An Analysis of Perceptions of Academics Regarding the Reward for Excellence in Teaching versus the Reward for Excellence in Research Approached through the Lens of Critical Theory

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Abstract
Under the pretext of enhancing a knowledge society, educational transformation promotes a polarization between excellence in teaching and learning and excellence in research through a system that favours research. Academics who may be good teachers but who are not research active may be seen as incompetent. Through the lens of critical theory, this paper argues that this polarization has created an oppressive hegemonic working environment for academics. Self-administered questionnaires were applied with academics as the target group. Face-to-face interviews were conducted among middle and senior management. Respondents indicated that they were still committed to pursuing excellence in teaching despite the unbalanced reward system towards research. This sense of 'calling' could make respondents vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation. When, for the purpose of pursuing excellence, they take on an increasingly heavy workload in the absence of adequate resources and rewards, they are contributing to their own oppression and self-destruction.

Keywords: Critical theory, hegemony, Gramsci, educational transformation, research excellence, teaching excellence, teaching quality

Introduction

For the past two decades there has been much dialogue and debate over the reward structures for research and teaching. The perception that there are relatively more rewards and recognition for research than for teaching, and the accompanying criticism for this discrepancy, is well published (see Hay & Heselman 2001:131; Young 2006:191; Cronje, Jacobs & Murdoch 2002:38; Serow 2000:449; Ruth 2001:157). A study at the University of the North (UNIN), for instance, revealed that respondents criticized the lack of recognition and incentives for teaching (Ruth 2001:157). The study by Cronje *et al.* (2002:32,38), which involved 20 higher education institutions worldwide, demonstrated that while respondents supported the importance of teaching they perceived that their institutions tended not to reward teaching as much as it did research even though there were formal reward systems in place for the recognition of teaching excellence. Young's (2006:195) investigation in the UK demonstrated that the route to promotions was based more on research than on teaching. Thus, the recognition of teaching is either absent, or not on par with the recognition of research. It appears as though rewards for teaching are in place, yet are insufficient to achieve career advancement up to higher academic hierarchies.

There is even a tendency for academics that are not research-active to be seen as incompetent even if they excel at teaching. Those productive in research advance in their careers while those who focus on teaching alone risk compromising their career development (Morley 2003). Teaching competence may be taken into account for promotion up to senior lectureship, but in order to reach higher levels (professorship) research becomes an essential criterion (Young 2006:194). There is a clear message that teaching competence alone is not sufficient for academic advancement.

In addition, Webbstock (1999:161) reports on the University of Kwazulu Natal's response to the need for recognizing and awarding teaching excellence. This was through a promotional system that required the examination of a candidate's teaching portfolio that demonstrated evidence of excellence in teaching. Promotion via teaching leads up to associate professor level, while promotion to full professor is dependent on the demonstration of competence in both teaching and research. This implies that promotion to full professor cannot be achieved via teaching alone. A recent conference paper (Subbaye & Vital 2012) confirmed that it is still the

University of Kwazulu Natal's policy to follow this trajectory. Their paper also provides evidence that promotion via the teaching portfolio created more opportunities for females to succeed in their application for promotion.

Some studies show that the low status accorded to teaching in higher education is a barrier to developing teaching (Walker, Baepler & Cohen 2008:183) and could impinge on the quality of outputs (Avdjieva & Wilson 2002:381). If teaching is to be promoted in an environment that is research intensive it will have to be integrated with research. That is, teaching only has value when it is linked to research. For example, Walker *et al.* (2008:184 - 188) report on how research strategies in teaching had to be devised to promote the scholarship of teaching at the University of Minnesota, where the reward structure favours traditional research. Through these efforts the university had begun to 'recognize the research value of teaching and learning' (Walker *et al.* 2008: 184). In Australia, the shift towards recognizing teaching academics has given rise to greater acknowledgement of the scholarship of teaching and learning which has occurred predominantly through the academic promotion system. Several Australian universities are providing opportunities for university teachers who are not research active to be promoted (Vardi & Quinn (2011:39). Brew (2010: 139) writes about the importance of integrating research and teaching. Chalmers (2011:25) also discusses initiatives such as the scholarship of teaching, and other quality movements to enhance the status of teaching through better recognition and reward of teaching at universities, but reports that in spite of these interventions promotion and tenure are still proving to be elusive.

Furthermore, the lack of recognition and reward for teaching impacts on the professional development of academics. A case in point is the study by Steinhert, McLeod, Boillat, Meterissian, Elizov, and McDonald (2009:46) who found that one of the main reasons for the lack of attendance and participation in staff development programmes by (clinical) teachers was the perceived lack of financial reward and recognition for teaching. Many teachers commented that 'research counts more for promotion' (Steinhert *et al.* 2009: 46) than teaching excellence. They, therefore, saw little reason for attending staff development workshops to improve their teaching skills. Moreover, Olsson and Roxa (2013:40) argue that although teachers are reward-ed as individuals for teaching excellence, they also contribute to the overall development of the institution, that is, the institution also stands to benefit.

Despite the lack of recognition for teaching for upward mobility, it is important to note that research should not be viewed as an adversary to teaching. The literature contains several accounts of how research complements and enhances teaching. Wehbic (2009) refers to the application of reflective practice as a research tool for enhancing the scholarship of teaching and the consequential publication of journal articles. Nilsson (2013) discusses how collaboration with a critical friend gives teachers an opportunity to reflect on their values, beliefs and professional practice, and ultimately to refine their practice. Turner, Palazzi, Ward and Lorin (2012) report on the creation of a community of practice which centres on teaching. The purpose of the community of practice was to exchange ideas, to reflect on teaching experiences and to share new knowledge with their peers. Thereafter, a series of conferences on teaching were held with the conference topics being written up as book chapters. Thus, effective teaching, from their perspective, is contingent on research.

In this article I intend to create an awareness of the hegemonic forces at play in higher education, and the way in which these forces impact on the professional lives of academics. It is for this reason that the perceptions and experiences of respondents, regarding differential reward structures for research and teaching, are illuminated in this study and analysed with reference to critical theory.

I refer to data captured as part of a broad study, which involved a survey conducted among academics, middle- and senior managers, to demonstrate that academics, instead of focusing on research, continue to show commitment and dedication to teaching in the midst of minimal rewards. Although the higher education institution involved in this study favoured research, it was a paradox that resources and support for engagement in research were found to be minimal. I argue that respondents in my study were participating in their own oppression and I position this argument by drawing on Gramsci's notion of hegemony. The article concludes by offering recommenddations on how academics can be proactive in their own empowerment by challenging and deconstructing hegemony in higher education.

Theoretical Framework

Gramsci's theory of hegemony is rooted in the political process of establish-

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ing consent (Friedman 2005:239-240) and is illustrated metaphorically in the following quotation:

> Begging for our own oppression is what happens when hegemony works smoothly. Those who are exploited enter ideological prisons built by the exercise of their own free will. They choose their own cells, lock their cell doors behind them, and then throw the keys out of the cell window as far beyond retrieval as they can, all the while luxuriating in a gleeful sense of self-satisfaction at having completed a job well done. In a situation like this, there is no need for elites or state agencies to exercise coercive control. Not only will those being exploited work diligently to ensure their continued subservience, they will take great pride in so doing (Brookfield 2005: 99).

In referring to Gramsci's notion of hegemony, Brookfield (2005:98) explains that it is not about oppression through brute force by an elite group, but by consent of the oppressed. People are not forced against their will to assimilate the dominant ideology; they do this willingly. Those being exploited will work to ensure their continued oppression while taking pride in doing so.

Hegemony, as it pertains to higher education, is not a new concept: several examples can be gleaned from the literature. Lo (2011:209) writes about the way in which global hegemony is manifested in agendas. In particular, he speaks about the dominance of the western paradigms on global higher education and how non-western countries are willing to follow the Anglo-American paradigm when developing their higher education systems. Ives (2009:673) discusses the teaching of English as a foreign or additional language as the 'hegemony of English', where the notion of 'global English' is regarded as 'an imposition of a language', and yet it is willingly accepted. Goodman and West-Olatunji (2010:183-184) argue that educational hegemony experienced by students from certain minority groups (in the USA) could hinder achievement by creating traumatic stress and low self-esteem among these students. They argue for social action to counter educational hegemony to reduce the effects of traumatic stress on these students and enhance their academic performance.

Few articles, however, focus on educational hegemony to the point of exploring the way in which differential reward structures for teaching and research have created a (Gramscian) hegemonic working environment for academics. The study reported in this article addresses that gap.

Research Methodology
Context of the Study
This study was conducted at a historically black institution (HBI) in South Africa. At the time of conducting this study there were four faculties with approximately 5000 students who were predominantly black and about 1800 academics; only 350 of whom were employed permanently on a full-time basis.

As an HBI, the university has been financially disadvantaged and this impacted negatively on the resources available for engagement in research and teaching. Since its inception, the university placed more emphasis on teaching than on research and, as a result, productivity in terms of research has been low. Given the nature of the programmes offered (mainly medical), most of the students enrolled were at undergraduate level.

Methods and Research Instruments
In this study, a critical theory paradigm was adopted in order to challenge existing assumptions. The intention was to bring about transformation (Dash 2005). In order to transform assumptions, I needed to ascertain what the assumptions were in the first place. Therefore, I adopted a multi-perspective approach which involved conducting face-to-face interviews and applying self-administered questionnaires among different sets of participants. A multi-perspective approach allowed for the research problem to be addressed by examining the different viewpoints of participants at different levels in the academic hierarchy.

I distributed self-administered questionnaires which contained structured and unstructured items; the former was designed using a 5-point Likert scale. The application of self-administered questionnaires enabled me

to involve a larger target population than would have been possible had I used the interview method. In this way, I was able to involve the very people who were most adversely affected by the promotion policies and the research-teaching status quo instead of simply focusing on participants who were in positions of power, such as middle and senior management, thus addressing the problem of elite bias, one can assume, whilst not eliminated had been somewhat neutralized.

Sampling Techniques and Description of Participants

The sampling technique for the study was purposive. Self-administered questionnaires were sent to 350 full-time, permanently employed academics across all four faculties. Face-to-face interviews were conducted among management staff and involved 20 Heads of Department (HOD's), all four Deans and the Deputy-Vice Chancellor (DVC). The DVC was chosen because of his direct involvement in the monitoring and promoting of academic policies and procedures. The Deans and HOD's were chosen because of their leadership status within faculties and academic departments.

The HOD respondents were selected across the four faculties. Setting up interviews and analysis of the data from these 20 respondents fitted in with the time frame of the study. At the same time, the data gathered from these respondents was adequate in addressing the research problem.

Data Collection and Analysis

Three reminders of the self-administered questionnaires were sent, but in total, only 106 questionnaires were received, giving a response rate of 30% **which is reasonable**. I employed the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) for the statistical analysis of the responses to the structured items in the questionnaire and mainly descriptive statistics, such as the calculation of frequencies and **cross tabulations**, were employed. I analyzed the responses to the unstructured items using coding, categorization and the identification of themes which I explain in some detail further on in this subsection.

The face-to-face interviews with management ranged in duration from 30–140 minutes. The interview with the DVC took one hour and twenty minutes. The interviews spanned an average of one hour with the Deans and

an average of thirty minutes with the HOD's. All interviews were tape-recorded and handwritten field notes were also compiled. I then transcribed the recordings and superimposed that with the field notes to create a more comprehensible document for analysis. I analyzed the data using data reduction techniques which sharpened, sorted, focused, discarded and organized the data in such way that final conclusions could be drawn and verified (see Miles & Huberman 1994:10). I applied three steps in the analysis of the data: organizing, summarizing and interpreting the data (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh 2002:465).

The first step taken to organize the data was to reduce it through a process called coding, which involved writing key words or phrases below the units of data. After coding, all units with the same coding categories were grouped together. The data was re-read to look for words and phrases that appeared relevant. This classification of similar ideas and concepts also represented categories. The goal was to create a set of categories that provided a meaningful reconstruction, summary and interpretation of the collected data (Ary *et al.* 2002:466-467; Bogdan and Bilken 1992:166). As a validity check, I had a colleague check the coded transcripts for correctness of coding and categorization. The ultimate step involved making general statements and further interpretations regarding relationships among categories by identifying patterns or themes within the data. In searching for patterns, I tried to understand the complex links between the respondents' perceptions, actions and beliefs in order to find negative evidence and alternative explanations. Pattern seeking also enabled me to explain the way in which the data illuminated the research problem, in addition to relating to the conceptual framework of the inquiry (McMillan & Schumacher 2001:476).

Approval to Conduct Research
The study was part of a PhD project and permission and ethical approval was obtained from the university in question to undertake the research.

Limitation
The power differential between the researcher (who was employed at the level of lecturer at the time of this study) and some of the participants such as

the Deans, DVC and HOD's could have influenced the responses given in the research situation.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the data obtained from the face-to-face interviews and the self-administered questionnaires are integrated to yield a coherent discussion.

Differential Rewards for Teaching and Research

In a previous publication (Hassan 2011) I report that the majority of respondents (76% or 79/104) agreed that the university (in question) seldom rewards excellence in teaching and learning, while just over a quarter of respondents (27% or 29/106) support the university's practice of rewarding research more than teaching. In that article, I argue that educational transformation has created a difficult environment for academics since they are expected to be imaginative and creative facilitators of innovative methods of teaching and learning even though more recognition and rewards are given for research than for teaching. Once again, when undertaking this study, the data confirmed that not much has changed.

In this article, I take the argument further by adding that in the midst of limited recognition and rewards for teaching as compared to research, and in spite of not supporting this practice, academics are still committed to teaching and, therefore, from a critical theory perspective, are contributing to their own oppression. I support this argument by drawing on additional data about academic's commitment to teaching obtained from the broader study.

It was during the interview with the DVC that the university's stance on teaching and research at the highest level was obtained. He admitted that the university rewards research more than it does teaching, but stated that: 'We see the importance of teaching on the same level as research and research development'. This is an important vision, but to what extent was it being implemented in faculties and departments? When the Deans and HOD's were interviewed, I noticed a differing perception regarding the university's focus on teaching and research. This is discussed in more detail later in this article.

Continued Commitment to Teaching (Compliance) in Spite of Minimal Rewards

Furthermore, the data also revealed that academic respondents were willing to participate in academic development programmes and that they were committed to improving their teaching skills. Sixty nine percent (73/106) of respondents indicated that they were willing to participate in staff development programmes to improve their teaching skills, even if they were not going to be rewarded for it. Almost all the respondents (94% or 90/105) perceived a need for staff development that would enhance the quality of their teaching skills. More specifically, they felt that staff development programmes should focus on helping academics cope with the challenges of empowering students who are educationally disadvantaged (91% of respondents or 96/106). If a postgraduate programme in higher education were to be offered, 59% (63/106) stated that they would be interested in enrolling for such a programme.

Although there was a perception that there were more rewards for research than for teaching, academic respondents still indicated that they wanted to pursue excellence in teaching. Further evidence from my study to support this interpretation was that 64% (or 66/106) of respondents disagreed that they would prefer doing research instead of being concerned with educational transformation as it relates to teaching. Also, 64% (or 66/106) indicated that they would be willing to participate in the educational change process (pertaining to teaching) at the university. Ninety one percent (96/106) of respondents expressed a need to learn more about teaching portfolios.

It was difficult to comprehend why academics would still be committed to pursuing excellence in teaching in the face of limited rewards and recognition. Gordon and Wimpenny (1996:483) attempt to offer some clarification on the matter by explaining that a person's vulnerability and need for approval and acceptance from those in authority can distort their perceptions of reality. This, however, does not explain why they would make themselves vulnerable by not engaging in research. When viewed from the angle of hegemony, we see that 'people actively welcome and support beliefs and practices that are actually hurting them' and furthermore, they believe that the dominant ideology represents their best interests (see Brookfield

2005:95, 96). Therefore, control of the subaltern classes (academics) is exercised in a subtle way and operates persuasively rather than coercively (Entwistle 2009:8).

In attempting to compare the results of my study with other documented studies, I found that many researchers simply refer to the job satisfaction that academics derive from teaching without discussing the reward structures for research and teaching, which would have provided the appropriate context for the interpretation of their results. The Ezer, Gilat and Sagee (2010:391-400) study is such an example: respondents who were graduates of a teacher education programme felt that teaching accords self-realization, provides a sense of purpose and enables lifelong development. Similarly, the research undertaken by Sturman, Rego and Dick (2011:725) show that the intellectual stimulation and intrinsic satisfaction of teaching were the most consistently valued rewards. Many academics feel they are 'putting something back' and stated that they 'enjoy the interchange with students'. These studies, however, did not discuss whether this perception was ascertained in a research-intensive university or not. Nor did they discuss to what extent teaching was being recognized and rewarded by the university. Therefore, it was difficult to determine if the respondents would have had a different view on teaching had there been more rewards for research at their university. If these respondents were not being rewarded and recognized for their laudable efforts in teaching then it would be safe to assume that hegemony had manifested. In a hegemonic environment, people not only comply, they desire and actively seek out oppressive practices. Brookfield (2005:95) proclaims that hegemony,

> can be viewed as embedded in a system of practices–behaviours and actions that people learn to live out on a daily basis within personal relationships, institutions work and community.

Thus, in analyzing the phenomenon that academics are still committed to teaching in the absence of proper recognition, I drew on the concept of vocational hegemony (see Brookfield 2005) which states that academics work to ensure their own oppression and that there is no need for control from an external agent. When academics take on more and more work in the face of staff shortages until they work themselves into a state of

utter and complete exhaustion, while not being adequately rewarded for their efforts, they contribute to their own oppression and self-destruction. This inclination for self-destruction perpetuates a system that is starved of resources (Brookfield 2005:100).

More Teaching Means Fewer Opportunities for Research and Academics not Challenging this

When academics in this study reported that they took on extra teaching loads and had less time to focus on improving their qualifications and undertaking research, it may well imply they had remained at the same personnel rank for some time. According to the Deans, financial support systems were in place for academics to improve their qualifications but it was not simply funding that was needed in order to study further. Most probably, academics needed moral support as well. My study showed that only 15% of HOD's (or 3/20) had indicated that they had motivated their staff to further their qualifications in their field.

It should not be forgotten, also, that during the apartheid era more resources were made available for historically white institutions (HWI's) than for HBI's. Consequently, the HWI's have higher research outputs than the HBI's and what we have is the creation of an academic elite with research being the main element of this group. See for example Zeelan (2003:142) who talks about the low research outputs at HBI's, partly because of the perception at the UNIN: '…research is a monster which can only be tamed by highly intelligent white people'. Thus, the respondents in this study would have been disadvantaged (by the lack of resources and opportunities to undertake research) by the mere fact that they were from a HBI.

Entwistle (2009) recommends that if they (academics) are to tackle and change the hegemonic power intellectuals from the dominated classes need to crack the code and have knowledge of the dominating classes (This is what Bourdieu (1986) refers to as cultural capital.) I would interpret this to mean that academics from the dominated classes (that is, from HBI's) should become more involved in research (acquisition of cultural capital) since that is the 'code' of the dominating classes (HWI's). Gramsci's advice on tackling hegemony is that 'workers must think and act like a ruling class

because the counter-hegemonic task is one of education' (Entwistle 2009:9) In mapping out a path for how education can be used to contest ruling class hegemony, Gramsci develops the concept of the organic intellectual who is an activist and who comes from an oppressed group to work with and represents that group (Brookfield 2005).

With this in mind I sought to find out if there were adequate resources for doing research at the HBI where this study was conducted. My argument was that if the rewards were skewed in favour of research, then it should have made sense for the University to provide sufficient resources for engagement in research.

Insufficient Support for Development in Research, being Disrespected and Inaction to Change this

The results of my study exposed a paradox: while the rewards for research were high the support and resources for doing research were wanting. This deficiency was pointed out quite passionately by many of the respondents. The following comment from Dean A highlights the frustration regarding the lack of support for research development: 'We have no development in research. Without research, we can't develop academics'. These sentiments concerning the lack of support for research were shared by the HOD's with one proclaiming that: 'Research is not a priority of this university and the university doesn't support it'.

Dean B said that he did not understand how money for research was allocated within the university as his faculty received a very small amount. Dean C explained that while they had support systems to improve their qualifications such as financial support for staff, the research budget within the university was limited and they were often dependent on research support from outside agencies. This implies that research was dictated by the needs and prescriptions of the possible funders and only research that was deemed relevant to external funders would have been supported. This would have constrained academics' freedom to undertake research in their area of interest, which could have potentially been a deterrent to them engaging in research altogether. The Deans' comments indicate that although they were at a relatively senior and powerful position in the academic hierarchy, they

felt powerless and saw themselves as victims rather than as enablers.

Many HOD respondents confirmed that there was a lack of funds, a lack of facilities and limited time to become involved in research. In addition, limitations in human resources compounded the problem. Several HOD's complained that their departments were short-staffed, which had culminated in a heavy workload for academics. One HOD respondent lamented:

> [The University] is not employing enough staff. As a manager, I cannot manage my department effectively since I have to do the groundwork in the department. I'm also responsible for delivery of all lectures in my department. There is no time for anything else.

Some HOD's were the only ones in their department with no additional staff to manage. This was a comment made by one of them: 'As far as staff is concerned, I couldn't do anything because I have no staff'. Another HOD argued:

> The support provided to staff is negligible because of all the constraints, for example, financial. If you really want to develop staff you must have adequate numbers (of staff) and facilities.

Another HOD felt that: '…research falls by the wayside since there is no time for research under this situation'. She was the only one in her department. One HOD lambasted the University for neglecting its staff because management did not share a passion for research: 'Staff don't have an opportunity to develop themselves to do research'.

Dean D complained that he encourages research but 'staff complain that they are overworked and underpaid'. This sentiment was echoed by one HOD who asserted that: 'They must not overload us with work. People resign with overload of work and look for places with an easier job'. Yet another HOD declared that staff are 'too tired' and 'people are demotivated at the University'. That academics are overworked is not unique to the university in question. A survey conducted by Enders (1999:77) showed that many academics consider their teaching-related workload too high. As recently as 2011, Sturman *et al.* (2011:722) also found that academics are

experiencing high teaching workloads that impacts negatively on job satisfaction.

According to the HOD's, academics were encouraged and given support to engage in research. Fourteen HOD's (70%) pronounced that staff in their departments were involved in research and explained how they were managing staff to achieve research excellence. This claim paints a positive picture, yet contradicts earlier findings and complaints regarding the lack of support and time allocated for research, which gave the impression of limited involvement in research. It may well be that the HOD's wanted to give a positive impression of their leadership skills in promoting research in their departments. Only six HOD's (30%) maintained that it is difficult to manage staff to achieve research excellence since their staff are not actively involved in research.

One HOD respondent said that she tried to,

> lead by example by presenting papers at conferences and also tried to coerce her staff to become involved in research by encouraging and supporting them and even gave them literature on research methodology.

Other methods used by HOD's to promote research include encouraging academics to publish once a year and assisting with applications for research funding. In spite of these measures HOD's had found it difficult to 'get people in gear'. One HOD commented: 'You must reinforce all the time otherwise the initiative dies down'. From another HOD was a complaint that most of the staff were currently relatively de-motivated and did not make themselves available for opportunities that existed.

What became evident was that while the support being afforded by the HOD's was important, it was not sufficient. What academics really needed was appropriate scaffolded support in the form of mentoring, from as more experienced other, on how to write articles that would have resulted in tangible research outputs such as publications in journals and books. From an intensive study on the interventions applied by universities internationally to promote the publication of research by academics, it was found that interventions such as writing courses, writing support groups and writing coaches lead to an increase in the average publication rates of the participants.

Many of the HOD's in my study were not active researchers themselves and were not competent to provide mentoring in research. For example, one HOD admitted that he was 63 years old and close to retirement and, therefore, his 'research days were over'. Arguably, he could have been mentoring young academic researchers. As the HOD, why was he not expected, as part of his job description, to mentor academics? Moreover, why were the academics in his department not insisting that they receive mentoring from him, given that there was nowhere else to turn to at the University when it came to research support? According to the Deans, the appointment of under-qualified staff to HOD positions, combined with a lack of research culture at the University, was compromising the quality of academics. Why were the academic respondents being so unassertive by not demanding leaders who were more qualified and competent?

Another factor that contributed to respondents being demotivated to do research was probably the heavy workload they were forced to endure as a consequence of staff shortages at a university that was under-resourced. During the time of this study, it was not the institution's practice to replace staff who resigned, thus overburdening those who remained. These results correlate with other studies (such as Garnett & Mohamed 2012:81) which have found that the lack of time, excessive administrative responsibilities and work overload contributed significantly to the lack of research outputs. In the Garnett and Mohamed (2012:87) research, professional barriers such as the lack of infrastructure, lack of support for research and limited organizational support were cited as additional obstacles to being active researchers.

Poor Leadership and a Sense of Helplessness

Evidence of poor leadership was embedded in the data, for example, one HOD maintained:

> We should have experts to run this place. We have people who don't know how to run this place. Some HOD's don't know how to be HOD's.

Furthermore, as can also be gleaned from much of the preceding results in this article, the sense of helplessness and frustration that came

across during the interviews with the Deans and HOD's was glaringly obvious. The very people who were supposed to manage the institution were not able to offer solutions nor were there any indications that they were taking action to change the status quo. From the results obtained in the interview study alone, it was difficult to assume whether they were part of the dominant elite in power or not. It might have been tempting to say that they were 'invisible', but far from it, their ability to exercise power was absent. Were they themselves part of the problem? Could they really not have seen how important research leadership was in trying to pursue a research agenda?

Also, the University wanted to run departments and faculties efficiently and cost-effectively whilst spending the least amount of money and employing as few academics as possible. This works against the interests of academics. At the same time, the way hegemony manifests is for these academics to be convinced that the way they live out their professional lives is natural and works in their favour and that being subordinate is a desirable state to be in (Brookfield 2005).

As far as the academics were concerned, an unstructured item in the self-administered questionnaire sought to determine what they thought their main weaknesses were. The responses obtained were firstly from the perspective of weaknesses inherent within the university: 1) lack of resources such as staff, facilities and resources and 2) insufficient time to do their work effectively, and secondly from the perspective of weaknesses within themselves such as: lack of motivation to perform their professional tasks effectively. These findings correlate with the results obtained in the interviews with middle and senior management, discussed above. Once again, none of the respondents offered a way out of their situation. Neither were there indications that action was being taken against exploitation and oppression by the university. In fact, the respondents appeared to accept their plight as normal and chose to remain in that situation. Clearly, not only were academics unable to develop agency to cope with their dilemma, they developed acquiescence behaviour as well.

Lack of Resistance and Agency against the Status Quo

The Deans and HOD's although in leadership positions displayed a sense of

helplessness and unwillingness to take the initiative to change the status quo. For example, one HOD reasoned:

> Why excel if there is no recognition for what you do. [The university] needs to create possibilities to grow, create possibilities for promotion and recognize excellence.

This also demonstrates that the University had left academics to their own devices. One could go as far as saying that academics were being blamed (and even punished) for not producing research and the University had expected them to solve the problem themselves. In this way, the University could absolve itself from all responsibility to help academics in terms of staff development, talent management and career development.

In addition, the main function of the University was teaching and this took precedence over research. It is indeed ironic that although the university rewards outputs in research, there is limited support and resources for academics to improve as researchers (Hassan 2011). One would be tempted to ask the question: why did the University adopt this skewed reward and support structure? Arguably, it was almost as if academics were being set up for failure and were being oppressed.

An important point is that the main thrust of the argument in this article is not simply about the University being construed as an apparatus of oppression. Rather, the focal point of the argument is about academics who willingly give consent to being controlled and exploited (by the University). Indeed, the inaction of academics in challenging their situation had made them complicit in their own state of subjection. From a Gramscian perspective of hegemony 'the implication of rule by physical coercion, which the notion of dictatorship commonly entails, is absent' (Entwistle 2009:7). In this study, if academics were being shortchanged by not being given adequate resources for research and yet were expected to excel as researchers, why did they not resist the status quo? For this to be understood, the insidious way that hegemony operates needs to be taken cognizance of, which is to coerce people to accept the way things are (Brookfield 2005: 95).

A poignant question at this juncture would be: How can academics develop agency against oppression? The Gramscian solution is to create a consciousness of oppression and organize a solidarity struggle against that

situation (Brookfield 2005). (Hopefully, as a starting point, this article will be instrumental in creating an *awareness* of the hegemonic forces at play in higher education and sensitize academics to oppression.) Gramsci's notion of hegemony

> …contains the structural critique of the internalization of domination with a focus on its cultural characteristics and the potential for agency in creating resistance (Ives 2009).

Staying with the notion of agency, while there are a myriad of reported studies on the perceptions of the differential reward structures for research and teaching, only a few published studies focus are published on how academics adapt (or develop agency) to this phenomenon. Nicholls (2001:3) writes about academics who focus more on research than on teaching even if they are passionate about teaching, in response to the differential reward structures that are weighted towards research. In the study by Serow (2000:461), academics adapted by either combining research productivity with their passion for teaching, or simply persisted with their teaching without involvement in research. The latter group became increasingly marginalized and was overlooked for promotion, that is; they stagnated in their careers.

Sometimes it is not up to academics to decide whether or not to focus more on teaching than research. Santoro (2011:1) reports on,

> accessing the moral dimension of teaching when the conditions of teaching become so challenging to the extent that teachers no longer see it as a moral reward'.

This access is achieved by not simply,

> cultivating individual teacher's dispositions toward good work but structuring the work to enable practitioners to do good within its domain.

This shows that when academics become demoralized the institution will install measures to ensure that they continue to find moral value in teaching.

In this regard, Brookfield (2005:98) warns that hegemony is a difficult concept to grasp and is able to change its form and shape in order to ensure its survival: 'Subtle and elusive, it seems to slide from our consciousness even as we think we have it'.

Entwistle (2009:8), on the other hand, proclaims that,

> it is possible for existing hegemony to accommodate alternative and counter-hegemonic cultural forces, neutralizing, changing or actually incorporating them.

Entwistle (2009: 8) cites an example by drawing on Klein's (1969) analysis of the 1960's to show that hegemony can operate to integrate different forms of protest in its own ideology. It must be noted that the relationships between hegemonies are subtle and complex.

Alternatively, a new theory to move out of the paralysis of exchanging hegemonies. Perhaps a 'capabilities approach' (see Sen 1993), wherein different capabilities are recognized and advanced, could be deployed. According to Sen (1993) policies should focus on what people are able to do and be, as well as on removing barriers and creating opportunities in order for them to have more actual (not paper) freedom to lead a life that they value. Therefore, they should have the freedom to choose to focus more on teaching if they value that; nevertheless, the opportunity and resources to undertake research should still be made available to them. This could be the focus of future research and since it is beyond the scope of this article it will not be further explicated here.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The main purpose of this article is to sensitize the reader to hegemony in higher education by illuminating the manner in which discrepancies in the reward structures for teaching and research are keeping academics in a state of oppression. By using data selected from a broader study, I have demonstrated that even though many academic respondents perceived teaching to be under-rewarded when compared to research, and did not support the institution's stance on this skewed reward system, many indicated that they would *still* pursue excellence in teaching. They still

portrayed commitment to teaching even in the wake of the low status and the lack of recognition compared to research. Numerous academics even perceived a need for staff development that would guide them towards improving the quality of their teaching. By these academics placing so much emphasis on teaching, when it was research that would ensure promotion, I have argued that the respondents in my study were contributing to their own self-destruction.

My study also illuminated the paradox that while there were more rewards for research compared to teaching, the support and resources for undertaking research were limited. This created an oppressive hegemonic environment which would ensure that the respondents would not easily advance in their careers, but remain enslaved to their profession as junior staff.

I have, therefore, demonstrated in this article that academics at the University where this study was conducted were subjected to hegemonic forces which were born from the activities and tools (or policies and practices) of management. I offer some recommendations on how academics can develop agency against these hegemonic forces weighing against them. I would like to suggest that they use those very same tools against the hegemonic practices of management. Maistry (2012:516) claims that performance management contracts are used as a surveillance mechanism to closely monitor the productivity of academics by quantifying their work, so one can, for instance, use these contracts to define the workload that one is prepared to undertake. If the number of hours of teaching looks unreasonable on paper this can be a point of departure for negotiation. Performance management contracts should also contain measures for professional development. One should further ensure that time is allocated for research activities such as presenting at conferences. If an individual is asked to work beyond the contents of the performance contract they should not be too quick to comply, unless it leads to the achievement of their developmental goals.

When academics take a stand in this way they would be teaching the relevant people (that is, those who occupy positions of power) how to manage higher education matters. For instance, management would be forced to employ additional staff, rather than over-burden existing staff. It would become the responsibility of management to motivate for new posts, should that become necessary. If it is not possible to employ more staff,

management should devise ways of working more strategically and effectively: 'work smart, not hard' should be the motto and there should be a focus on quality rather than quantity. It is also the responsibility of the university to put in place effective human resources policies which would ensure that people employed in management positions are leaders in the true sense of the word, are academically savvy and are capable of academic leadership so that they are able to provide guidance and nurturing for academics in a complex, uncertain, hegemonic higher education terrain.

Ultimately, the hegemonic status quo in higher education needs to be challenged, not bowed down to and feared, nor assimilated within our very being. Academics owe it to themselves to remain alert to its presence, its morphology and inclination to change its shape lest it be identified. They need to take a stand, not simply as individuals, but together in solidarity as a united force.

I conclude this article with Entwistle (2009:9) quoting from Gramsci's writing in the *LÓrdine Nuovo* (a weekly journal) as follows:

> Instruct yourselves because we shall need all our intelligence. Agitate because we shall need all our enthusiasm. Organize yourselves because we shall need all our power.

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Excellence in Teaching versus Excellence in Research

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