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A scholarly approach to student success in
Higher Education Volume 2



TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGIES

Chief editor: J Pool
Assistant editors: MM Fernandes-Martins, M Fourie

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CHAPTER 4:

Culture trumps structure in the competitive struggle between teaching and research

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Abstract

In response to international research-informed calls for the professionalisation of teaching to support student success, the South African Higher Education sector has implemented structures aimed at promoting teaching and research as equals. Despite this occurring at both the institutional and national level, many South African institutions are still struggling to achieve this balance, with research remaining a dominant factor in academic recognition. Using a phenomenographic research design and employing the notion of structure, culture and agency to conduct a thematic analysis of qualitative data, this study examines the success of a potentially enabling structure (i.e., a Postgraduate Diploma in Education [Higher Education]) designed to professionalise teaching in support of student success. The findings suggest that, despite strong indications that good

teaching is encouraged and valued, the dominant research culture within the authors' institution has negated the attempts to place research and teaching on an equal footing. Institutional-level structures remain fragmented with respect to research and teaching. Student success is not only dependent on receiving research-informed disciplinary knowledge, but also on how an institution promotes and facilitates well-informed and scholarly teaching practices. The authors conclude by recommending i) the recognition of postgraduate diplomas as an indicator of learning and teaching expertise by staffing and promotions committees; ii) the utilisation of agents who have self-selected to professionally develop their teaching to be part of a coherent system that supports and steers cultural change within academia; and iii) the recognition of research in learning and teaching as equal to discipline-specific research.

Keywords: South Africa, higher education, structure, culture, academic development, teaching and learning, research

Introduction

In the South African (SA) higher education (HE) sector, academics are generally required to contribute to three broad areas of work: teaching, research, and academic citizenship or service (Rothmann & Barkhuizen, 2008, p. 451). Research acumen is initially developed through the attainment of higher degrees, and later by conducting research studies and supervising postgraduate students. Academic citizenship covers broad areas of service within the higher education sector into which academics are inducted in various ways. However, teaching, and the teaching dimension of academic professional learning and development, continues to be less valued than research, which appears to be structurally and culturally prioritised (DHET, 2020, p. 12; Leibowitz, Bozalek, van Schalkwyk, & Winberg, 2015, p. 325). A large five-phase study involving eight SA HE institutions conducted between 2011 and 2016 found that at all eight institutions there was a “valuing of research over and above teaching” (Leibowitz, Bozalek, Garraway, Herman, Jawitz, Muhuro, & Winberg, 2017, p. 15). Leibowitz et al. (2017) also found

that the skewed focus on research is further complicated by the twin pressures on academics to do research and attain higher degrees in their disciplines (p. 15). A long-standing assumption widely held within the SA HE Sector (among non-educationalists) is that a doctorate⁶ or Master's degree in any given discipline automatically qualifies someone to teach at university level. However, those qualified in education know this to be a misguided assumption with negative implications for the sector and success of students, as quality teaching and student success cannot be separated (Mangum, 2017, p. 17). The Leibowitz et al. (2017) study, and an expansive body of research on academic development within the SA HE context spanning nearly three decades, substantiates this (McKenna, 2003; Volbrecht, 2003; Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007; Scott, 2009; Boughey, 2012; Boughey, 2013; Vorster & Quinn, 2017; Collett, Van den Berg, Verster, & Bozalek, 2018).

With the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and HE institutions' increased focus on promoting student success (Leibowitz et al., 2017, p. 12), it is important to prioritise the professionalisation of teaching in HE. Transformative pedagogies that address the needs of SA students, as well as academic faculty that are well versed in educational theory, will most likely emerge from a culture that values teaching. This chapter aims to demonstrate how the tensions between teaching and research (Leibowitz et al., 2015, p. 325) remain evident at one research-intensive public university in SA, despite near-decade long national and institutional efforts to resolve them. Leaving these tensions unresolved could impede student success.

⁶ PhD is used where respondent feedback is quoted verbatim.

The authors expand on the Leibowitz et al. (2017) study by investigating the interconnection of structures and culture at the abovementioned university, where they work⁷. In particular, they explore culture's dominance over structure through an analysis of questionnaire and focus group data gleaned from engagements with the alumni of a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Higher Education) (PGDipE[HE]) offered at the institution, which is viewed as an enabling structure focused on upskilling and developing academics and university teachers.

A guiding question of this research therefore became whether the alumni of the PGDipE(HE) feel that their achieved expertise is recognised and valued by their institution, and if not, whether inferences can be made between the recognition or lack thereof of the alumni, and the dominant research culture at the institution. Leibowitz et al. (2017, p. 15) emphasise that

the domain of culture has been shown to be extremely significant in reproducing and transforming dominant ideas about teaching and learning in higher education. This domain is salient at all institutions, whether historically advantaged or disadvantaged.

The argument made in this chapter is not that university teachers without formal teaching qualifications are inferior (there are many excellent educators who are not formally qualified), or even that all university teachers should attain a formal education qualification such as the PGDipE(HE). Rather, it is argued that, despite structural reform through national and institutional frameworks to enhance academics as university teachers, and

⁷ The institution did not form part of the Leibowitz et al. (2017) study.

with over 100 alumni having successfully completed the PGDipE(HE⁸), the dominant culture at this particular institution appears to remain skewed towards research. Boughey and McKenna (2021, p. 133) remind the reader that “structures require complementary cultures to be effective”.

Background and context

SA has come far in terms of structurally emphasising professional learning and development of tertiary academics. This has been achieved through national regulatory frameworks, with the introduction of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and its Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). Quality assurance of learning and teaching is part of the HEQC’s mandate, as is the professional development of academic staff (Leibowitz et al., 2017, p. 21). The DHET’s latest initiative was the implementation of the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) in 2018, which focuses on developing the capacity of academics in their roles as teachers and researchers, while improving the quality of teaching and student success within the sector (DHET, 2020)⁹. This programme was born from the Staffing South Africa’s Universities Framework (SSAUF) implemented in 2015, which launches many staff development initiatives (DHET, 2020, pp. 18–19). The DHET (2020) acknowledges that “teaching activity enjoys lower status than

8 The authors are not arguing that the continuous professional learning (CPL) and development of academics as university teachers can only occur by means of formal qualification; however, the PGDipE(HE) (a formal, professional qualification) is the focus of this chapter, which is why this chapter does not address CPL workshops, short courses, and so on.

9 Prior to the UCDP, the DHET used to avail a Teaching Development Grant and Research Development Grant in three-year cycles. These were merged during the build-up to the 2018–2020 cycle and replaced by the University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG), which would realise the objectives of the UCDP.

research activity, and the recognition and reward that is afforded for research activity outweighs that afforded to teaching” (p. 12). One particular recommendation from the Leibowitz et al. (2017) study was that a national “policy on professional learning regarding the teaching role be written” (p. 15). In 2018, the DHET launched the National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers (DHET, 2018). This is the latest policy to promote the development of academics as university teachers in the nation’s continued effort to place equal value on teaching and research (DHET, 2020, p. 20; National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers, 2018, p. 4).

In response to the increased focus on nationally developing academics as teachers, the authors’ institution has prioritised the professional development of lecturers in several ways. For example, through its implementation of institutional policies, such as the Institutional Framework for Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) of Academics as University Teachers (2019), which all faculties at the institution need to espouse in their own interdisciplinary structures. This framework (a structure) enables the institution, and the sector at large, to make meaningful, policy-supported strides towards the upskilling of academics as university teachers, and was welcomed by many academic developers and learning and teaching professionals.

If culture is truly to shift towards a more centralised focus on teaching, the values contained in the Framework for Continuous Professional Learning of Academics as University Teachers (2019) need to be extended holistically to all of the institution’s policies. However, the emphasis on research remains subtly embedded in other institutional policy documents. In previous years, there used to be a “teaching track” for academic staff working at the authors’ institution, which allowed those appointed on this track to focus solely on

teaching. By association, this meant that research output was not stipulated as a requirement of service for academics appointed on this track, although some still conducted research from time to time. However, the teaching track was discontinued in 2014 for most disciplines, thus no longer allowing academic staff to focus predominantly on teaching. In contrast, the research-only track was not discontinued, thereby allowing academics to continue focusing predominantly on research if their contracts were approved in that way (Policy HRA17, 2014; Policy G-C-2020-023, 2020, p. 7). This means academics working at the institution are either appointed as traditional academics who have to contribute in the areas of teaching, research, and academic citizenship, or simply as researchers. This element of Institutional policy subtly perpetuates the cultural dominance of research over teaching.

Other examples of how the culture of research is enabled through policy can also be found. The Academic Workload Policy explicitly lists postgraduate supervision and research as important academic activities (Policy G-C-2020-023, 2020, p. 4) for developing the skills and capacity of a division, but it is silent on any teaching or teacher training. Developing skills within a discipline should include recognition for training in professional teaching if the institution wants to be clear on its commitment to the professional learning of academics as university teachers. The institution's Academic Promotion Policy can be seen to further complicate matters. While it speaks to four broad career tracks for academic staff, with the aforementioned teaching track still listed, it does not acknowledge that this track is not available to many if not most disciplines and faculties (Policy GJC-HRC-2021-040, 2021). Evidently, in as much as the authors' institution – and most SA higher education institutions – is following the international trend of promoting and supporting the development of academics as professional teachers at universities through formal structures (e.g., frameworks), there are still

subtle elements contained in institutional policy documents that reveal and support a research-dominant culture.

Another way in which the institution is focusing on the professional development of academics is through the introduction of its PGDipE(HE), which is a formal, professional teaching qualification aimed at developing academics as university teachers. Although the policy frameworks and PGDipE(HE) were not intentionally linked (the PGDipE(HE) was launched a few years prior to these frameworks being released), their objectives are aligned. This chapter focuses on the authors' observations of how the alumni experience the dominant research culture at the institution, using questionnaire and focus group data to draw inferences. In particular, both the questionnaire and focus group asked whether the alumni of the PGDipE(HE) feel that their achieved expertise has resulted in changes in their teaching practice and engagement, and whether they believe this is recognised and valued by their institution. The authors argue that even though their institution has implemented structures that recognise the importance of improving learning and teaching (i.e., the aforementioned framework and the establishing of learning and teaching centres in faculties), which should, in turn, improve student success (Mangum, 2017, p. 17), the dominant culture – perceived by the alumni – remains one of publish or perish (Callaghan, 2016; Von Solms & Von Solms, 2016).

Theoretical underpinnings and analytical framework

The lenses of structure, culture and agency (SCA) have been used extensively in educational research (Behari-Leak, 2017; Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Case, 2015; Leibowitz et al., 2017), both from an analytical and theoretical perspective. Informed by Social Realism (Archer, 1995, 2000, 2005) and

Critical Realism (Bhaskar, 1975), SCA affords educational researchers the opportunity to investigate the dual autonomy and interconnectedness of structure and culture, their interplay, the consequent outcome of that interplay, and the ways in which structure and culture either enable or constrain agency. In this chapter, the authors use the notions of culture and structure in particular to perform an analytical interrogation of qualitative data generated through a questionnaire and focus group discussions with PGDipE(HE) alumni of their institution, while briefly touching on agency (although a broader discussion of agency forms part of another paper). Case (2015) explains that structure “has to do with material goods (unequally distributed across society) and is also the domain of social positions and roles” (p. 843), while culture encompasses “the world of ideas and beliefs” (p. 843) including propositional beliefs, opinion, and myth (Case, 2015, p. 843). Lastly, Case (2015, p. 843) describes agency as the “domain of human action and interaction”, although, as Leibowitz et al. (2017, p. 5) explain, the notion of agency relates to “the power of individuals or groups to change their practices, conditions or contexts¹⁰”. Drawing on the SCA literature, one might say that the national structure of higher education in SA, and the institutional structure of the PGDipE(HE), have made some progress with positioning teaching as equal to research. Consequently, one would expect this national and institutional progress to filter down from faculty and school¹¹ levels to the academics themselves. Yet, what emerges is that

10 Although the authors will not be discussing Archer’s (1995) morphogenetic framework to investigate change or the lack thereof (as becomes apparent in this chapter), this will form part of their future work.

11 At the authors’ institution each faculty is made up of numerous schools, which in turn consists of various disciplinary/academic departments. For example, the Faculty of Commerce, Law, and Management has six schools, one of which is the School of Business

alumni are still perceiving a research-dominated culture in their everyday experiences of academia.

Methodology

The authors adopted a phenomenographic research design (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016). Cibangu and Hepworth (2016) explain that the “focus of phenomenography is on people’s varying conceptions of a given phenomenon, not on the phenomenon itself” (p. 5). In the case of this study, the authors were concerned with the varying conceptions and experiences of PGDipE(HE) alumni in relation to their work as academics and university teachers after completing the qualification, not the qualification itself. Thus, the phenomenographic approach afforded the authors an opportunity to investigate the variation of alumni experiences (Marton, 2015 and Marton & Pong, 2005, as cited in Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016, p. 1) of the PGDipE(HE).

Following an online questionnaire (consisting of open-ended questions) with 19 PGDipE(HE) alumni respondents, an iterative and inductive approach was adopted, which identified recurring themes from the questionnaire data. These themes were used to inform the semi-structured focus group discussions held with eight of the 19 PGDipE(HE) participating alumni, who were grouped into three focus groups. One focus group met in person, while the other two met virtually. All focus group recordings were professionally transcribed. In line with ethical requirements (ethical clearance had been obtained from the institution’s Human Research Ethics Committee [Non-

Sciences. The school houses a number of departments, like the Information Systems Department, the Insurance and Risk Department, the Marketing Department, etc.

Medical]¹²), the transcriber was required to sign a non-disclosure and confidentiality agreement. Upon completion, the authors engaged in a collaborative, deductive analysis of the questionnaire and focus group data, using the lenses of SCA (Archer, 1995, 2000, 2005) to code their findings. The results of that analysis form the basis of this chapter.

The authors acknowledge that the sample size is small, with approximately 20% of all alumni responding to the questionnaire and a smaller group participating in the focus groups. Furthermore, although most questionnaire respondents indicated a willingness to participate in a focus group, the authors felt that the data gathered from the three focus groups was rich and detailed, and data saturation was reached by the end of the third focus group discussion. It is possible that the PGDipE(HE) graduates who did not respond to the questionnaire may have different conceptions of, and experiences with, the programme than those who did respond. However, the study focuses on the effects of enabling structures being constrained by a dominant opposing culture.

Findings and discussion

The PGDipE(HE) is a voluntary diploma for which academics may enrol, and it has been a formal structure at the institution since 2015. It consists of four part-time courses that are taken over a period of two years. These four courses focus on (i) learning and teaching philosophies; (ii) current debates around assessment; (iii) topical issues in curriculum design; and (iv) independent research, through which the staff member may explore any

12 The protocol number allocated for this project is: H21/06/02.

area of interest developed in the preceding three modules and write towards publication. This has been a well-accepted structure with over 100 graduates to date. The data comprised the responses of 19 participants representing each year of study since 2015. The participants' tertiary teaching experience ranged from three to 27 years upon starting the PGDipE(HE). Participants were from a wide variety of disciplines within the institution with a few being non-disciplinary-based academics¹³.

The findings centre on three emerging themes: Firstly, that the PGDipE(HE) alumni made informed enhancements to their own practice based on what they had learned from the PGDipE(HE), suggesting that the structure is a successful enabler. Academics report making more theoretically grounded decisions in their teaching practice and feeling better equipped to enter discussions via committee participation, contribution to policy writing, or Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) engagement. Often, these changes seem to stop at the individual level, as few participants stated that they made or influenced faculty-level or institutional changes. Secondly, most participants experience a clear divide between discipline-specific research and learning and teaching research, with the latter perceived as being less valued than the former. Thirdly, some participants felt that the learning and teaching expertise they gained through completion of the PGDipE(HE) was not recognised or valued by their institution. The findings for each theme are presented and discussed here, followed by recommendations drawn from the discussions.

13 Some participants are not disciplinary academics directly involved in student teaching; instead, they work in academic development or learning and teaching centres. Therefore, their research is expected to involve SOTL.

Theme 1: The PGDipE(HE) as a successful enabling structure

Structures have been implemented to promote the professionalisation of learning and teaching in HE, such as National and Institutional Frameworks and the PGDipE(HE), but those structures are slow to effect cultural change in both teaching and research. Kezar and Eckel (2002, p. 436) posit that it may be beneficial to use cultural changes occurring at the micro-level to gain an understanding of the change process needed for real macro-level cultural change to occur; “[t]he challenge is to chart a middle ground and identify findings informative at a level that can be used to guide change processes... one solution to charting meaningful middle ground is through a cultural perspective” (Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 436). This chapter argues that harnessing the collective individual expertise and experience of the PGDipE(HE) alumni could be a useful starting point in making comprehensive cultural changes at a faculty and institutional level (Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 440; Williams et al., 2013, p. 54). This agency enabled by the PGDipE(HE) structure, if utilised and harnessed at the faculty and institutional level, can be a powerful means to connect the national and institutional structures with the type of institutional cultural change for which they are striving, thereby closing the middle cultural gap.

Influence of PGDipE(HE) on practice

Respondents were asked to “Please describe briefly what influence the PGDipE(HE) has had on your practices, if any”. The results suggest that the influence of the PGDipE(HE) on their individual academic practice has been profound for all 19 respondents, as they all reported making changes in their own teaching and assessment practices:

"I now think before I act, it has informed my academic decision making." [R3¹⁴]

"I now see teaching and learning as a process and not a destination. I constantly reflect and make changes to my teaching content, delivery and assessment." [R6]

"It has fostered innovative and flexible practices to my teaching and learning skills." [R8]

"It has drastically improved my learning & teaching and assessment practices. It has given me the ability to engage with how I construct curriculum in a more cohesive way." [R12]

These findings are indicative of the individual change that has already begun to occur as a consequence of the PGDipE(HE) for alumni.

Respondents also report a heightened awareness of students when implementing these changes:

"I am more responsive to learners' learning and how context influences learning." [R13]

"I think about what and how I teach, how students learn, what enhances learning, how I design curriculum and have reworked much of my courses, the activities and the whole programme" ...

"I am constantly experimenting to see where impact can be made for my students both on their enjoyment of the programme and their ability to achieve deep learning and criticality." [R4]

Student success is not only dependent on who the student is or what the student does, but also on how responsive the teacher is to the student's needs (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007, p. 393; DHET, 2020, p. 12; Boughey & McKenna, 2021, p. 137). A crucial aspect of quality teaching is being aware of

14 R refers to respondents to the questionnaire and P refers to the participants in the focus groups.

the student and their needs and then adjusting pedagogical approaches accordingly. As Mangum (2017, p. 17) explains, “Quality instruction [is] a key element of [...] student success strategies”. The PGDipE(HE) brought such awareness to several participants.

The results also speak to more involvement, generally, in learning and teaching activities at the institution since undertaking the PGDipE(HE), suggesting that the programme has influenced the participants’ beliefs and practices. This is interpreted as a potential shift towards a culture, as defined by Case (2015, p. 843), or the strengthening of a pre-existing culture that values good teaching and views ongoing development of teaching expertise as vital to their role as academics.

Involvement in learning and teaching activities

Fourteen of the 19 respondents reported that their involvement in learning and teaching activities has changed since undertaking the PGDipE(HE):

“Yes, I tend to look out for opportunities that relate to teaching and learning; conferences, journals webinars.” [R3]

“I am alert to symposia, seminars, conferences and attend many of these. I still read in the field and speak to colleagues about how to better develop the critical thinking, the deep literacy and the enjoyment of learning all the time.” [R4]

“I now see the extent and importance of SOTL. Hence, after the PGDip, I enrolled for an M.Ed.” [R6]

“I now actively work on my own practice - it feels like constant action research. I attend many webinars on issues I find interesting.” [R18]

This change, while apparently widespread among the respondents and aligned with desired “continuous” professional development, appears to be confined to the individuals themselves and their specific practice. There is little mention of broader influence on colleagues. However, when

considering the potential benefits of their teaching development, the vast majority of the participants identify benefits to a broader constituency.

Moyo and McKenna (2021, p. 5) argue that “strong leadership that contributes to cultures of professionalism is needed for teaching and learning enhancement. Corporate agents – agents with significant institutional power – are key to the success of teaching development work.” While appropriate institutional structures and the right people at an institutional level are crucial to the implementation of any structure, this chapter suggests that harnessing the changes that individual agents are making in their everyday practice could be an equally beneficial avenue to explore in cultivating cultural change within the institution.

Perceived benefit to department and institution

Fifteen of the 19 respondents concluded that their individual learning and teaching development benefitted both their department and institution. These responses do not refer to actual measured benefits to learning and teaching, but rather to the respondents’ perception of the benefit to their department and institution:

“Yes, my teaching and assessment style has changed for the better. This in my view is a value add to both School and institution.” [R3]

“The real benefit is to my department and my students, the teaching assistants and the writing fellows.” [R4]

“I believe that the benefit to the School and [the Institution] is quite simply that I am competent educator. I am confident in my role and well equipped to take on new challenges.” [R9]

“It directly benefits my teaching, and my immediate division.” [R12]

“I am of benefit to my school because I contribute to the Teaching and Learning Committee.” [R13]

“I feel that I am contributing in meaningful ways at a faculty and institutional level.” [R19]

Despite the above claims, three of the 19 respondents qualified their completion of the PGDipE(HE) as beneficial to the Institution, with a reference to research output:

*“[The Institution] has benefited at both a practical level in the changes I have made to curricula and assessment practices as well as my ability to contribute to policy and **from my increased research output.**” [R2]*

*“The university might benefit from a positive reputation from students and those who encounter our graduates. **However, the university directly benefits from my SOTL publications subsidies and aggregate research outputs.**” [R6]*

*“[The Institution] will be gaining a more qualified staff, a more knowledgeable one, and **a more research-productive one.**” [R11]*

The authors attribute the statements above to the continued research-dominant culture at the institution, which arguably negates or diminishes the structures that recognise or promote teaching as equal to research.

Theme 2: Discipline-specific research versus learning and teaching research

Boughey and McKenna (2021, p. 133) state that there is a need for both learning and teaching research and discipline-specific research. However, they argue that learning and teaching research “cannot be pursued at the expense of an individual’s development in the home discipline” (p. 133), as research acumen in the home discipline is vital for academics to know what to teach their students (p. 133). This could be viewed as a subtle nod to a research-dominant culture within the SA HE sector more broadly. However, the authors of this chapter argue that, if the dominance of a research culture is to be challenged, individual interest and passion for SOTL should be

encouraged and nurtured. This would not only afford the individual an opportunity to become a scholarly expert in learning and teaching, but also enhance teaching practices and (by association) student learning and success (Mangum, 2017).

Closely linked to the above, a strong sense emerged from the focus group data that some participants felt conflicted by doing both home-discipline and learning and teaching research, as researching both (or favouring SOTL) created a researcher-identity divide:

“... we need a teaching capability framework. One that is linked to research outputs. One that is linked to sort of promotional, sort of opportunities beyond just research.” [P8]

“... you are often reminded to research in your area that you teach in, but never the question about do [you] research in how you teach.” [P5]

Participants also linked these sentiments to how a staffing and promotions (S&P) committee would perceive this tension. Discussions on staffing and promotions criteria revealed that research was often the primary indicator of an academic’s abilities:

“So, I often ask myself, where should I focus? Should I focus on business law, on HR or can I change and talk more about curriculum and teaching and assessment, because what happens next is when you’re being considered for associate Prof, there’s diversification or there’s diversity in your research. And that becomes a bit problematic. I wish, when it came to maybe promotions and the rest of it, that when the portfolio is displayed, you know, there’s an indication that you have an interest in the actual teaching and the about teaching. So, you know, I think, maybe there needs to be a little understanding that comes from faculty and those that review these portfolios, but I think there’s very little clarity as to what next for a PGDip [alumni].” [P5]

The above response from a focus group discussion illustrates the dilemma that was voiced by several participants: Confusion about negotiating the evident conflict between promotion criteria and processes (structures), and the attendant research-focused culture. This tension is further exacerbated by an inherent individual valuing of teaching, which has been developed and nurtured by enabling structures (i.e., the PGDipE(HE)), both at institutional and national levels.

The dilemma is further complicated by institutional demands for academics to achieve formal recognition as researchers through NRF ratings:

“... for NRF, if people are interested in applying for NRF ratings, they tend to, from what I understand, you know, they tend to want to see a specific focus within a discipline and so, if you’re doing research within the discipline as well as doing research about teaching in a discipline, they tend to see that as two separate focus areas rather than one. Which is a bit crazy.” [P4]

Again, this positions opposing cultures and structures against each other, within competing national structures; those focused on research versus those that support the professional development of teaching. While these should theoretically be able to co-exist, as both are required in the academic role, subtle criteria encapsulated in policy and supported by the prevailing research culture (such as a focused research portfolio), can be misinterpreted or abused.

There are examples of staffing and promotions criteria within the institution that arguably support the cultural dissonance between teaching and research. As mentioned in the Background and Context section, there is a research-only track in addition to an academic track. The former allows individuals to focus solely on research, while the latter requires duties across the areas of teaching, research and academic citizenship. Yet, the teaching-only track (which still exists in the in the Institutional Academic Promotion

Policy (Policy G-JC-HRC-2021-040, 2021)), is not an option for most within the Institution. Consequently, those wishing to focus on learning-and-teaching innovation and enhancement, must do so on the academic track and in addition to their research and academic citizenship responsibilities.

Under the confirmation and promotion requirements for teaching, the S&P Criteria (2019) refers to “good teaching” (p. 8) at lecturer level, “demonstrated teaching ability” and “solid contribution to teaching” (for promotion) (p. 6) at senior lecturer level, and “demonstrated ability to teach” (p. 3) at associate professor level, without any further elaboration on what this means. In practice, academics employed on the academic track (which is the norm – at least in the faculty where the authors work) who wish to apply for promotion are required to submit two or three student evaluations of teaching undertaken in the preceding years, which the criteria document implies will be used as an indicator of teaching competence. In other words, teaching competence is largely assessed according to student perception and feedback. Shifts are starting to occur towards more robust and well-rounded measures in addition to student evaluation (i.e., peer reviews, teaching philosophy statements, and portfolios of teaching), but the dominant cultural belief among academics is that student evaluations remain most important to the S&P committee. It is only at the level of professor that the criteria document first mentions a teaching portfolio (S&P Criteria, 2019, p. 1), with no mention anywhere in the criteria document of how a PGDipE(HE) might count towards recognition of teaching competence for the staff member who has successfully completed it. Thus, this is an example of two structures within the institution (i.e., the PGDipE(HE) and the S&P Criteria (2019)) not being aligned, possibly at the expense of learning and teaching.

In contrast, the research requirements across all levels of promotion, from associate lecturer to full professor, are well articulated, with a clear

indication of how many publications are required within a specified timeframe, and/or what further higher degree studies are necessary. Additionally, readers are assigned to investigate the quality of an applicant's research output. The message embedded in such strong emphasis on research, and so little on teaching, is testament to the way in which the misalignment of structures serves to support the dominance of a research culture within the institution, which (as the data shows) has tangibly affected the participants of this study. This echoes Boughey and McKenna's (2021, p. 13) quote presented earlier that "structures require complementary cultures to be effective".

Theme 3: Recognition of learning and teaching expertise

The professionalisation of teaching in HE has received much attention in SA HE literature (Behari-Leak, 2017; Leibowitz, 2017, p. 28; Boughey & McKenna, 2021. p. 140). However, when respondents were asked if they felt recognised as having expertise in learning and teaching by their colleagues, school, faculty, or the university at large, the minority – five out of 19 – indicated that they experienced some level of recognition in this regard:

"Yes, I have been invited to speak at seminars as well as contribute to T&L policy at all levels." [R2]

"Invite to join committees and mentorship." [R3]

"Not really. Although my Head of School has been supportive of me applying for grants or when I speak at symposia etc." [R4]

"This is hard for me to answer due to my position in a faculty T&L unit which means that invitations to join committees are often related to my position." [R10]

"Absolutely. I have been invited to join university committees and am seen as an expert in my faculty and school. I must admit that this may also be related to my PhD in education." [R14]

Conversely, 10 participants explicitly said they did not believe that their expertise was recognised:

"The School has not regarded it, acknowledged it or in any way drawn from this experience. Even during the pandemic I offered to sit on a committee thinking about T&L (not the formal T&L committee but a discussion/community of practice space within the school) but it fizzled out as overwhelm set in and no real focus / resources / champion took it on. Apart from the teaching faculty of the PGDipHE I don't think anyone else really cares about who has done the PGDip HE." [R4]

"No, I don't feel like my expertise are recognised anywhere at [the] University. I have accepted that the university is a corporation and it is only interested in research output. So, for me SOTL is for both my unrecognised critical and reflective teaching practice, but also for the recognised publication track." [R6]

"No, I don't feel like it has been recognised in the school more generally, except by one or two individuals." [R12]

During the focus group stage, the theme of whether the institution recognised and valued the alumni's expertise gained through the PGDipE(HE) was further explored, with one participant commenting that

"... there's generally a culture in the institution of a lack of celebration of what works well in teaching and learning. You know, you get the awards every now and again, but that touches very few [people]. There is very little ways of celebrating excellence and innovation in teaching in a general sense" ... "Teaching is not valued in the same way as we all know, as easily countable, bean countable research output" ... "you'll never convince me that this institution is serious about teaching and learning until they shame poor teachers in the same way that they shame inactive researchers." [P2]

Two participants felt that the message they received “coming down from the top” is to attend workshops offered by the institution’s Centre for Learning, Teaching, and Development, which have become a mere box-ticking exercise for promotion or probation:

“And I mean, it’s so strange how many people just see their teaching responsibility, or seem to see their teaching responsibility as just something, it’s just a box I need to tick, I have to do it, and I mean, we see that regularly.” [P2]

Other participants reiterated and expanded on what was gathered through the questionnaire responses:

“I don’t feel that there is any institutional and departmental recognition of having the PGDip. In my department we still believe in research. Classical [disciplinary] research as an indicator of, you know, your academic ability or stature. [The PGDip was a] Sort of something nice to have but not something that directly has an impact on my work or could have an impact, a positive impact on the departmental work. And as it were, one of our colleagues, I think two or three years ago, resigned because she was in the senior tutor track and really, her contention was that she doesn’t feel valued because now the department values people with PhDs and doing [disciplinary] research. So, as a departmental issue it’s, for them the PGDip is of no value at all.” [P6]

“I think part of the problem at [the Institution], like at many universities...is that the teaching function is not seen as a prioritised or incentivised as much as the research focus is. People get appointed pretty much as a lecturer based on how well you can prove yourself as a researcher. So, you know, oh, you’ve got a Master’s degree or you’ve got a PhD, okay, now come join the department and teach and research again.” [P4]

“... as time’s gone on and as time should progress, it should be much more recognised. That this is what we actually need to do as part of our profession. I mean, if you look at our promotion and confirmation things, as you know, like are you studying, are

you progressing [...] Are you actually doing a PGDip, are you growing yourself in your teaching and learning? Because I think that's unfortunately the part that gets neglected [...] You know, research and all that, how much you, how much are you researching. How much are you actually, what papers are you putting out, what journals are you going for? That gets acknowledged a lot more than what actually are you doing on teaching and learning. And for me that, teaching and learning should be a lot more acknowledged." [P9]

Throughout the questionnaire and the focus group discussions, participants mention that the institutional culture still predominantly values research over teaching. Therefore, the lack of recognition of teaching achievements within divisions is perhaps not surprising; as Behari-Leak (2017) emphasises, "[t]o what extent can individual academic teachers mediate problems located at structural and systemic levels through their own practice?" (p. 486).

The PGDipE(HE) is not unique as a structure where the participants and their work are all but invisible; the national UCDP-funded TAU programme¹⁵, which has fellows across all 26 public universities in SA working on projects designed to advance teaching, also grapples with the problem of supporting sustained improvement in teaching by empowering its fellows to undertake the role of change agents within their institutions (TAU, 2021).

¹⁵ TAU is the Teaching Advancement at Universities programme, a collaborative project initiated by HELTASA in 2016 and funded under the UCDP. TAU is a component of the DHET's National Framework for Advancing Academics as University Teachers.

Recommendations

Our findings strongly suggest that, despite well-established national and institutional structures to support and enable the development and professionalisation of teaching, the dominant culture (at least at the authors' institution) remains research-focused. The challenges experienced by participants of strong and well-established national structures like TAU suggest that similar claims might be true across the sector.

Despite enabling and supporting structures geared towards the development of academics as teachers in recognition of its importance and relevance to student success (Mangum, 2017), the research-dominant culture of the institution means that research continues to be valued and rewarded (whether subtly or explicitly) more than teaching – a case of culture dominating structures. The participants mentioned how their personal improvements could benefit the institution at large, but very few of them referred to actual change they were making at an institutional level, with research and publication remaining more celebrated in academia. Additionally, the participants report a divide in their research interests, with clear tensions between their disciplinary research and research focused on learning and teaching. Some participants even stated outright that their learning and teaching research is not valued within their disciplines, nor among their discipline-specific colleagues. This creates uncertainty for academics who want to pursue research in learning and teaching, which is acknowledged as an important contributor to quality teaching (Leibowitz et al., 2017; Boughey & McKenna, 2021). While the institution has come far in establishing the necessary structures to promote academic development in learning and teaching, the cultural undertone experienced by academic staff is that research output is still a dominant driving force within academia, and

disciplinary research generally remains the preferred form of research output.

With this chapter, the authors make three recommendations with the potential to foster cultural change within the HE sector, aimed at bridging the gap between the national and institutional structures implemented for the professionalisation of academics as university teachers and the individual experiences of PGDipE(HE) alumni.

Firstly, the authors recommend that staffing and promotions committees recognise the PGDipE(HE) and similar qualifications across the sector. There must be greater recognition of teaching achievements, teaching innovation, SOTL, and what constitutes quality teaching under staffing and promotions criteria.

Secondly, as emphasised by Kezar and Eckel (2002, p. 452), there is a need to make the changes occurring at HE institutions visible to the individuals within those institutions. Therefore, the authors recommend that PGDipE(HE) alumni and participants in national structures like TAU be recognised and utilised within their schools, faculties and institutions; thus affording them the opportunity to use their agency, knowledge and expertise to advance cultural change within the spaces they occupy. To this end, faculty deans and department heads should be informed of who these academics are and capitalise on their learning and teaching expertise. Allowing these graduates to serve on learning and teaching committees, encouraging them to run workshops on teaching innovations and new assessment strategies, and giving them the freedom to pursue their learning and teaching interests are some examples of how this may be achieved.

Thirdly, the authors recommend that the recognition of learning and teaching research be viewed as equal to discipline-specific research. While

the relevant institution's Framework for Continuous Professional Learning (Institutional CPL Framework, 2019) states that "at a research-intensive university, scholarly engagement with a body of evidence underlying effective educational practice is just as important as scholarly engagement with disciplinary knowledge" (p. 9), it is clear that this is not being operationalised in some disciplines. Anecdotal observation suggests that this is widespread across HE institutions in SA and may warrant further investigation.

Limitations and conclusion

In this chapter, the authors have only briefly touched on the matter of agency. A continuing area of exploration involves more in-depth research of the agential forces at play (e.g., PGDipE(HE) alumni and institutional leaders) in the tensions between the structures and culture explored in this chapter. Additionally, a more comprehensive analysis of change over time, using Archer's morphogenetic framework to guide the analysis, may yield new insights into the evident tensions between teaching and research cultures and structures within the HE Sector in SA.

In conclusion, as long as the structures intended to facilitate equality between teaching and research remain fragmented, the likelihood of these overcoming a long-established and powerful research culture seems slim. If institutions are to avoid negation of their efforts to facilitate this shift, it is recommended that a system of coherent and consistent enabling structures is established, both at institutional and national levels. In some cases, this requires simple actions, such as achieving coherence between policies and a potential shift from exclusively top-down efforts in order to promote recognition and support of change driven by individuals from the ground up. The fact that passionate academics could be prevented from contributing to

student success through scholarly engagement with learning and teaching practices due to a research-focused culture is a travesty.

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