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Becoming a new kind of professional: A black woman academic caught in a transition

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Abstract

The post-1994 democracy in South Africa sought new policies to steer higher education institutions (HEIs) towards transformation, intended to end the segregation policies of apartheid. Although certain policies led to HEIs opening their doors to students and staff from different backgrounds and institutions, the legacy of apartheid continued to haunt, both overtly and covertly, black women academics, amongst others, as they attempted to pursue their teaching and research identities in these new contexts. It is against this background that the author explores her personal experiences as a black academic, using an auto-ethnographic qualitative method to reveal 'sensitive issues and innermost thoughts' that are not normally within reach (Chatham-Carpenter in Ngunjiri, Hernandez and Chang 2010, 17). She explores her professional position and experiences within HEIs, as these institutions grappled with issues of transformation. She describes what it was like being part of the process of moving from one university, which had been reserved for blacks' to another – one that was then a 'white' HEI. The author explores how her teacher training in a 'blacks only' university led to the kinds of knowledge and practices that in her new context either enabled or constrained her advancement. She then questions the lack of mentorship in these new contexts, and concludes by reflecting on how these experiences may assist a new generation of black women academics and help support transformation goals for HEIs in general.

Keywords: organisational change, mentorship, community of practice, institutional transformation

INTRODUCTION

The first South African Minister of Education of the first democratically elected government in 1994, Professor Bengu, considered 'lifelong learning' and '... the ability to deal with change ...' as key goals for higher education institutions (HEIs) (DoBE 1997, 10). These 'changes' referred to a large degree to race and gender. Staff appointments were then based on affirmative action even though specific qualifications continued to be entry requirements. Female staff also began to occupy higher positions, such as that of vice-chancellor (Fourie 1999, 285). It was at this time that I entered the Wits School of Education (WSoE) with the goal of furthering my postgraduate studies and career in academia.

This came after all my previous education experiences had been with the Department of Bantu Education and HEIs for blacks only. The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits University or Wits), formerly mainly for whites only, was able to open its doors to students and staff from all different backgrounds and institutions. The core business of the WSoE is teacher training. I expected to continue training teachers in ways similar to the ones adopted by the previous HEIs I had attended, namely Soweto College of Education (SCE) and Vista University (hereafter Vista), which focused mainly on black teacher training in township areas.

My narrative will be represented by two moments: the first I refer to as my small step and the second, my giant leap. The small step constituted the move from one black HEI to another; the giant leap transpired when I moved from a black HEI to a white one. It was at the latter institution, the WSoE, that I was called upon to become a new kind of professional. It was there that my role as teacher and researcher was clearly articulated in the culture of the new context. I will explore the challenges I faced and possibilities that opened up as I made the transition.

I employ an auto-ethnographic research method for the purposes of this narrative. According to Ngunjiri, Hernandez and Chang (2010, 2), auto-ethnography is 'qualitative, self-focused and context conscious'. In this way, I am able to direct the narrative on myself whilst I am conscious of the situation from which the narrative is drawn and of which I am part. I position myself at the centre of my personal account, where I become a 'subject' who investigates an 'object' which is investigated (Ngunjiri et al 2010, 2). On the one hand, I am able to reveal 'sensitive issues and inner most thoughts' that no one else could access except me (Anderson 2009 in Ngunjiri et al 2010, 3). On the other hand, my roles in this narrative as researcher and participant are challenged by the question of 'scientific credibility' (Ngunjiri et al 2010, 2). I did find it challenging in instances where I had to reveal my inner feelings, which would better be kept to myself whilst I regarded myself as an investigator. This dilemma is mirrored by Chatham-Carpenter, a participant in Ngunjiri et al (2010, 8) who experienced difficulty when 'using her own life experiences with an eating disorder', as part of a research project. The latter helped me to understand my own difficulties as I developed my narrative.

The narrative is located in literature that facilitates a deeper understanding of my experience. Finally, I make a few recommendations in the hope that they might, in future, assist older black women entrants into formerly elite HEIs.

A SMALL STEP AND A GIANT LEAP: HOW I BECAME A TEACHER AND RESEARCHER

In this section, I explore my experiences as I moved between three HEIs. First, I discuss how I became a professional at the first two, namely, the SCE and Vista; and second, how I was called upon to become a new professional at the WSoE.

After matriculating at Guardian Angels High School, a Roman Catholic Mission School in Glen Cowie, Limpopo, I studied at the University of Limpopo (then

Turfloop) for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education. After this I obtained a one-year University of Education Diploma (UED) at the same HEI. I then taught for a period of seven years at three different high schools, where I implemented what I felt were the principles of my university education.

During 1972–1975, teachers focused strongly on content knowledge. Therefore, in all my classes, teaching became what Ahmad, Jamil and Razak (2012, 154) observe as a more 'lecture based, teacher centred learning where there were limited two-way interactions between teachers and students'. This was the kind of teacher training I had received and I was comfortable to move into schools that were receptive to it. On rare occasions more capable students would ask a few questions to take the process beyond the prescribed content, but I did not encourage this. I did not realise then that students had to use 'higher order thinking operations' in order to support 'high intellectual quality' (Ahmad et al 2012, 149). At all three schools, resources were meagre except that there were sufficient prescribed textbooks to cater for the different subjects. When I left university, I thought I would need a mentor to start me off in my teaching career. However, when I started teaching, I found that I had had sufficient teaching practice during my training and thus mentorship did not seem necessary nor was it provided.

At the beginning of my eighth year of high school teaching, I was employed by the SCE, situated in a South Western Township called Pimville, where I joined the Division of African Languages and Education Studies. The institution catered only for black students and had more black than white academic staff. The core business of the college was to educate student teachers. I continued to use the teaching principles I had gathered during my university teacher training, as well as during the seven years of school teaching at one rural and two township schools as the basis for my instruction of student teachers. During training for my UED, I was exposed to knowledge and principles of curriculum, teaching and assessment. I also had to go to schools to observe qualified teachers in the area of my specialisation. A lecturer from the university came once to observe me teaching, and I was credited for my good performance in class. I thought I had sufficient teaching experience to carry out all the activities when I resumed my teaching career at the SCE. The years I spent at this institution proved to be the most comfortable, as my professional knowledge and skills seemed sufficient to fulfil my duties as a teacher educator. I emphasised the attainment of objectives in my lesson preparation, which focused mainly on content knowledge; this was a method I had acquired and employed during my own training.

There was a library at the SCE where students could do their research, but I do not remember an instance where I deemed it necessary to send my students to the library, as it was a foreign resource that I had not been exposed to before. I regarded a library as a resource tied to universities, because my first proper experience of a library was at the University of Limpopo. I regarded colleges as inferior to universities. I thought that it was only at university level that students were expected to do research.

Preparation and use of a variety of teaching and learning aids was believed to be the main task of primary school teachers. Therefore, our primary school colleagues

and students at the SCE would be seen carrying a variety of teaching and learning aids to lectures, whilst in the secondary school section, only textbooks were used. Without much discussion between us, we assumed teaching and learning aids to be for primary school use. Secondary school learners were regarded as sufficiently mature to understand theoretical knowledge without the assistance of teaching and learning aids. This was not surprising since we were also not exposed to designing teaching and learning aids during university pre-service training.

Assessment of students was mainly summative and focused on preparing of students for good grades in their final examinations, based on topics covered. It was not surprising then that teachers would measure success in their practice by the scores students obtained in their subjects. Eisner (1985, 134) considers such classroom practices as bound to a 'curriculum orientation that is technological'. No-one questioned these practices because it was all that everyone knew. It is against this background that I entered a second HEI in Soweto, known as Vista University.

When I moved from the SCE to Vista, I experienced mixed emotions of loss, anxiety, fear and anticipation. In his farewell advice to me the college rector warned that I would be expected to construct new knowledge at my new institution. I did not know what it meant as I had never been exposed to such an idea during my junior degree years. I could not imagine that all the teaching experience I had accumulated over more than a decade would be insufficient to take me to the next level. My experiences of organisational change were similar to those of Marris (1993 in Gultig, Ndhlovu and Bertram 2009, 85), who compared organisational change to the loss of loved ones, and argued that it was necessary to '… recognise the element of bereavement …' above all, in the process of change and that change needed 'time and patience'.

Within a few weeks of my arrival at Vista, I also realised that the kind of student teacher trained at the new institution was different from the SCE student teacher. Vista student teachers were acquiring an undergraduate degree alongside their teacher training. I noticed that their training had a strong academic strand. In earlier years student teachers at the SCE were required to complete four university courses alongside their diploma qualification, with a strong emphasis on teaching experience. Later the requirement of university courses fell away and students were expected to complete a diploma qualification with a strong practical element and thus less of an academic focus.

After a few weeks at Vista, I was warned that a senior lecturer would visit one of my lectures to observe my teaching. This was a foreign practice as I never had such exposure at the other HEIs where I had worked. The large number of students and the huge lecture hall were intimidating and I was not given the assessment criteria for that observation. I did not know the cultural practices. I was supposed to know the 'ropes' of the new division which Acker (1997, 67) points out as one of the many challenges that face new entrants into HEIs. At Vista, I reverted to my old teaching practices of using 'direct instruction', a traditional teacher-centred method, 'in which the teacher delivers academic content in a highly structured format, directing

the activities of learners' (Killen 2010, 126). The senior lecturer was satisfied with my performance but advised me to ask the students more questions that would encourage more meaningful interaction during my lectures. Effective classrooms use 'higher order thinking' where learners are encouraged 'to think deeper' and to participate actively in classrooms (Ahmad et al 2012, 153). The methods I applied in my classroom would thus not develop students' thinking capacities. I now know that my classroom focused on an 'interactive/authoritative communication approach' where teachers use questions and answers to lead students to one particular point of view that they set to be achieved rather than listening to other different points of view where genuine questions are posed to facilitate an 'interactive/dialogic communication approach' (Scott, Mortimer and Aguiar 2006, 611–612).

The teaching staff at Vista were multicultural although the majority of staff in the Department of Education Studies on the Soweto Campus were black. Senior positions in the department were held by a few black men and white women staff. We all seemed to understand the unwritten rules, which had their roots in apartheid practices, where whites were privileged over blacks. White women academics were regarded as superior and could occupy positions reserved for men. It was acceptable that women would continue to be carers of their families. We did not question any kind of inequality, as my generation and race were socialised by apartheid to accept subordination (Christie 1991). It was only later after the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa, that black women academics were slowly given positions of power. It was, therefore, during this period that staff in our division, across race and gender, acted annually on a rotational basis as sub-head of the Department of Education Studies.

There was a subtle and unspoken messages from the schools and HEIs that black women were supposed to be carers of their families. Therefore, no urgency was given to the academic advancement of black women and to their completion of doctoral studies; nor did we as black women academics feel empowered to further our studies. I knew that postgraduate degrees were a requirement for employment. Individuals chose to study according to their own pace and I had already started an honours degree in Education. When I left the SCE, I had completed two postgraduate degrees with the University of South Africa (UNISA). While at Vista, I completed a master's degree in education with the University of Johannesburg (UJ), then called Rand Afrikaans University (RAU). Publications and conference attendance were not a requirement of either of these HEIs. I think that if I had had mentorship at the time I would have become a better academic, but this was not common practice, neither in South Africa nor abroad. Bagilhole (1993) observed in a study of ten women who were on probation at a university in the United Kingdom (UK) that less than a quarter had mentors. Fourie (1999, 286) confirms the lack of mentors in the South African context, a problem facing especially black women academics. She argues that this lack of role models is a 'serious handicap' (Fourie 1999, 286). Older black women academics received their education under an apartheid system that gave very little in terms of quality education and yet these women are expected to perform at

the same level as their white counterparts who come from advantaged backgrounds. Mentors might have provided 'guidance, support and advocacy to the apprentice' (Bagilhole 1993, 437).

I also now realise that at Vista and the SCE, some of us black women academics placed our careers on the backburner as we focused on our children and families. There was an apparent expectation in the workplace and on our campus for male black academics to publish more than black female academics. We also perpetuated that mind-set, as we would eagerly wait for the end of lectures to attend to the transport of our school-going children between different extramural activities. I distinctly remember that each afternoon after lectures, one of our senior male black academics would open his office door and do personal reading. We were not expected to emulate this culture of academic practice as we were too busy with family chores. Thus, we did not participate in the activities of a community of practice of which we were part.

While at Vista, there was an emergence of ideas about the importance of publications and conference attendance from some black male academics in our department. Interestingly many of these colleagues were studying at Wits, where I also would later experience research intensiveness.

A GIANT LEAP: WITS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

I experienced a substantive change when I was employed by the WSoE as a full-time contract lecturer. Wits was formerly what is known as an historically white institution (HWI) and had catered for white advantaged students. HWIs gained their history from an apartheid ideology that followed the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which enforced apartheid in education in 1959 (Worden 1994, 96), including at universities. At Wits, I had to become a new professional.

I was truly caught in a transition between three apartheid institutions, that is, the University of Limpopo, the SCE and Vista University, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the formerly racially elitist HEI, where historically only white students and staff had gained access, namely Wits University. The latter had begun to open its doors to students and staff from different backgrounds. The first year of my contract was the most challenging as I found it difficult to balance my work and domestic responsibilities. My challenge amongst all these activities was whether my background experience was sufficient to meet the demands of my new context. Wits was more demanding in terms of teaching expectations, research output, furthering postgraduate studies, and knowing the kind of student I had to teach. In order to participate and acquaint myself with the Wits community of practice, I had to sacrifice (painfully) some family and community activities. For instance, I would absent myself from attending extended family activities and occasionally the funerals of acquaintances in order to meet teaching and research expectations at Wits.

Unlike at the SCE and Vista, where I always reverted to my old teaching practices acquired during my UED and my seven years of teaching experience, I realised that I needed to change drastically to fit into the culture of my new community. The mixed emotions of loss, anxiety, fear and anticipation I experienced when I moved to Vista seemed trivial in comparison with the deep emotions of anticipation and loss I experienced with this move. I anticipated Wits, as an HWI, to have different demands as I came from formerly disadvantaged, mainly 'blacks-only' institutions. I had taught only black students, whereas at Wits I had to teach students from different cultures and races. I wanted to be the same black woman academic I had been at my former institutions. I hoped that Wits would accept that as a black woman academic I had to continue caring for my family; participating in most community activities; and carrying out my academic activities just as I had at my previous institutions. The possibility of different demands being made on me due to the differences in the two contexts overwhelmed me.

I soon realised that I had entered into a different kind of academy, where I was expected to teach and produce research, a culture affirmed by Nixon (1996) and Acker (1997) who both assert that the academic demands of HEIs expect university educators to work as teachers on the one hand, and as researchers on the other. I later learnt that another challenge at this institution is the amount of research output which is a key function of most research-intensive HEIs like Wits. Academics are also encouraged to raise funds by doing research outside their institutions and to further their careers as the latter rests on how well known they are outside their institutions. Steneck (1994 in Nixon 1996, 8) confirms that it is more important to 'engage in an intellectual life off campus' than on campus. Academic staff are also expected to produce papers for publication in accredited journals. I thought to myself that this was far beyond my reach. I had not published anything in my ten years of lecturing at my previous universities. Though I had experienced the emergence of ideas around such activities in my previous department at Vista, I had not participated like some of my male academic colleagues had.

I also found that the work demands at Wits meant that I had to sacrifice some long-established friendships and extended family ties because I failed to honour the special occasions which measure genuine relationships in African culture. In my new role I learnt that I if I wanted to advance my career, I had to realise the importance of networking. Fourie (1999, 285) also contends that, amongst others, in terms of research, academics are expected to 'interact with their colleagues in higher education'.

An additional difficulty was that I was expected to teach from a more learner-centred approach in contrast to the more teacher-centred approach I was used to. I was also expected to attend conferences and complete my doctoral studies. This dual purpose of teaching and research placed on academics is said to have been a result of the 'restructuring of higher institutions' at western universities from the sixties onwards (Nixon 1996, 7). It was a great challenge for me.

I was also intimidated by the fact that this was an HEI with a reputation that it ranked close to the top 100 international universities at the time. I constantly questioned my competence and presence but found solace in the thought that I had accumulated a vast degree of teacher training expertise while working at my previous teacher training institutions. Yet, I continued to feel uneasy about my new context. Younger black women academic entrants joined the WSoE and I found that they coped far better within the new culture. My experiences were much like those of some academic women in Canadian faculties of education, who indicated that as new entrants from teaching at schools they needed to 'catch up' as compared to younger entrants who diligently attain the requirements of 'academic productivity' (Acker 1997, 65). I found that there was a large degree of expertise that I still needed to acquire in terms of my approach to teaching and managing my research. The challenges I faced corresponded with a list similar to that constructed in Acker (1997, 67), that ranged from: 'getting into the academy; learning the ropes; working with colleagues and administrators; operating within the culture of the department; faculty institution, developing a pedagogy; coping with evaluation; juggling work and domestic demands'.

I did not know that my title as a lecturer had to be hard earned. At both my previous institutions, I had earned the title by virtue of my entry into an HEI. After a period of two years during which I had the title of 'lecturer', I was advised to change my title to 'tutor' because as a tutor expectations in research and publications were fewer. I had not begun to participate in any of the mentioned practices, nor was I aware of these requirements. After a lot of anguish and many feelings of great disappointment at losing the title of lecturer which I had enjoyed for more than two decades, I finally agreed. I had my own long-cherished aims, to stay longer at the institution and study further. It is against this background that I wished there was mentorship at the university.

In a study of 43 women academics in the UK, conducted by Bagilhole (1993), it was observed that British women academics were in the minority and worked in a male-dominated environment. Therefore, they had few mentors, as male academics excluded them, whilst women academics avoided being associated with them as they placed 'pressure on themselves to perform better than their male colleagues' (Bagilhole 1993, 431). This situation is familiar in most aspects. The WSoE had very few black women academics in senior positions who could serve as mentors and role models. Even though there were quite a number of white women academics in senior positions, it was difficult for me to find a mentor (there were no black women academics in senior positions when I joined my division). It has also been observed that women do not obtain assistance from mentors as easily as men do because they are fewer in numbers, and woman academics prefer to identify with their male colleagues and not support women. Yet, in order to succeed in academia, individuals need 'colleagues who can provide guidance, support and advocacy to the apprentice' (Bagilhole 1993, 437). The few black women academics occupying senior positions

currently may be willing to mentor new entrants but are also faced with challenges of upward mobility amidst heavy teaching and administrative responsibilities.

My employment on an annual contract was yet another challenge. I was unable to plan my future with certainty. I initially thought I would not be expected to perform like a full-time employee in terms of research output but the opposite held true. This trend is common in many higher institutions, as observed also in the UK, where many contract staff are expected to be responsible for teaching and research, yet their circumstances could be described as that of '… insecurely employed contract staff' (Ainley 1994 in Nixon 1996, 7).

Faced with such challenges, I yearned for some guidance, as did other black women in the same position as myself. The study by Bagilhole (1993) shows clearly that women do not obtain support readily when entering HEIs. This is also so in South African contexts where Fourie (1999, 286) discusses the lack of mentors as a problem for mainly black women academics. I feel that I have the 'serious handicap' (Fourie 1999, 286) describes and believe that if I had had a mentor, I would not have lost my title as a lecturer after two years of employment at the WSoE, and I would have begun to meet my probation demands timeously.

I also did not know how fortunate I had been that the entry requirement for academic jobs, when I joined the WSoE, was still accommodative of a master's degree. Within a few years of my employment, this changed to that of a doctoral qualification or an almost completed doctoral qualification. I learned that this entry requirement is an international trend, similarly observed in a study of women academics at Canadian faculties of education, who used their narratives to discuss their 'struggles and strategies' as they moved from 'normal schools and teachers' colleges into universities' (Acker 1997). One of the 30 women studied by Acker (1997, 68) observed that '… she needed a doctorate to stay in the mainstream of university teaching'. I feel the need for a doctorate qualification vital for my current context, the same as Acker (1997, 68), but I am currently left with four years before enforced retirement age and do not have sufficient time to complete doctoral studies. I had also wished to retire whilst teaching at university but I do not currently hold a doctoral degree nor am I near enough to completion to remain at the university. These are the innermost feelings of frustration that I have to contend with daily.

There is a part of me that blames the transformation of higher education. I wonder why formerly advantaged HEIs opened their doors to staff and students from formerly disadvantaged HEIs if the challenges facing these students were not entertained in their new contexts.

The teaching approach that was expected of me was yet another challenge. I was challenged by how students had to be engaged during tutorials. The constructivist approach to teaching and learning was emphasised, with students occupying a central place and teacher educators acting as mediators. I was initially inclined to dominate my tutorials under the impression that I was to lead students in order to ensure that I completed the curriculum for their success in final examinations. Teacher educators and students interacted in ways where there was a changed contract from the more

traditional teacher-centred approach acquired and entrenched throughout my teacher training and at previous institutions, to a more student-centred approach where students constructed their own knowledge to reach deeper understanding. I wonder if I could have been as successful at the WSoE as I had been at Vista if within a few weeks of my employment, a senior lecturer came to observe my teaching! I am grateful that Wits was patient and allowed me time to grow into the new community of practice as Marris (1993 in Gultig et al 2009, 85) argues for 'some time and patience' to be considered as one of three principles for managing change.

Planning of tutorials entailed reading highly technical academic articles with dense concepts pertaining to the disciplines in a way that required me to understand more than what was contained in the reading. I spent most of my preparation time reading through the articles and searching the internet for further clarification. This clearly indicated that I had entered a different community of practice where the rules and conventions were different.

I also realised that I needed to have inside contacts if I wished to succeed soon in the activities of the WSoE. This was my other observation at the institution which I probed several times with no direct response from colleagues in my department except for a few for whom I have great respect. The absence of contacts for black women academics adds to the challenge of working at institutions such as Wits, but this practice is not restricted to South African universities. This kind of challenge has been documented by Wright, Thompson and Channer (2007, 156) in their study of black women academics' experiences at UK universities where one interviewee's response showed that white female colleagues were able to prosper because either they had worked at the institutions for a longer period or 'they tend to be people who have links with people who are established here and are groomed and, therefore, offered opportunities to come and make rapid progress when they come into the organisation' (Wright, Thompson and Channer 2007, 156).

From the statement above it appears that being supported when entering an HEI affords a person opportunities to advance quickly and reach goals. How I wished that when I had started, there were just two black women academics' faces I had known before joining the university. There are exceptions where, in the same study, some black women staff did find support within the institution because there were mentors and it reads: 'I think I have a lot of support from my research mentor who I've met with twice, who said he would read my papers once they're written' (Wright, Thompson and Channer 2007, 56).

It is also taken for granted that employees at a university will have knowledge of all the available facilities to advance in their career. It is true for those who know long-serving colleagues. This has been observed by some of the participants in Acker's (1997, 71) Canadian research who had 'a network of important connections and a research grant' as they entered academia.

Amidst all these challenges, there were also possibilities. I managed to register for a Master of Arts by dissertation degree in the Languages division at Wits hoping to obtain a distinction so that it could be converted to a doctoral level. The university

funded my fees for which I am truly grateful. Fortunately, I succeeded though I did not obtain a distinction, but I have a second master's degree to my credit. I am glad that I undertook this degree as I amassed vast amounts of content knowledge in the field of languages together with research skills during the study.

Today when I reflect on all these challenges, I realise how much working at the WSoE has developed me. I have grown immensely and progressed greatly both in my teaching practice and as a new researcher. I have acquired the practices of the new culture and learnt about the teaching of diverse students. I look back on my accomplishments in research activities as a contract employee. Besides the degree acquired at the university, I attended three conferences, one held in Botswana and the other two at the WSoE, and I presented two unpublished papers, one individually in Botswana and the second co-authored with a colleague on campus. I am currently awaiting the final results for the publication of a paper co-authored with a group of lecturers in the Languages division.

I still believe that there should be mentorship for new entrants, especially from unfamiliar backgrounds to their current contexts. Black female academic entrants especially from previously disadvantaged HEIs' need mentors who can familiarise them with the university culture. This issue is also challenged where older, experienced white or black staff need to meet their own research output quotas either for their own upward mobility or for the benefit of the institution.

REFLECTIONS

I have realised that what I had thought as professional in one context, did not hold true in another. This had to do, in part, with the transition from apartheid to democracy. Both the institution and I were simultaneously in transition, coming from opposite directions. I had to change to fit into a formerly white institution with an international reputation; the institution had to change from an elitist and closed institution to one that embraced people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Of the two parties, I would argue that I had to transform far more than the institution did. Despite this, I am aware of the possibilities and opportunities that were granted to me and how these have allowed me to grow and continue to grow.

I learned that apartheid ideology and practices treated different groups of people in South Africa unfairly. Black students were educated in disadvantaged contexts that gave them very few skills to work fruitfully in contexts of privilege. When democratic transformation ideals were introduced, blacks had to merge into HWIs where they were expected to perform at equal levels with their formerly advantaged white counterparts.

I also realised that HEIs do not approach teaching and learning from similar orientations. Some are constructivists, using more learner-centred approaches, whilst others are more technicist, using more teacher-centred approaches. There are also HEIs with a more research-intensive thrust compared to others with more of a teaching focus.

The changing environment of universities challenges their existing staff who have to open doors to students from very diverse contexts. Add to the scenario black women academic staff who also enter these institutions from formerly disadvantaged HEIs and this is bound to lead to a stressful situation. The closure of South African teacher training colleges and the merging of these colleges with universities meant that some staff from those contexts also entered HEIs that differed greatly from the ones to which they had been accustomed. The cultural capital they carried from their background made it a difficult experience for them as academics, but gave them some advantages as individuals who could identify with and pinpoint the problems of students who came from backgrounds similar to their own. As professionals, though, they have to put in double the effort to satisfy the requirements of their new community. It is under such circumstances that mentorship is indispensable – certainly to the new entrant, but also to the advantage of the university that surely wants the most from its staff.

Former black HEIs were not research oriented compared to the new contexts where these professionals have to find employment. These new contexts put new demands on all professionals to be research intensive and to be excellent teachers. Many of these professionals need mentorship beyond the research supervision that is part of post-graduate study. This is not easily accessible at these universities, perhaps for financial (but certainly also for workload) reasons. Yet mentorship is key if new entrants are to be productive and to increase their output in terms of research and teaching at these HEIs.

What managers of divisions should also consider is that when black female academics enter these new environments from formerly disadvantaged HEIs, they bring with them a culture that is almost engrained in them and difficult to eradicate immediately. Black women academics from some of these institutions have been accepted as being carers of their families and no great expectations are placed on them to do intensive research. Traditional teaching strategies acquired from their training during the apartheid era continue to be part of their practice. There are sacrifices they endure in trying to meet the demands of their new situations, but then there is also an onus on these departments to assist new entrants with mentorship in order to support their way into the new HEIs and subsequently into successful careers.

I also wish that managers of divisions, and colleagues especially, would consider learning about each other's culture so that they are able to read their colleagues correctly. For instance, some newcomers in African culture have to first learn the ropes when entering a new area before acting. As such, many African colleagues will tend to be quiet on arrival at a new institution and are then likely to be viewed negatively. Yet, should some of these colleagues have mentors they would open up quicker than when they have to navigate the new community of practice on their own.

I therefore recommend that there should be mentorship for all entrants who are insufficiently prepared to participate effectively in new communities of practice and that they should not only have to depend on whether they have connections with

older academics who help them to prosper. Departments should consider diversity as defined in White Paper 3 (DoBE 1997, 10), which states as one of the goals for a transformed higher education institution to consider the importance of 'diversity' and 'change'. This will assist new entrants from diverse contexts who do not have either the connections or the culture to prosper in their new contexts and will ultimately benefit both themselves and their institutions.

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