

# **An Appraisal of the Decentralized Professional Development Model Adopted by a South African Higher Education Institution**

**Nomakhaya Mashiya**  
**Rita Kizito**

## **Abstract**

Structural arrangements aimed at developing teaching excellence and enhancing student learning have been put in place at South African universities since 2000. These include the creation of directorates for teaching and learning, featuring teaching and learning as a strategic goal in the university institutional operating plan, the development of strategic plans for teaching and learning and the adoption of various models of professional development. This study examines how the decentralized model of professional development is being implemented and received at a South African university in the Science and Economic Management faculties. From a document analysis of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee quarterly reports (from July 2012 to July 2013) conducted in the two faculties, there is evidence of an uptake of professional development programmes and the use of innovative pedagogical practices in some departments. However, it is difficult to obtain accurate measures of how the new structural arrangements translate into observable change in classroom practice. Interviews conducted with a few academics reveal minimal acceptance of decentralizing the provision of professional development. The conditions for successful implementation of professional development were identified from the interviews. The study concludes that there will often be a gap between espoused and enacted models and policies and that *buy-in* and support from management (deans, heads of departments) and lecturers is vital in the transformation of teaching and learning practices.

**Keywords:** decentralized model, professional development, teaching and learning, document analysis

## **1 Background to the Study**

The widening of access to higher education in post-apartheid South Africa has presented tertiary educators with a number of opportunities and challenges, namely, under-prepared students who take longer to graduate from their programmes and lecturers who have to devise ways of responding sensitively to a diverse profile of students. A perturbing finding in the Council on Higher Education draft report (2013) is that only 5 per cent of black African and coloured students graduate in regulation time<sup>1</sup>.

From 2000, directorates of teaching and learning were set up in all the 23 universities and universities of technology in South Africa to promote teaching and learning, enhance student learning and improve throughput. Centralized and decentralized professional development models have been adopted at different institutions with the aim of addressing the challenges mentioned above. Despite the efforts made, professionalizing university teaching continues to be an enormous challenge. Traditionally, university teachers rely on individual craft knowledge associated with expertise and dexterity in the different disciplines to inform their teaching practice (Elton 2001; 2009). Novice teachers learn from their predecessors and often perpetuate outdated practices. Lecturers are often unaware of what should be done to support under-served students as they do not receive any professional teaching development when they join universities.

Overall, the last two decades have witnessed an increase in the demand for the professionalization of university teaching, resulting in the establishment of units such as the Quality Assurance Agency and more recently, the Higher Education Academy, both in the United Kingdom. These units are structured to ensure that university teaching professionals are properly trained, recognised and rewarded for their contributions as teachers in higher education settings. The recognition that teaching is researchable and

---

<sup>1</sup> Regulation time is the designated time for completing a degree or diploma degree. The majority of South African undergraduate degrees (except Medicine) are 3-4 years. The diplomas range from 2-3 years.

worth recognition has also been stimulated by educationist Boyer's (1990) publication, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, and Elton's (1998; 2009) efforts to link continuing professional development to the scholarship of teaching and learning.

South Africa is following in this direction and, from 2013, has established a Quality Enhancement Project run by the Council of Higher Education to analyze issues of improving the quality of higher education and the professional development of academics. A number of South African institutions have developed post-graduate programmes for academics. One of them is the Post-Graduate Diploma in Higher Education in Teaching and Learning, offered jointly as one programme by a consortium of universities in the Western Cape: the University of the Western Cape (UWC), Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and Stellenbosch University. UWC has also embarked on an in-house professional development programme for beginner academics.

The challenge is that the current approaches to professional development for university teachers have not always produced solutions for the educational conundrums of the contemporary context, such as, for example, finding innovative pedagogies for students from highly diverse educational and multilingual backgrounds, or providing for the growing demand for e-learning' (Scott, Yeld & Hendry 2007: 60). Moreover, as Clegg (2003: 37) points out, '...the discourse about professional learning and development itself is characterized by conceptual vagueness'.

In addition, within the South African context, there is differentiation of professional development delivery across institutions. Well-resourced universities have central units dealing with professional development issues headed by a deputy vice chancellor of teaching and learning (University of KwaZulu Natal, University of Pretoria), or a dean of teaching and learning (University of Cape Town). In less resourced universities such as UWC, there is a directorate of teaching and learning supported by two management tiers, the deputy deans for teaching and learning and the teaching and learning specialists<sup>2</sup> in each faculty.

---

<sup>2</sup> Teaching and learning specialists are tasked with supporting lecturers' adoption of effective teaching and learning related activities.

---

## **2 Approaches to Professional Development**

In this paper, we focus on two dimensions of professional development: (a) professional development models and (b) the distinction between decentralized and centralized models of professional development provision.

### ***2.1 Professional Development Models***

The professional development models used in higher education could be classified as extensions of existing teacher training models. Traditional models of in-service education for teachers are based on a deficit model. In such a model, participants are required to attend the occasional one-day workshop away from their teaching sites and are lectured on a topic selected for them by experts who draw mainly on their own experience (Sandholtz 2002). Participants invariably find the once-off workshops irrelevant and often forget most of what they have learnt. Such in-service education courses have been criticized for not promoting active learning and for undermining teachers' experiences (Lieberman & Miller 1990). In fact, in-service courses have been rated as the least effective forms of professional development (McCulloch, Helsby & Knight 2000).

In contrast, a constructivist approach to professional development is based on adult learning theories which identify the following conditions as ideal for promoting adult learning in the workplace: opportunities for individuals to work with and learn from others; collaboration in group work and learning; chances to work with and learn from others in similar positions; and variation, autonomy, and choice in the allocation of work roles and tasks (Smylie 2015). However, according to Sandholtz (2002), these conditions are absent in most teacher professional development provisions. Constructivism underscores personal discovery of knowledge and the need for teachers to provide a learning context that promotes active learning (Hung 2001).

In this study, we adopted Lester's (2010: 2) interpretation of a professional as an individual who 'makes proficient use of expert or specialist knowledge, exercises autonomous thought and judgment, and makes a voluntary commitment to a set of principles'. We also subscribe to Padwad and Dixit's (2011) view that there are generally two approaches to professional development – a narrow (or shallow) view and a broad (deep) view. The narrow view is instrumentalist, focusing on specific sets of skills

that professionals are required to teach (for example, training teachers to use an online learning management system such as Moodle) and the broad view which is, according to Padwad and Dixit (2011: 7):

... a much deeper, wider and longer- term process, in which professionals continuously enhance not only their knowledge and skills, but also their thinking, understanding and maturity; they grow not only as professionals, but also as persons; their development is not restricted to their work roles, but may also extend to new roles and responsibilities.

Various modes of learning in different professions include learning by teaching; learning by doing; conducting personal research; consulting experts and networking; engaging in professional interactions; and attending courses and conferences (Becher 1996). The following have been identified as sites of professional development: daily work practices; team, department and other mandated meetings, team or departmental professional development sessions, reading, subject and professional associations and centrally provided courses and workshops. Each of these has its strengths and weaknesses (Knight & Trowler 2001).

## **2.2 Centralised and Decentralised Models of Professional Development**

Coupled with these approaches are the ideas of centralized and decentralized models of professional development. In a centralised model, there is a centralized university entity tasked with developing, implementing and managing all professional development activities within a university. In a decentralized model, each faculty develops and manages its own professional development activities, usually in an *ad hoc* manner. The decentralized approach can also be categorized as site-based (Ono & Ferreira 2010; Frick & Kapp 2006) as participants identify and respond to their own learning needs. It draws on constructivist theories of learning and employs methodologies such as reflective practice, adult learning, and peer coaching and mentoring. This approach is also premised on the understanding that learning occurs at the work place and is more effective if it is owned by the participants

themselves. As such, professional development is seen as ‘permanent or continuing education’ (Avalos 2004: 121). An effective site-based professional development programme should be seen as part of the improvement goals of an institution.

A decentralised structure or ‘ripple-down model of institutional change’ (Bozalek & Dison 2013) for organizing professional development has been adopted at UWC. The structure is headed by the director of teaching and learning and supported by teaching and learning specialists from each of the seven faculties. Each of the faculties has a teaching and learning coordinating committee with departmental representatives. These committees are coordinated by deputy deans of teaching and learning from each faculty. Thus the academics who are experts in their professions play a vital role in the planning and implementation of their own professional development, with guidance from the teaching and learning specialists. The directorate provides the overall guidance by developing policy and a direction for operations, but the strategies and delegation of duties occurs at the faculty level.

The university offers professional development interventions which are initiated centrally such as, for example, induction workshops for all newly appointed heads of departments and staff. Recently, the institution has embarked on an institutional, 14-week course titled ‘*Towards the professionalization of teaching and learning*’ which is offered jointly by the directorate and facilitators from all the departments.

The decentralized model described here responds to the recognized need for a more coordinated, collaborative, and comprehensive approach to professional development across an institution. However, whatever approach is used, the establishment of a space for negotiation, collegial support and ownership is critical if these interventions are to be sustained. As Sayed (2009) contends, although there are merits and demerits for each model, it is the recognition of the conditions that will make them work which is crucial to their success. This study is an attempt to identify the conditions.

### **2.3 *Statement of the Problem***

Poor participation in teaching and learning activities and its impact on teaching practices remain a great concern to teaching and learning specialists. It is this concern that has motivated this systematic appraisal of the

decentralized model of professional development provision adopted by UWC. In this study, we appraise the professional development model adopted by UWC to find ways of increasing lecturer participation in the teaching and learning activities planned by the directorate of teaching and learning to promote ‘epistemological access’ and lecturer effectiveness. The rationale behind the appraisal is to explore how lecturers can derive maximum benefit from the various teaching and learning interventions of the university. The researchers adopted a ‘distant attitude’ in their appraisal in order to suggest possibilities on how to make the model more effective.

### **3 Aim of the Study**

The overall aim was to establish how significant the decentralized model of professional development is in promoting teaching effectiveness and student learning in the two faculties. Specifically, we sought responses to the following questions:

- 3.1 How has a decentralized model of professional development for academics been received by Economic and Management Science and Science academics?
- 3.2 Are there any adjustments or changes needed to ensure that the current professional development model at UWC promotes successful teaching and effective student learning?

This appraisal was conducted in two parts: (a) interviews with faculty-based teaching and learning committee members and selected heads of departments to determine staff understanding and perceptions of the teaching development initiatives of the directorate of teaching and learning; and (b) a document analysis of Senate Teaching and Learning Committee reports (2012 -2013).

### **4 Research Methodology**

The study employs a pragmatist research paradigm which is concerned with action and change and the interplay between knowledge and action (Goldkuhl 2012: 136). This makes it appropriate for research approaches intervening into the world and not merely observing the world (*ibid*) as is the case when

the intervention is organizational change. Pragmatism employs mixed methodologies within the same study and focuses not only on what ‘*is*’ but also on what ‘*might be*’ (Goldkuhl 2012: 136). It foregrounds both efficiency and appropriateness ‘which is a matter of combining a whole range of evaluative factors, not efficiency and effectiveness alone but also their broader normative nature’ (Rescher 2000: 175). Three inter-related kinds of pragmatism have been identified: the functional, the referential and the methodological (Goldkuhl 2008). Functional pragmatism is concerned with the creation of actual practices while referential pragmatism scrutinizes the actions in these practices and their unique characteristics. Methodological pragmatism deals with the development of knowledge in each set of practices.

For the purposes of this research, the discussion on pragmatism will focus on functional pragmatism which views ‘knowledge as a basis for action’ (Goldkuhl 2008: 9). Pragmatic research can be carried out through action research<sup>3</sup> where the researcher has a direct influence on local practices or, alternatively, the researcher can adopt a ‘distant attitude’ and not engage in local practices. In this study, the two researchers did not engage in action research and, as already mentioned, instead adopted a ‘distant attitude’ in their appraisal of the model. In other words, the researchers sought to interrogate the research questions from a distance as observers of the phenomenon being researched.

#### **4.1 Data Collection and Analysis**

Semi-structured interviews and Senate Teaching and Learning Committee reports were used as the main sources for data collection. The semi-structured interviews were flexible and allowed the researcher to modify the questions and to ask follow-up questions (Scott & Garner 2013) to clarify an earlier response or a new idea offered by the respondent. The interviewees were six academics from two faculties. Each respondent was assigned a code to avoid compromising their identity and the confidentiality of the interview. An interview guide was also employed by each researcher to see ‘the agreements

---

<sup>3</sup> Action research is research initiated to solve a problem or to reflect on a process of progressive problem-solving in a community of practitioners to which the researcher belongs.



and disagreements among the respondents and the different ways in which they framed the answers' (Scott & Garner 2013: 283).

The interview data collected from the six selected participants was subjected to discourse analysis, a research method that 'emphasizes the role of language in the construction of social reality' (Talja 1999: 460) and focuses on the analysis of texts to interrogate assumptions, identify the explicit purpose(s) of texts and unearth multiple discourses in texts (Rex, Bun, Davila, Dickson, Ford, Gerben, Orzulak & Thomson 2010). Discourse analysis also refers to attempts 'to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts' (Stubbs 1993: 1). Foucaultian-influenced discourse analysis does not study the rules and conventions of mundane talk; rather, it examines 'serious speech acts or institutionalized talk or practices' (Talja 1999: 460) as represented in texts. Discourse analysis was chosen as a method because interview data can be analyzed at a macro, micro and meso levels as social texts (Rex *et al.* 2010).

Using the constant comparison method, data was separated into categories that the researchers considered significant to the inquiry at hand (Guba & Lincoln 1985). The coding and analysis of the data occurred simultaneously and repeatedly until recognizable themes emerged. The researchers coded the data separately but spent time to discuss and agree on the emergent themes and to apply Budd and Raber's (1996: 217) approach in exploring the form (structure of the language as code, including grammar and semantics) and function (language as a social phenomenon) of the utterances made by the respondents during the semi-structured interviews.

In addition, the 2012 -2013 Senate Teaching and Learning Committee reports were subjected to document analysis which was directly linked to the pragmatic- or practice-based discourse analysis used to explore the interview data. The documented text served to describe what was done (in action) as a supplement to how the respondents felt in the interviews. The document analysis was used to determine in which professional development activities lecturers participated from 2012 to 2013 within each faculty.

Fourteen documents comprising the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee minutes were analyzed in search of categories and themes. A review protocol in the form of tables was used to capture the different forms of professional development activities in which academic staff engaged between 2012 and 2013, the period in which the two researchers were

appointed as teaching and learning specialists at the university.

An analysis of the Science and Economic and Management Science reports helped the researchers to better understand how the different recorded elements related to each other; how the elements in the reports provided an interpretation of the teaching and learning practices and how these were congruent with the prescribed decentralized model. This analysis also gave the researchers an indication of priority areas (generic issues about teaching and learning that cut across disciplines and subject specific concerns). The aim was to reveal meaning or an understanding of the teaching and learning practices by studying the interviews of a few selected individuals and the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee reports. Ultimately, the aim was to identify what support lecturers felt they needed to enable them to execute their duties efficiently and to improve student learning.

## **5 Findings**

This discussion of findings is made in relation to the research questions with a focus on the emergent themes. The themes emanating from the semi-structured interviews and the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee documents are not mutually exclusive, but are intertwined and overlapping in meaning.

### ***5.1 Themes Identified in the Interview Data***

Five major themes emerged from the data: personal versus professional values, institutional support, mandate and engagement, contestation between research and teaching and learning, opposing discourses and enabling and constraining factors impacting on teaching and learning.

#### ***5.1.1 Personal versus Professional Values***

All the interviewees (A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, and A6) viewed the professional staff development activities (the workshops, induction programme, and seminars) as crucially important and value-adding. In addition, they were of the view that these professional development initiatives should focus on discipline-specific concerns of lecturers as well as generic issues that cut

across the disciplines (A6, A1, A3 and A4) and that most of the work should be done at departmental level. They participated in these activities with varying frequency because of time constraints and because of the *ad hoc* scheduling of workshops (A5). According to interviewee A2, the faculty-based workshops, the Cape Higher Education Consortium courses and the lunch-hour seminars '*made me think about my own practice, the way I run my tutorials and infuse technology into my teaching*'. Another view was that it should be compulsory (A5) for staff to attend professional development activities '*during vacation, on and off-campus because of the competing responsibilities such as teaching and marking*' (A2). This interviewee viewed professional development activities as a space for reflective practice and personal professional growth. However, interviewee A5 attended the workshops not because they were compulsory, but because '*I'm curious. I do enjoy engaging*'. S/he had dropped out of a structured teaching and learning programme at another university because of work-related pressure, but had decided to complete the 14-week long '*Towards the Professionalization of Teaching*' programme because it was compulsory. These contradictory discourses demonstrate the extent to which employees will engage with change if they perceive the programme as a formalized and valued process in the institution.

### *5.1.2 Institutional Support, Mandate and Engagement*

Interviewee A1 identified the following challenges that threaten to undermine teaching and learning at UWC: '*skewed resource allocation, night/part-time teaching, and a lack of resources to cope with the growth of student numbers, the fact that there was no dialogue between Teaching and Learning and Academic Planning*' and recommended the use of '*a fusion between a top-down approach and a bottom-up approach to professional development*' to change perceptions '*about teaching and learning and increase participation rates*'. Implied in this statement is the view that teaching and learning is not taken seriously. In addition, interviewee A2 argued that '*training must have a practical orientation*'...and that '*teaching practice and micro-teaching were an integral part of one's induction into teaching*'.

Academics also reported finding it hard to juggle the teaching and research because of time constraints and other competing responsibilities. For

## *The Decentralized Professional Development Model*

example, as interviewee A5 explained: *'My sense is like you know we're skimming, you know just touch the surface on everything and maybe it's just the person that I am. I'd like to, okay let's take a moment and really just engage and really explore much more. The amount of time that we have is just not sufficient to do that... we're so busy running around doing everything so just having these little things every now and then. We're just going to keep on running, chasing our tails.'*

There were also differences in the way younger and older academics engaged with the professional development initiatives as can be seen by this excerpt:

***Interviewer:*** *Do academics in your department participate in these professional development initiatives aimed at promoting excellence in teaching and learning?*

***A5:*** *You have very clearly two groups I think - like in most departments.*

***A5:*** *You have the younger people who are really keen on developing and interacting. They try to do their best. But they're also coming under tremendous pressure to be productive, to do research and everything and then, you know, again the time becomes difficult. But again, on the other side there are those other people.*

***A5:*** *...Who are not interested and that would seem to be the older ones for whom there's not ...*

***A5:*** *It's not because people don't want to contribute and engage. It's just time.*

Lecturers seemed to prefer intentional to *ad hoc* interventions.

***A5:*** *You know this is one of those things we need to schedule and just you know must make time for it rather than just having it ad hoc.*

***Interviewer:*** *Oh, okay. So are you getting that sense that it's kind of ad hoc?*

***A5:*** *Yes. You get email every now and then there's this but you, there's no sense of how important it is. There's no sense that, listen you guys let's get together and just deal with this because it is important.*

As a way of providing differentiated services to the different categories of academics, the United Kingdom professional development framework

(Brown, Bower, Skalicky, Wood, Donovan, Loch, Bloom & Joshi, 2010) uses three standard descriptors that cater for early career academics, those with substantial teaching roles and academics tasked with leading and mentoring roles. Each standard descriptor is used to develop a discipline based framework, thus catering for the needs of the different groupings of lecturers.

Ironically, the directorate of teaching and learning at UWC sometimes self-sabotages its intentions by not making enough provision for all eligible academics to attend induction programmes as the following interview excerpt shows:

**Interviewer:** *In terms of the workshops or conferences or induction? You came to induction. Did you?*

**A5:** *No. That was, again, that was one of those interesting issues because it was myself, P... and Q, I think. There is a number of new staff and we all were supposed to go but there was only space for one person.*

In addition, lecturers preferred intentional to *ad hoc* interventions.

**Interviewer:** *How do you think we should go about it? To make it continuous, let's just say because we are competing for time and we also want to do something -as you said -more engaging. Who should do it and when should we do it and where should we do it.*

**A5:** *My sense is everyone should be involved. It should be very structured. It should be in the form of a programme. We can't have it ad hoc.*

**A5:** *I like the idea of a very strong centralized Teaching-learning Unit... but at the same time you need to have very close links with the individual departments so that there's a very clear engagement and it's not just, you know, the departmental representatives.*

According to interviewee A5, the Rhodes University model of professional development is stronger because it is structured and centralized and that a weakness in the UWC model is its prioritization of the role of the faculty-based teaching-learning representatives, over the creation of a strong, structured partnership between the directorate and the departments. The

authors believe that the UWC model could be strengthened if Teaching and Learning Committee members were experienced enough to influence teaching and learning decisions in the departments.

A need for re-positioning teaching and learning as a central university function was also identified.

*A2: Teaching is the core activity of the university – the primary reason why we have been employed here. Course content is evolving and new knowledge is generated. There's therefore a need to upgrade ourselves ...learn new approaches to teaching – new ways of doing things. We have to keep abreast of changes in our fields.*

Interviewees A3 and A4 were of the view that the decentralized professional development model could be strengthened by substituting the teaching and learning committee structure with a head of department-led structure as heads of departments have the authority to implement, or fast-track change. For example, interviewee A3 maintained that *the Directorate of Teaching and Learning should have people who work directly with the senior professors- get understanding- hear from them what the problems are and then try to address those problems* and, when asked who the influential people in the department were, replied *Those are the heads of departments.*

Interviewees A3 and A4 also expressed a need to address challenges brought about by diversity in their classrooms, improve pass rates and throughput rates, especially in Science. According to interviewee A3, staff invited visiting scholars, attended workshops organized by the department that addressed their specific needs, conferences and faculty-based workshops but the latter were not found to be helpful because *... sometimes you are there, you are lost because you don't know – they are talking about teaching in Computer Science and you are not really interested in this because this is not your field. It's like a waste of your time when you are sitting there.*

Any course/intervention that did not address the needs of the participants was perceived as a waste of time. Generally, interviewees felt that a better proposition would be to have faculty-based Teaching and Learning Committee members working closely with the teaching and learning staff to establish a community of practice in each department to engage in matters relating to discipline-specific teaching and to the scholarship of teaching and learning. According to interviewee A3, ideas to

ensure that teaching and learning was embraced could include: (a) a focus on relevant, discipline-based issues with which academics grapple (b) advocating for compulsory attendance of a minimum number of professional development activities, (c) awarding continuous professional development points for participation in professional development activities, and (d) paying closer attention to when workshops are scheduled.

### *5.1.3 Contestation between Research and Teaching and Learning*

All six participants agreed that there was very little recognition given to teaching and learning as compared to disciplinary research. Research was positioned as more important than teaching and learning. For example, A1 strongly criticized the *'aggressive drive (by senior management) for academics to pursue PhDs that were sometimes not even related to the discipline that one was teaching, and viewed this as a 'disservice to teaching-learning'*. For A1, teaching and learning was at the heart of the academic enterprise.

***Interviewer:** So how can we strengthen lecturer participation in professional development initiatives?*

***A3:** You see there, it sounds now terrible what I'm going to say but as long as people don't feel they get rewarded for teaching and learning - I mean in the meeting yesterday... it's about research. The prestige which goes with it, right? It's like I'm the top guy. You see in terms of the publication and NRF rating and all those things. In teaching and learning they can do many things, who is going to recognize them for it? Nobody. And I can say to you from our meeting yesterday - What is important are the rewards that people receive for excelling in what they do ...that's why they focus on research, that's the main task here.*

For A6, the nexus between research and teaching-learning could be strengthened by ensuring that teaching is research informed.

This contestation between research and teaching and learning has been increasingly identified in a number of recent studies, for example, Bozalek and Dison (2013) and Leibowitz (2014).

Three forms of contestation, namely pedagogy, organizational culture and epistemology have also been identified in short-term teaching-learning projects (Gosling & Turner 2014). For example, at UWC, although the adoption of appropriate pedagogies is encouraged, the institution continues to reward research as the epitome of academic achievement. The poor attendance of induction workshops and teaching and learning conferences are indications of the value assigned to some of the professional development activities in which interviewees had participated. Interviewee A3 concluded that *Staff focus on disciplinary research, and pedagogy is a peripheral matter in the department, that for as long as the department is not going to be held accountable, nothing would happen.*

#### *5.1.4 Opposing Discourses*

Two opposing discourses emerged from the interviews regarding what would constitute an effective model for academic professional development of staff at UWC. As indicated earlier in this paper, UWC currently has a decentralized model where each faculty develops and manages their own professional development activities. Interviewees A2 and A6 supported this model but not the manner in which was currently being implemented while interviewees A1, A4 and A5 opposed the current model. Although interviewee A2 saw the current model as ‘good’, s/he stressed that *‘the lecturers’ mindsets, a lack of enthusiasm about teaching and learning, too much focus on disciplinary research and employment conditions and status, inactive Teaching and Learning Committee members, threatened to undermine teaching and learning’*. Thus there was a disjuncture between the model and how it was implemented.

***Interviewer:*** *How can the current model of professional development be strengthened?*

***A6:*** *Most of the professional development work must be done in faculties, with the Dean and Head of Department driving teaching and learning. Generic issues that cut across discipline should be tackled during induction and discipline experts and the faculty teaching and learning staff could work very closely on the discipline-specific matters. This would make the current model more efficient.*



A1 was critical of a model in which the faculty based teaching and learning staff were not a discipline expert[s]', conflating the role of the teaching and learning staff with the work that could be carried out in the Academic Planning Unit. Interviewee A1 believed that teaching and learning '*should not be divorced from discipline and industry experience*' and that it was important that appointments to the position of the teaching and learning staff in the faculties be based on disciplinary expertise and extensive industry experience. S/he also argued that there were ample opportunities for the professional development of staff in the Economic and Management Science faculty which were not offered by the directorate of teaching and learning, for example, research training by agencies such as South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development, the industry consultancy experience of staff, and conference attendance and staff took advantage of these opportunities.

Similarly, interviewees A3 and A6 were of the view that one teaching and learning staff member appointed to address the teaching development needs of academics in different departments within a faculty did not have the capacity to do so. From these discussions, there seems to be some overlap between the work of a teaching and learning staff member (usually a generalist with background in Education) and that of a curriculum specialist in a particular field. However, it is often difficult to identify specialists in all the disciplines within a faculty.

Interviewees A4 and A5 felt that the centralized Rhodes University model was stronger, and better coordinated than the UWC model which was '*too diffused*'. Instead of *ad hoc* arrangements for professional development, they felt that the university could adopt a more structured programme and make participation mandatory for every staff member and allow them to gain continuous professional development points. They believed that this would raise the profile of teaching and learning and that, as A5 contended, with this arrangement '*people would learn even though they were resistant*'.

### *5.1.5 Other Constraining Factors Impacting on Teaching and Learning*

Other constraining factors identified by interviewees were a lack of monitoring systems to ensure uptake of the interventions. Although faculty

courses and workshops are needs-based, not many academics attend them. There was also a perceived lack of support from management, the perception of poorly coordinated professional development activities (A4), and no direct link between participation in the professional development activities and academic promotion. These constraints were further intensified by lecturer work pressures and lack of time. This erratic participation in professional development activities creates challenges and highlights the importance of balancing lecturer needs with institutional purposes for introducing systemic changes.

## **6.2 *An Analysis of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee Documents***

The Senate Teaching and Learning Committee reports from both faculties reveal that UWC has adopted an eclectic model (as evidenced by the variety of professional development activities in which staff participate in addition to workshops and courses). This model focuses on the implementation of an institutional strategic plan led by the director and supported by the deputy deans and specialists of teaching and learning.

In the analysis of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee documents, the reported data was categorized into four main areas. These include:

- a) *Externally run initiatives* such as partnerships with other universities in the region, for example the Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education run by UWC in collaboration with Stellenbosch and CPUT and offered through a blended delivery mode and other short learning programmes.
- b) *University-wide collaborations* (including on- and off-campus teaching and learning initiatives) such as the on-campus support by the Centre for Innovative Educational and Communication Technologies and the library. The use of teaching portfolios as a criterion for promotions and appraisals for staff on probation, not just for promoting reflection on individual practice.

- c) *Needs-based faculty initiatives* such as individual consultations, lunch hour seminars and workshops).
- d) *Challenges and successes* or the enabling and constraining factors impacting on teaching and learning. Lecturers cited the following constraining factors and challenges as key reasons behind the low participation rates: under-staffing, heavy teaching and marking loads, a lack of resources, time constraints and the pressure to improve their qualifications and publish in their disciplines.

From the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee report analysis, it is evident that decentralization makes the funding and organization of professional development activities in the faculties very difficult to manage. At UWC, there is no dedicated structure to ensure sufficient funding to support the running of the internal teaching and learning workshops, or for staff to attend local or regional colloquia and conferences. Left to the faculties, the coordination of the teaching and learning activities tends to become marginalized as the teaching and learning representatives are not always committed to their respective portfolios. There are two main reasons for this: (i) teaching and learning representatives are usually junior staff with no authority to influence performance in the departments; (ii) academics have heavy workloads which limit their participation in teaching and learning activities. However, a positive outcome of decentralization has been the opening up of authentic spaces within the faculty for lecturer negotiation and ownership of their own teaching and learning processes.

## **7 Conclusion and Recommendations**

This analysis of the two sets of data demonstrates how a decentralized model of professional development for academics has been received by Economic and Management Science and Science academics. The analysis also highlights the difference between an espoused and an enacted model of professional development.

The analysis has also identified some of the conditions required to make decentralization or centralization model of professional development in higher education effective. Although the current model of promoting teaching

and learning at UWC has proved successful in creating an authentic conversation about teaching and learning, uptake of the model has been erratic in some departments, and, as confirmed by the academic professional development studies reviewed in this paper as well as the contextual factors impacting on teaching and learning, there is evidently a need to improve the effectiveness of the current UWC model.

Some of these conditions for the successful implementation of professional development are outlined below:

1. A variety of sustainable professional development interventions other than workshops could be adopted to promote reflective practice. Courses and workshops are not the only mechanisms for responding to a changing South African higher education context. For example, Knight and Trowler (2001) view courses and workshops as only occasional contributors to professional learning and emphasize the importance of creating other opportunities for academics to behave as a learning community.
2. The designation of professional development leaders in the faculties and the possibilities of their roles are important. Knight and Trowler (2001:147) and Knight (2002) identify such teams and departments as effective sites of educational development and are critical of the dominant provider model of educational development. It helps if teaching and learning committee members in the faculties are senior academics with a track record in their fields. The role of the heads of departments in professional development also needs to be clearly articulated as improved communication and engagement with individual departments through the heads of departments can raise the profile of teaching and learning considerably. In a decentralized model, communication lines between the director and the respective heads of departments and faculty-based teaching and learning committee members would require reinforcement to be effective.
3. An institutionalized and structured support for teaching and learning (for example, participation at teaching and learning events) directed and encouraged by senior management can also raise the profile of teaching and learning and participation rates.

4. The model also needs a clearly articulated moderation and evaluation component to gauge its success. Kutner, Sherman, Tibbetts and Condelli (1997) suggest the following evaluation framework for adult professional development: evaluation of the impact on instructors, programmes and students using multi-purpose evaluation strategies such as questionnaires, interviews, *observation of practice* (our emphasis), portfolios, practitioner journals and alternative assessments.
5. A generic professional development framework for developing academic competencies (Brown *et al.* 2010) could also be designed. For example, the United Kingdom and Australian generic professional standards in teaching provide leadership for the professions in terms of quality and consistency, a shared language around teaching and learning that can inform institutional policies and planning, as well as a basis for accreditation, recognition or reward and a guide for professional learning (Australian Science Teachers Association, 2002; United Kingdom Professional Standards Framework; the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2009).
6. A minimization of the artificial binaries between teaching and research through a system which rewards teaching and learning appropriately and strengthens the nexus between teaching and research.

Within the UWC context, the status of teaching and learning needs to be reinforced to ensure that it is on a par with research. Heads of departments should play a key role in promoting teaching and learning and the scholarship of teaching and learning to ensure that the emerging culture of valuing teaching and learning at UWC is nurtured. In addition, teaching and learning also needs to be properly rewarded. The higher monetary rewards given to top researchers in comparison to the value of the teaching and learning awards, will continue to drive the perception that teaching and learning is not valued by university management.

However this article seeks to stress that important steps are being taken: for example, UWC is in the process of consolidating its teaching and

learning activities as well as its induction course for newly-appointed lecturers and its Post-graduate Diploma in Higher Education in Teaching and Learning will prepare the novice lecturer as well as the experienced lecturer for a productive and reflective role in academia.

These suggestions are, of course, potentially applicable to other South African institutions with similar professional development structures.

## **References**

- Avalos, B. 2004. CPD Policies and Practices in the Latin American Region. In Day, C. & J. Sachs (eds.): *International Handbook on the Continuing Professional Development of Teachers*. Open University Press.
- Australian Science Teachers Association/ Monash University 2002. *National Professional Standards for Highly Accomplished Teachers of Science*. Available at: [http://asta.edu.au/resources/professional\\_standards/asta\\_national\\_ps](http://asta.edu.au/resources/professional_standards/asta_national_ps).
- Becher, T. 1996. The Learning Professions. *Studies in Higher Education* 21,1: 43-55.
- Brown, N., M. Bower, J. Skalicky, L. Wood, D. Donovan, B. Loch, B.W. Bloom & N. Joshi 2010. A Professional Development Framework for Teaching in Higher Education. *Research and Development in Higher Education* 33:133–143.
- Boyer, E. 1990. *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bozalek, V. & A. Dison 2013. Using the Human Capabilities Approach as a Normative Framework to Evaluate Institutional Teaching and Learning Interventions at the University of the Western Cape. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 8,2:388-400.
- Budd, J.M. & D. Raber 1996. Discourse Analysis: Method and Application in the Study of Information. *Information Processing and Management* 32, 2:217-266.
- Council on Higher Education 2013. Report of the Task Team on Undergraduate Curriculum Structure (Discussion document), August 2013.
- Clegg, S. 2003. Problematising Ourselves: Continuing Professional Develop-

- ment in Higher Education. *International Journal for Academic Development* 8,1-2:37-50.
- Elton, L. 1998. Dimensions of Excellence in University Teaching. *The International Journal for Academic Development* 3,1:3-11.
- Elton, L. 2001. Research and Teaching: Conditions for a Positive Link. *Teaching in Higher Education* 6,1:43-56.
- Elton, L. 2009. Continuing Professional Development in Higher Education: The Role of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 8,3:247-258.
- Frick, L. & C. Kapp 2006. Continuing Professional Development of Lecturers in the Natural Sciences: Enhancing the Quality of Learning. *Education as Change* 10,2:81-96.
- Goldkuhl, G. 2008. What Kind of Pragmatism in Information Systems Research, AIS Special Interest Group on Pragmatist IS Research, Inaugural Meeting. Paris.
- Goldkuhl, G. 2012. Pragmatism versus Interpretivism in Qualitative Information Systems Research. *European Journal of Information Systems* 21:135-146.
- Gosling, D. & R. Turner 2014. Responding to Contestation in Teaching and Learning Projects in the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in the United Kingdom. *Studies in Higher Education* 40,9:1573-1587.
- Guba, E.G. & Y.S. Lincoln 1985. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage: New York.
- Hung, D. 2001. Theories of Learning and Computer-mediated Instructional Technologies. *Education Media International* 38,4:281-287.
- Knight, P.T. & P.R. Trowler 2001. *Departmental Leadership in Higher Education*. Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.
- Knight, P. 2002. A Systemic Approach to Professional Development: Learning as Practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 18,3:229 – 241.
- Kutner, M., R. Sherman, J. Tibbetts & L. Concelli 1997. *Evaluating Professional Development: A Framework for Adult Education*. Pelavin Research Institute, United States Department of Education, Division of Adult Education and Literacy. Available at: <http://www.calpro-online.org/pubs/evalmon.pdf>.
- Leibowitz, B. 2014. Conducive Environments for the Promotion of Quality Teaching in Higher Education in South Africa. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning* (CriSTaL) 2,1:49-73.

- Lester, S 2010. *On Professions and Being Professional*. Available at: <http://www.sld.demon.co.uk/profnal.pdf>.
- Lieberman, A. & L. Miller 1990. Teacher Development in Professional Practice Schools. *Teachers' College Record* 92,1:105-122.
- McCulloch, D., G. Helsby & P.T. Knight 2000. *The Politics of Professionalism*. London: Cassell.
- Ono, Y. & J. Ferreira 2010. A Case Study of Continuing Teacher Professional Development through Lesson Study in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education* 30,1:59-74.
- Padwad, A. & K. Dixit 2011. Continuing Professional Development of English Teachers in India: The ETCs' Experience. In Beaumont, M. & T. Wright (eds.): *The Experience of Second Language Teacher Education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Rescher, N. 2000. *Realistic Pragmatism: An Introduction to Pragmatic Philosophy*. Albany, NY: Suny Press.
- Rex, L.M., M. Bunn, B.A. Davila, H.A. Dickson, A.C. Ford, C. Gerben & M.J. Orzulak 2010. A Review of Discourse Analysis in Literacy Research: Equitable Access. *Reading Research Quarterly* 45,1:94 -115.
- Sandholtz, J.H. 2002. In-service Training or Professional Development: Contrasting Opportunities in a School University Partnership. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 18, 7:815- 830.
- Sayed, Y. 2009. Continuing Professional Development and Education Policy: Characteristics, Conditions and Change. Paper presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Continuous Professional Development Conference, Walvis Bay.
- Scott, G. & R. Garner 2013. *Doing Qualitative Research: Designs, Methods and Techniques*. Boston: Pearson Education.
- Scott, I., N. Yeld & J. Hendry 2007. A Case for Improving Teaching and Learning in South African Higher Education. *Higher Education Monitor* No. 6. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education. Available at: <http://www.che.ac.za/documents/d000155/index.php>. (Accessed on 3 November 2008.)
- Smylie, MA 2015. Developing Teacher Leadership: What Teacher Leaders can Do. Available at: <http://www.nnstoy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Mark-Smylie.pdf>.
- Stubbs, M. 1993. *Discourse Analysis: The Socio-linguistic Analysis of Natural Language*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Talja, S. 1999. Analysing Qualitative Interview Data: The Discourse Analytic



*Nomakhaya Mashiyi & Rita Kizito*

Method. *Library and Information Science Research* 21,4:459 -457.

United Kingdom Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). Available at:  
<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/recognition-accreditation/uk-professional-standards-framework-ukpsf>.

University of the Western Cape Senate Teaching and Learning Reports (2012 to 2013).

Nomakhaya Mashiyi  
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences  
University of the Western Cape  
nmashiyi@uwc.ac.za

Rita Kizito  
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University  
Rita.Kizito@nmmu.ac.za