helping new teachers advance into the profession.

In addition, according to the Institutional Audit Report (2011), although the University has a Teaching and Learning Policy and a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation of Teaching and Learning Policy (2009c), interviews with a range of academics indicated that at department level there is no awareness of either the policies or of their implications for practice. The University has guidelines and procedures for programme development and approval (UHL Self Evaluation Report 2010). However, interviews with staff by the Institutional Audit panel indicated that they were not generally aware of the existence of such guidelines. The sentiments expressed by staff were that 'not many people know how to design a programme' and that the process is unclear. According to the Institutional Audit Report (2011), some staff members confirmed that there is a template for programme design while admitting that they have not used it themselves. Interviews suggested that those

schools or departments that took the initiative to design new programmes were discouraged due to the lack of clarity around institutional approval processes and procedures and the appropriate academic structures to which such proposals should be submitted to for discussion and approval. Some staff members suggested to the Audit Panel that there is a need to streamline the development of new programmes by providing central assistance to schools and departments through the IPQA Directorate or the Staff Development Unit as most academics required support in the area of programme development. The newly established Educational Development Centre will also play a key role in this regard.

Despite the availability of the afore mentioned policies, the recently published University of Higher Learning HEQC final audit report reveals that there is a lot still needed to drive the teaching and learning agenda at the University. According to the Final Audit Report (2011: 32), the Panel identified that there was a lack of support for academics to professionalise their teaching and insufficient focus on teaching and learning in the criteria for promotion. This lack of support is indeed cause for concern, since, as Abdulghani et al. (2013) show, teachers in higher education come to the field of teaching with little, if any, formal professional trainings in teaching other than the content of their discipline. Citing Little et al. (2007), Abdulghani et al. (2013) are convinced that the enhancement and promotion of learning and teaching must be a priority for all of higher education. In addition to this lack of support, according to the Final Audit Report (2011) the Panel found little evidence of on-going discussions and initiatives on new approaches to, and innovations in, teaching and learning. Support for teaching and learning and a drive towards the professionalisation of teaching and learning is identified as an area that requires improvement. This again rests on the shoulders of educational developers who reside in the new Educational Development Centre. The establishment of the new centre is demonstration that what the institution espouses in its documents is not tokenism but a true process.

The Audit report reveals that staff indicated that there is a rather superficial induction programme which does not comprehensively address the development needs of new personnel and which does not deal with the professional

competences related to teaching and learning practice. According to the Audit Report (2011: 12), "Interviewees indicated that staff development interventions at present are isolated and inconsistently implemented, and consistent and regular programmes for teaching and learning development offered by the EDC are required." The university has recently established the Academic Development Unit (ADU) whose main objective is the promotion of successful teaching and learning. According to Audit report, there is, however, as yet, very little evidence of a sustained, appropriate and effective academic staff development programme across the University and it appears that the University has not adequately resourced this function and has been unable to offer adequate support or relevant academic development opportunities to either staff or students."

The issue of staff development for teaching and learning is particularly important in the light of the strategic decision to grow the University's 'own timber' to counter the problem of high student to staff ratios, but also given the serious challenges faced by the University in providing student access with success and retaining suitably qualified staff. While the audit panel (2011) appreciates that there is a staff training programme organised in the form of workshops on curriculum development, assessment and moderation presented by facilitators from other universities and organisations, there is no evidence that the provision of these workshops is sustainable in the long term or are sufficient to meet the development needs of academic staff. Given the status as a comprehensive university, academic staff members require considerable training in designing new curricula. Staff development and training in this regard is crucial.

Another pertinent issue raised by the audit report that has implications for educational development is the issue of inconsistency in assessment. According to the report (2011: 42), interviews with staff and, particularly, with external examiners pointed the Panel to variability and inconsistency of practice in the standard of assessment across departments. The Panel heard of exam questions assessing simple and low level cognitive skills and points out that the implications of this for the integrity of qualifications and the possibility of students finding employment can be dire. The HEQC Final Audit report (2011) recommends that the university devel-

ops a comprehensive staff development strategy as part of its approach to human resources management and ensure that the Academic Development Unit is appropriately resourced to support quality teaching and learning. The professionalization of teaching, which is the subject of this paper, as Maphosa and Mudzielwana (2014) show, enables university teachers to understand the role of assessment in teaching and learning and to apply appropriate assessment techniques.

Agency

Boughey (2010) defines agency as the personal and psychological makeup of individuals, their social roles and relates to the capacity people have to act in a voluntary way. Archer (2000) distinguishes between the people (agents) and the parts (structure and culture). Agents coming into the scene (such as the director of the newly established Educational Development Centre), inherit a set of doctrines, theories and beliefs which dictate what can have an impact on them and these shape what agents can do (Quinn 2006). Several agents can be identified who have influenced the professional development agenda at the University of Higher Learning. At Council level the DVC academic plays a key role in pushing for resources to support the teaching and learning agenda and the curriculum transformation process. The DVC Academic, Director, Educational Development Centre, Deans of Schools and Heads of Departments in schools form the key agents driving the teaching and learning agenda in Senate. In the Executive Management Committee, the DVC academic is the key agent in driving the teaching and learning agenda. In the Senior Management Committee, under the DVC academic's section the Educational Development Centre director is the key agent driving the agenda to professionalise teaching and learning. The Head of the Staff Training and Development Unit was also a key agent driving staff development initiatives in the university prior to establishment of the Educational Development Centre. Another key agent has been the Head of the Quality Assurance Unit who led the process of developing the University's Teaching and Learning Policy and the Assessment of Student Learning Policy. These roles are structures which could impact greatly on morphogenesis

but it depends on how the key agents who occupy the positions enact their roles.

At school level the heads of departments together with the lecturers are the starting point for all teaching and learning issues. One example can be found in one of the schools, which uses problem based learning (PBL) where the dean of the school has put in place a school staff development agenda where all new staff members undertake a rigorous three day induction on problem based learning. One ambitious aim the university has decided on is to empower the lecturers so that they become a group of powerful corporate agents and in this regard the case study university is enrolling 20 academics per year for a post graduate diploma in higher education with another university for the next two years. It is only when the teachers are prepared for teaching, learning, assessment and curriculum development that universities can guarantee enhanced student learning and attainment (Maphosa and Wadesango 2014).

As already indicated in a previous section, the Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance directorate is expected to provide the agency in driving curriculum development in the university. However as shown in the Institutional Audit Report (2011: 27), of particular concern to the Panel, is that, "the IPQA is under-capacitated to undertake with sufficient depth the many necessary tasks and projects at UHL." The report (2011) recommends that the University of Higher Learning address the conceptualisation of planning and quality underpinning the work of the Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance Directorate, including the technical and human resources available to it, in order to ensure that the responsible staff have sufficient knowledge, training, capacity and seniority to interact appropriately with senior academics to discharge their responsibilities. Before IPQA staff can staff develop' the academics, they need staff development themselves.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that efforts have been made at national level to foreground the professional development of academics in their role as teachers in order to enhance teaching and learning and improve the low national success rates. Various acts of parliament and Council on Higher Education pronouncements

bear testimony to this. The national drive has also influenced the University of Higher Learning, which has adapted and/or incorporated elements of the national framework in the development of its own teaching and learning agenda in relation to the professionalisation of teaching as evidenced by the various policies discussed which constantly refer to the professional development of the academic staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above conclusion and the evidence of commitment to professionalise teaching and learning in the national documents, the study recommends;

- ♦ Synergy among the various structures that deal with staff development such as the Staff Training and Development Section, the Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance Unit and the Educational Development Centre,
- ♦ Now that structures have been put in place, it is recommended that the key agents driving the staff development agenda work with academics in the domain of culture to create a paradigm shift through both formal and informal conversations and
- ♦ That an improvement plan based on the HEQC Institutional Audit report that focuses specifically on staff development be developed and properly resourced for implementation.

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