Unlocking the Value in Accredited Professional Academic Development Programmes through a Process of Academic Reflection

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Abstract

The attitudes and perceptions of participants in accredited academic development programmes in South Africa is not well documented in the literature. Consequently, there has been a lack of awareness, within the domain of the higher education discipline, of the personal journey and insights of such participants as pertain to their development and experience of these programmes. Whilst some investigations have been undertaken on the attitudes of participants in general academic development initiatives, limited research has been undertaken with respect to those of participants in accredited programmes. The participant-authors in this self-reflection study are both academics, one of whom has commercial and academic experience, whilst the other has academic experience spanning over twenty years. It emerged from the study that the participants experienced a shift in attitude as they progressed through the programme, enabling them to overcome their initial reluctance. The study found that the catalysts for this change in attitude were the accredited nature of the programme, the acceptance of academic development as a process of change, the satisfaction of relationships built amongst academic peers, and the development of writing skills. These findings suggest that, notwithstanding initial hesitation and reluctance, other academics may similarly elicit value from an accredited academic development programme.

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1 Introduction

Professional academic development programmes are a relatively recent addition to the South African higher education landscape. Flowing from the country's transition to democracy in 1994, the new political dispensation introduced new demands and expectations that drove tertiary education institutions to adopt an open, relevant and non-discriminating direction to replace the inequities of the apartheid system (Fourie 1999). In the mid-1990s, the *South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act*, no. 58 of 1995 (RSA 1995) presented a new viewpoint for regulating qualifications in education and training. The process of radical transformation in higher education brought about the introduction of academic development initiatives.

The need for such programmes has been acknowledged by higher education management and quality assurance practitioners alike. Quality education is imperative for the further economic development of the country. Akoojee and Nkomo (2007:394) maintain that quality considerations in South Africa should be focused on the participants, be based on the 'values, purposes and ends of the beholder', and target the needs of the academics themselves. Institutions should 'develop ways to ensure that personnel will be appropriately skilled and re-skilled into new ways of engaging with the new community of students'. The aim of academic development initiatives is to support academic staff by improving their teaching skills, as well as their understanding of the higher education context and the developments that have taken place within the sector. In other words, academic staff are to be exposed to 'novel ways of dealing with teaching and learning provision, including peer mentoring and other strategies' (Akoojee & Nkomo 2007:395). Academic staff development and improvement are critical factors in ensuring the success of institutions. The White Paper for Post-school Education and Training (2013) indicates that a 'crucial factor in overall quality improvement and the development of the university sector is its academic staff'.

Disappointingly however, these programmes have met with reluctance and scepticism from academics. Makunye and Pelser (2012), in their article 'Academic staff's apathy towards formal professional develop-

ment programmes at North-West University', investigated the lack of interest amongst lecturers in these initiatives. Vorster and Quinn (2015) and Subbaye and Dhunpath (2016) are amongst the researchers who have documented academic development from the viewpoint of the developers, but little has been published regarding the attitudes of academics, and we found no studies that explored the academic journey through such programmes. This gap in the literature has motivated our exploratory small-scale study based on our reflections as two authors on our experiences of attending a two-year SAQA-accredited academic development programme.

The purpose of this investigation was to explore and track our own in-depth reactions and attitudes as we progressed, from the time that we envisaged our participation in the programme, through our actual engagement with it, to its completion. We diarised our experiences, feelings and attitudes through the stages of the programme, and then drew conclusions. In summary, we started the programme with lack of enthusiasm and scepticism, and with time and as the programme progressed, we encountered unanticipated benefits.

This preliminary study records just two personal subjective accounts. However, it may be of value to programme developers as they review, re-design and revise current academic staff development initiatives to raise their appeal to their target population. Academics contemplating their own potential participation may also find this study of interest as they reflect on their own attitudes towards such an investment of their time.

The objectives of this study were to address the gap in the literature by monitoring in detail the experiences, attitudes and feelings towards the accredited academic development programme over time. The research question that guided the process was: 'What was the effect of the accredited academic development programme on the feelings, responses to the content and attitudes of two researcher authors while taking part in a two-year SAQA accredited academic development programme. How did our reactions and attitudes change through the academic journey?'

1.1 South African Higher Education: A Changed Environment

Higher Education in South Africa has undergone immense changes since the end of apartheid in 1994. The *White Paper for Post-School Education and*

Training (DHET 2013) reported that student numbers country wide almost doubled from 495 356 students in 1994 to 937 455 in 2011, and The National Development Plan aims to achieve a target of 1 620 000 students in South Africa by 2030 (National Planning Commission 2012:278).

Increased student numbers have placed pressure on academic staff, who are expected to achieve consistent pass rates despite the increased student-to-staff ratio. The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training reports that the increase in student numbers has not been coupled with a correlating increase in staff numbers (DHET 2013), nor has it been supported by a corresponding increase in infrastructure and resourcing (Subbaye & Dhunpath 2016).

Today's students are also very different to students of the past. In 1994, 55% of students at public universities were black (African, Coloured and Indian), and by 2011, this proportion had risen to 80%. The White Paper further reports that, stemming from the persistent inequality of schools in South Africa, many school-leavers from poorer schools in townships and rural areas are underprepared for tertiary education and need additional assistance at tertiary level (DHET 2013). Educational transformation, in these circumstances, creates a critical need for ongoing staff development (Hassan 2011) in order to meet the changing needs of the student population (Makura & Toni 2014).

While dealing with transformation in the classroom, South African academic staff are simultaneously trying to meet increased quality control and accountability measures as well as dealing with university ranking pressures (Makunye & Pelser 2012). This situation is further exacerbated by managerial demands created by increased government funding incentives for higher student throughput (Ntshoe *et al.* 2008) and higher research outputs. In addition, Ntshoe *et al.* (2008) report that the role of academic staff has been stretched to include administrative and managerial duties, which historically fell outside the ambit of their responsibilities.

In the light of these conditions, SAQA initiated the development of formal academic programmes to equip staff in higher education institutions for their roles in academia. To date, it has accredited four Postgraduate Diplomas in Higher Education (PGDIPHE) and three Postgraduate Diplomas in Higher Education in Teaching and Learning. The former are offered by Rhodes University, the University of Johannesburg, the University of the Free State and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), while the latter are

offered by Stellenbosch University, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology and the University of Cape Town. All these programmes are accredited at NQF level 8. The rationale for these programmes includes the enhancement of teaching and learning facilitation and assessment practice, introduction to key research skills, and the development of a broader understanding of the South African higher education context (SAQA 2019).

The country's academic enterprise requires of staff to perform in three areas: teaching and learning, research, and community engagement. However, Quinn (2003), Subbaye and Dhunpath (2016) and Cameron and Woods (2016) observe that, traditionally, academic staff members of South African universities have received little or no training for these roles. These lecturers tended to rely on their own experiences as students, and memories of how they received instruction, then used those same methods in their classrooms.

Reddy *et al.* (2016) further point out that knowledge and skill in one's disciplinary field does not always translate into the ability to teach reflectively. They further suggest that academic development is a response to the pressure in higher education to achieve the performance and metrics necessary to attract funding to individual institutions. Accordingly, staff training is designed to develop participants to excel in teaching and enhance their research and supervision activities.

Accredited academic development programmes provide an opportunity for staff in tertiary education to professionalise their roles in academia. Such professionalisation of teaching and learning comes from the accreditation of programmes, which then give academics the opportunity to elevate their personal qualification levels and status (Makura & Toni 2014). This type of advancement in the field of higher education training is differentiated from the various (formal, informal and non-formal) non-accredited academic development initiatives made available across the country.

Examples of these include induction programmes offered by human resource departments to academics joining an institution; skills development workshops and seminars offered by teaching and learning centres; scholarship of teaching and learning presentations by academics in different faculties; and collegial discussions, forums within professional learning communities, and group discussions. Depending on the nature of the offering, these courses may be voluntary or compulsory for staff members.

Given the multiple responsibilities assigned to each academic, time

is a scarce resource and needs to be used for maximum impact. Locke and Bennion (2010) report that an objective of staff development initiatives is to orientate academics towards the importance of remaining relevant: what they know and how they impart that knowedge through their teaching and learning practices must be pertinent to the current and future climate in higher education. They must account for outputs, and they need to focus on the employability of their graduates, the usefulness of their research, and the accessibility of higher education to those who were previously excluded.

Formal academic development is a recent addition to the South African higher education landscape, having been introduced in the late 1990's when SAQA presented its case for the regulation of qualifications in education and training (*SAQA Act No 58 of 1995*). Quinn (2012) explains that the existence of academic staff development initiatives has its origins in educational development units that were, in fact, intended to service students. When it became evident that enhancing lecturers' skills would be a more efficient way to attend to students' needs, academic development practitioners developed interventions aimed at enriching teaching skills and curriculum development as required.

Despite the intended benefits of participation in academic development programmes, Makura and Toni (2014) note that older academics believe that academic development is only for young academics who are still developing their teaching skills and have time to see the effects of their efforts unfold in years to come. Leibowitz *et al.* (2015) report that seasoned academics are often disinterested in participating. They feel, for example, that the programmes disregard their expertise developed over years of experience in academia.

According to Leibowitz *et al.* (2015), university lecturers of all ages are sceptical about whether superior learning will stem from the implementation of enhanced teaching methods. Reddy *et al.* (2016) add that their reluctance is compounded if participation is made compulsory, as this is seen as an infringement of their academic autonomy.

Other obstacles have been reported in the literature. In various studies performed in Britain, Canada and Africa, Soi Lang (2004, in Makunye & Pelser 2012) found that academics listed time constraints, clashes with classes, inadequate funding, insufficient resources, inefficient planning, deficient staff development policies and unsatisfactory incentives as obstructions to their support of professional development initiatives. In addition,

lack of support while undergoing professional development prevented them from prioritizing their studies, and overarching apathy in their academic communities towards these programmes, further discouraged participation.

Echoing views expressed in other studies, Makunye and Pelser (2012) cite Makondo (2010), who reports that staff development programmes at North-West University were sometimes cancelled due to lack of interest or absenteeism of staff. In a follow-up study at the same institution, however, Makunye and Pelser (2012:529) found that 62% of the 210 academics who responded to the survey indicated that they deliberately volunteered to participate. Although they experienced several weaknesses in the programme, their responses overall were positive.

This finding contrasts that by Leibowitz *et al.* (2015) who, whilst exploring how context supports or restricts the effectiveness of professional development, found that heavy academic workloads prevalent in South African higher education context discourages academics from enrolling for academic development, even in instances where the individuals would otherwise be interested in participating. The socio-economic condition of an institution also plays a role in discouraging participation since workloads are directly affected by the availability of physical and staff resources in each institution. Academic development programmes must be squeezed into the open spaces between teaching and research activities and the ever-expanding volume of administrative duties expected of academics (Ntshoe *et al*. 2008).

Resistance to a variety of academic staff development initiatives at a South African university was interrogated through the performance of a critical discourse analysis by Quinn (2012). Her findings identified four discourses which explain the observed resistance:

- disciplinary discourse resents time spent outside of activities which will strengthen the academic's particular disciplinary knowledge;
- student deficit discourse identifies any learning problems as being caused by the students' lack of ability rather than the academics' inadequate teaching skill;
- skills discourse dismisses the technicality of teaching as a proficiency to be nurtured, and
- lastly the discourse of performativity which overcomes resistance only because of perceived benefit through institutional incentives attached to performance.

The tension between research and teaching has found many academics choosing to ignore the call to professionalise their teaching skills. The perception that research is more important than teaching drives a rational academic who already spends a significant portion of available time on teaching-related activities, to reason that participation in a professional academic development programme will reduce time otherwise spent on research, to the detriment of the academic's research profile (Leibowitz *et al.* 2015; Quinn 2012; Hassan 2011; Van Lankveld *et al.* 2017). In addition to this, disciplinary cultures tend to embed the notion that a good researcher will be a good teacher, further justifying academic time favouring research rather than engagement in improved teaching and assessment strategy (Quinn 2012).

Despite this, many lecturers have been persuaded to participate in accredited academic development programmes by incentives generated through institutional policies which are increasingly incorporating this as a criterion for promotion, as well as through institutional practices of recognition for teaching excellence through reward schemes (Leibowitz *et al.* 2015). However, academics are certainly unwilling to make a financial contribution towards these studies (Makura & Toni 2014).

As can be seen from the above review, there is much in the literature on the need for academic development in South Africa and the role of academic development initiatives, however no critiques of a SAQA-accredited academic development programme in South Africa could be found. Several articles discuss academic development practitioners views on aspects of academic development which range from assessments to theoretical frameworks of such initiatives and others reveal attitudes of academics who have participated in academic development initiatives. However, none of the initiatives mentioned in the studies is a SAQA-accredited programme and no study that tracks the academic journey of participating in such an accredited program could be found. This reflective study addresses this gap in the literature.

1.2 Context of the Study

We, the authors, are both permanent academic staff members in the Accounting and Auditing Department at the University of Zululand (Unizulu), a rural-based, comprehensive, historically disadvantaged

university located approximately 160 km North of Durban, in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa. Unizulu comprises two campuses; KwaDlangezwa Campus commonly known as the 'main rural campus', and the Richards Bay Campus, commonly known as the 'city campus'.

We are based at the city campus, and Author 1 is a qualified Chartered Accountant (South Africa) with 6 years' industry experience and 10 years' experience as a lecturer, while Author 2 holds her PhD in Management Accounting and has 25 years' experience in academia. At the beginning of 2017, we registered for the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDIPHE), a two-year, part-time, accredited academic development programme, offered at UKZN. We were part of a cohort of 17 academic staff members from Unizulu registered for the programme.

The Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law; Faculty of Education; Faculty of Science and Agriculture; and Faculty of Arts were represented in the cohort. Modules were offered in block sessions lasting one week each, four times a year. Assessments took the form of assignments and presentations; no summative examinations were undertaken, while learning took place independently and outside the block sessions.

The programme consisted of eight modules (16 credits each), totalling 128 credits. The three core modules are: Higher Education-Context and Policy; Researching in Higher Education; Practice, Reflection and Portfolio Development, while the five elective modules are chosen from the following list of six options: Diversity and the Student in Higher Education; Designing Curricula in Higher Education; Teaching and Learning in Higher Education; Assessing Learning in Higher Education; Technology for Higher Education Pedagogy; and Supervising Research in Higher Education.

We attended four modules per year. With the exception of one module that was presented on the UKZN Campus, all modules were presented in lecture venues on the Kwadlangezwa Campus, Unizulu. All modules were facilitated by a UKZN staff development practitioner.

In 2017, the following four modules were completed; Higher Education-Context and Policy, Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, Diversity and the Student in Higher Education and Assessing Learning in Higher Education, while in 2018 we completed; Practice, Reflection and Portfolio Development, Researching in Higher Education, Designing Curricula in Higher Education, and Supervising Research in Higher Education.

2 Method

We chose to explore and track our in-depth reactions and attitudes by diarising our personal experience, thus using reflection during our study period as a tool to collect valuable insights to our attitudes and perceptions. These reflections were then analysed to identify our attitudes towards, and perceptions of, the PGDIPHE. Mezirow (1990) posits that reflection 'enables us to correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem-solving'. Rogers (2001) adds that academics can use reflective skills in an effort to improve professional practice.

Our reflections consist of written accounts of our experiences recorded upon enrolment in the PGDIPHE, during the period of study and upon completion of the programme. Where we explicitly recorded our feelings, this has been taken as evidence of our attitude. Where no explicit statement indicating our attitude was recorded, the tone and content of the writing was analysed for evidence that they represent a particular attitude. We have extended these records with additional reflections whilst writing this article.

2.1 Academic Reflection

Reflection takes place on a continuum of deepening levels (Ryan 2011). Bain *et al.* (1999) propose a process of reflection which begins with simplistic descriptions of events or issues and through consultation with theory probes deeper to extract meaning and ultimately to generate a new understanding or conception. This process moves through five steps and is known as the 5R's framework.

> Reporting, Responding, Relating, Reasoning and Reconstructing. Their levels increase in complexity and move from description of, and personal response to, an issue or situation; to the use of theory and experience to explain, interrogate and ultimately transform practice (Ryan 2011).

This framework inspired Mary Ryan's Academic Reflective Writing Model (Ryan 2011), which we used to enhance academic rigour in this academic reflection exercise as follows:

- Identified agents of change (events/ episodes/factors) were depicted and our personal responses (attitudes) were described – these are presented as our findings.

- The findings were explained and interrogated by theory from literature, and the analysis culminated in the contemplation of a new construct (changed behaviour/new practices/new attitudes) as a result of this enriched understanding. This constitutes the discussion.

3 Findings

3.1 At the Start Line

We enrolled for the PGDIPHE in January 2017. Neither of us were highly motivated to enrol at first. Author 2 undertook investigations for a full year before enrolment, and both authors experienced hesitation and feelings of resistance towards committing to a two-year study programme. Author 2 displayed a begrudging attitude:

> *I honestly am not looking forward to embarking on this two-year programme, I completed my PhD many years ago and the thought of formal studying just does not appeal to me.*

Author 1 stated plainly that the driving force for enrolment was the need to *'eliminate an obstacle to promotion'* in the future, since the PGDIPHE had recently been incorporated into the Unizulu Promotion Policy as a criterion for promotion for academic staff (University of Zululand 2010). Author 2 was not lured by this provision, but rather believed that the introduction of a compulsory formal teaching qualification was on the horizon and chose to enrol voluntarily before being drafted into it under circumstances out of her control.

> *I will rather do it now while there are no pressures from management than wait until it is made mandatory (Author 2).*

The authors record that the accreditation of the programme was an important factor in their decision to enrol. Both authors have attended uncertificated teaching and learning workshops in the past, so if the

programme was not certificated, and accredited by SAQA, they would not have enrolled. Author 2 exhibits conditional satisfaction:

> *At least upon completion I will have something to show for my attendance and hard work.*

Author 2 recorded that she was *'curious'* about the programme and Author 1 expressed hope that the investment of time and effort on the part of the participants would be worth it. Her expectation was that the programme content would revolve around teaching and learning and assessment practices which she feels will be of benefit to her. She expressed fear that she might not cope with the demands of the study programme as a part-time learner.

3.2 The Hard Slog

Anxiety over lecture timetable constraints and increased workload pressure was recorded by both of us through the duration of the programme.

> *The biggest challenge I experienced was time pressure to meet deadlines. I worked late at night in order to complete assignments on time whilst still meeting timelines associated with my normal academic workload. Author 1.*

Our absence from campus impacted on our teaching plans for the modules we teach at Unizulu and created pressure to catch up missed lessons. Author 2 was appreciative that block sessions were not held on campus. This removed distractions whilst attending PGDIPHE lectures.

> *Being away from lecture venues is definitely beneficial; it creates that sense of isolation - allowing me to focus on the learning that was happening in the programme*

Author 2 records that for her this factor increased the level of anxiety and pressure,

> *the flip side to block lectures is that I must catch up on lost contact time.*

Author 1 reveals feeling completely out of her depth during several

of the modules due to the unfamiliar discourses and the specialized vocabulary associated therewith. Examples of such vocabulary include 'epistemology, constructivism, pedagogy and behaviourism'. Making sense of higher education discourses required diligent effort and perseverance. Both of us reported feelings of inadequacy and a lack of confidence when participating in class discussions with other academics who were familiar with educational discourses, such as those from the Faculty of Education. Author 2 comments that it would have been more comfortable learning these new concepts with others from the same discipline.

> *… the colleagues from the Faculty of Education know so much, I feel quite intimidated and amateurish in my knowledge of education theories…..*
>
> *The educational philosophy discourse was so foreign to me; it really challenged me. Academics in the social sciences were much more comfortable during these discussions, especially those from the Faculty of Education (Author 1).*

Author 2, having completed a PhD qualification in 2010, also reports feeling challenged by the academic-writing tasks after such a long hiatus and was concerned about not meeting the expectations of the programme facilitators. Author 1 entered academia ten years ago from the accounting profession and reports quickly having to develop academic writing skills in order to complete assignments required for the PGDIPHE. This presented a formidable challenge and was the cause of great frustration. Simultaneously wrestling with the unfamiliar discourse of the education discipline and trying to master the skill of academic writing was an ordeal.

> *I was very frustrated at the amount of time I had to spend on the assignments due to my inexperience. I had to learn how to scan large quantities of information quickly, how to select the most important pieces of information from the readings, how to paraphrase and reference, and how to synthesize whilst writing up all the information. I realised how big a gap there was in my academic experience, and this left me feeling very inadequate (Author 1).*

3.3 Crossing the Finish Line

Triumph over several of the challenges identified above evidences valuable learning successes for both of us. Mastery over the higher education discourse is an example of this, as well as a sharpened ability to perform critical analyses of academic literature in order to synthesize information and produce a worthwhile piece of academic writing. We both acknowledge the gaps in our knowledge of the higher education environment that existed prior to our studies in the PGDIPHE. Author 1 reports now having a far greater understanding of the higher education landscape.

> *The PGDIPHE broadened my understanding of the bigger picture of the higher education enterprise. I learnt several new discourses, all relating to different aspects of higher education, which goes to show the knowledge gaps I had. I have a better understanding of the role I play in the knowledge society and I have made great strides in learning the academic writing skills I will need to write up research in the future.*

Author 2 reflects that,

> *This programme has reminded me that the local HE playing-field cannot be seen in isolation, trends and developments in HE are actually global. Factors that affect institutions internationally also affect us in South Africa, managerialism being a typical example.*

Whilst we shared the expectation that the PGDIPHE would expose us to innovative teaching and assessment practices, we do not both feel that this was adequately achieved. Author 2 expresses that classroom practices will benefit from what was learnt, noting that,

> *the module on 'Assessing in Higher Education' has shown me alternative ways of assessing my students' work and I am hopeful that I will apply these methods in future.*

Author 2 posits that it may have been even more fruitful to discuss teaching and assessment methods in discipline-specific groupings of academics for the purpose of relevance.

Author 1, however, expresses dissatisfaction in the attention paid to innovative teaching techniques.

> *The brief time spent on this during the PGDIPHE was no more beneficial than unaccredited workshops I had attended previously on teaching and learning practices.*

Conversely, Author 1 reported great satisfaction that research received so much attention.

> *Of great benefit to me were the two modules addressing research in higher education….*

This was unexpected and offsets the disappointment in the modules on teaching and learning practices and assessment. Author 1 is a novice researcher and benefited greatly from the guidance provided on the research process during these modules. An assessment output from the research module was a mini research proposal. We both applied for, and successfully obtained, ethical clearance from the Unizulu Research Office to carry out our research projects. Author 1 places great emphasis on this as a first step toward developing a research profile and Author 2 is working towards resuming a research trajectory in order to successfully publish academic material.

A noteworthy gain derived from participating in this programme carried out as a cohort of colleagues is the sense of connectedness that develops among the members of the group.

> *The camaraderie between us grew each time we met … now we feel part of a community … (Author 1).*

Author 2 mentions that *'being in this together'* created a sense of belonging and decreased the feelings of isolation. This strengthened bonds between members of the group and provided a cohesiveness amongst staff across faculties of the institution. This has the potential to translate into inter-departmental collaborations in the future. We undertook to enrol in this programme together in order to support and encourage each other throughout the duration of the programme. We agree it worked well and strongly recommend others to do the same. Author 2 commented that,

> having a colleague in the same position as myself was definitely a contributing factor to my successful completion of the Diploma. When grappling with unfamiliar concepts and working through the night to complete assignments, it helped to know that there was someone else doing the same.

We both express great pleasure at having attained the PGDIPHE. Author 1 reports that the programme covered far more than anticipated at the outset and consequently has learnt much more than expected.

> *I am so glad to have completed the programme and feel a real sense of satisfaction … I had not expected to be orientated toward research in the PGDIPHE when I embarked on the programme. I thought the content was going to be heavily entrenched in teaching and learning alone.*

Author 2 is pleased to have acquired enhanced teaching and learning practices, revived research interests and exercised academic writing skills.

4 Discussion

Our observations arising out of these reflections can only be exploratory, but they highlight several matters which proved to be catalysts for the change in our attitudes. These are the importance of accreditation of the programme, the academics' acceptance of the process of change, the value of collegiality and the significance of academic writing skills development as a learning outcome. These matters are underexplored in the existing literature on academic development.

4.1 Accreditation is Key

Reflections collected **at the start line** demonstrated that, for two academics who have busy workloads, it was important that time spent on professional academic development was formal and certificated. The accreditation of the PGDIPHE increased its appeal and differentiated the programme from a myriad of professional development workshops and seminars that we have attended in the past. The prospect of attaining an accredited qualification

played a significant role in overcoming our initial resistance. It is our assertion that institutional management could more ardently leverage this factor in recruiting participants. In other words, participation in professional development could be boosted by appealing to the scholar in each academic.

Lifelong learning is inculcated in academia. We are members of the knowledge society and we are committed to lifelong learning. It is a factor in our personal development, as well as our career trajectory. The opportunity to strengthen our personal *Curriculum Vitae* (CV) appealed to both of us as building a CV strong in qualifications has the power to uplift one's personal status, as well as one's marketability in academe.

In our case, Unizulu has incorporated the attainment of the PGDIPHE as a criterion in the promotion policy, and the university pays the associated tuition costs. These incentives were strong motivating factors for us, and we perceive them to indicate the importance Unizulu places on the formal professional development of staff. These perceptions are supported by Gumus *et al.* (2011), who studied the uptake of professional development by healthcare practitioners. They found that recognition afforded by the employer of this progress through promotion opportunities and corresponding salary increases encouraged participation. They also found that staff felt personally enriched by the attainment of an additional qualification, and felt valued by their employer in cases where the employer covered the study costs.

We recognise that when we embarked on this academic development programme we were extrinsically motivated to learn. In their research on motivation, Deci and Ryan (1985) explain that extrinsic motivation to learn is to undertake learning in response to an outside stimulus, whether positive (i.e. reward) or negative (i.e. pressure). Author 1 acted in response to a promise of possible future reward in the form of a promotion, while Author 2 responded to a perceived pressure. Deci and Ryan (1985) report that sometimes it is necessary to use extrinsic motivation in order to create opportunity for a subject to then develop intrinsic motivation, just as a child is offered a reward for tasting a new food, but then continues to eat of his own will.

We reflect that at some point we became so invested in our learning that we intrinsically wished to learn and the scale of motivation switched to that of intrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) explain that intrinsic motivation to learn is the desire to learn for the sake of learning. They continue that the most effective learning takes place when a learner is

intrinsically motivated, is self-determined and takes control of learning, in other words, is autonomous. Dickinson (1995:167) describes autonomy as 'an attitude towards learning in which the learner is prepared to take, or does take, responsibility for own learning'. This resonates with our experience on this programme which culminated in effective learning. Consequently, we assert that, notwithstanding embarking on the programme in response to an external stimulus, as we did, staff can derive immense benefit.

4.2 Change Management

Whilst analysing the reflections during **the hard slog**, we became acutely aware of the identity shift we had undergone from academics, competent in our chosen disciplines, to students, novices in the higher education discipline. It is clear from the narrative that we felt confused and frustrated by our lack of mastery over the subject content in the PGDIPHE. This is understandable, since a sense of competence is embedded in the teacher identity (Van Lankveld *et al.* 2017). However, the teacher identity did not apply in this context.

Upon further musing, we concluded that we failed to readily assume a student identity upon assuming the role of student. Instead, we subconsciously expected to demonstrate proficiency over the new study material, just as we are accustomed to doing in our own disciplines. Pajares (2003:153) explains this: 'beliefs of personal competence ultimately become habits of thinking'. Bandura (1986, in Pajares 2003) theorizes that an individual's belief about his/her capabilities underpins his/her behaviour and motivation and Pajares (2003) elaborates that one's self-efficacy critically influences one's academic success or failure. We reflect that our belief in our competence fostered resilience in the face of the challenges we were up against, and ultimately steered us towards success in achieving the learning goals of the programme.

Upon reflection, we realise that incorporating a formal part-time study programme into our busy schedules was an exercise in change management and our initial reluctance to enrol reveals resistance to change. The change at hand was two-fold:

1. a disturbance to existing routines (through the introduction of formal learning and completion of the related assessments); and

2. the intended improvement to academic practices as a consequence of the development programme.

Whilst the disturbance to existing routines may be widely expected to produce resistance, it is somewhat irrational to react negatively to the prospect of improvement in one's academic practices. However, Oreg (2003) reports that resistance to change that favours one is known to occur. In our case, reasons for this resistance includes being daunted by the extra work or inconvenience required to effect the change, avoidance of a period of transition, and feelings of relinquishing control.

We feel that 'change' is an understated, but overarching theme of professional development. The objective is to bring about change in the way we fulfil our academic responsibilities, but implementation strategies to effect these changes were not addressed in the programme and tools useful for coping with change were not offered. Examples include project and time management skills which could be utilised when implementing new teaching methods or designing new curricula and assessment procedures. These tools would ease the period of change and improve the likelihood of innovative teaching methods being introduced in practice. After all, it is much easier to stick to what you know has worked in the past unless you have a strong detailed implementation plan for new practices. We agree with Oreg (2003) that individuals who embrace change and work to implement new developments are valued in the workplace.

4.3 Collegiality

A factor which appears to have enhanced our overall experience of participation in the programme is the camaraderie within the cohort of attending academics. The facilitators of the modules utilised a learner-centred teaching approach during the week-long block lecture sessions. A social learning environment was created by incorporating much interaction between participants in the form of group work. This led to the development of professional relationships amongst peers that can continue to be nurtured beyond the borders of the programme. Hargreaves (2002) encourages the social nature of learning. He describes the professional learning communities that exist among academics in many educational institutions. Brainstorming, inquiry, discussion, idea-sharing, collaboration and networking are all

characteristics of such a community. These activities can promote continuous development in a professional context. Osman and Hornsby (2016) agree, describing a community of practice as a way for peers, within common disciplines, to collaborate and streamline their scholarship of teaching and learning efforts in order that they work as a team and support one another in so doing. Our collaboration in writing this paper is an example of such. Each institution can benefit from the enhanced collegial relationships between staff through increased collaborative outputs.

4.4 Academic Writing

Assessments are an important component of any accredited programme. In our experience they brought immense value as they created opportunity for us to develop our academic writing skills, despite the fact that we found them to be time consuming and required committed effort. Our initial struggle with these eventually gave way to progress. The development of academic writing skills is a feature of the accredited programme that may attract academics who are novice researchers. These skills are not usually developed in non-accredited professional development initiatives, since they generally do not include written assessments. We found this to be extremely beneficial, since these are skills required to build a research profile, further not only our own academic careers, but also a corresponding benefit to the institutional research capacity.

In addition to the above-mentioned matters, our reflections give rise to several recommendations which could be used by academic developers to enhance their programmes.

5 Recommendations

The benefits we derived include mastery over several education discourses, enhanced understanding of the higher education sector in which our life's work is located, deepened collegiality amongst peers in academia, exposure to sophisticated teaching and assessment practices and enriched critical thinking skills. In addition, we were urged to develop our academic writing skills and nurture our research ambitions, both of which are key ingredients for a rich career trajectory within academia.

In a constructivist spirit, but without detracting from the gains de-

scribed above, we have undertaken a critical appraisal of the programme in which we were enrolled with a view to making recommendations for future improvements, as follows:

- incorporation of a broader range of elective modules to ensure that each participant can complete modules that are most relevant to him or her;

- the use of scaffolding to ease the steep learning curve for those academics who are unfamiliar with education discourses,
- improved marketing of the content of the programme to dispel the myth that it is solely focused on teaching and learning;

- inclusion of a community engagement module in the programme in order to ensure all four pillars of the university are represented.

We propose the incorporation of a professional academic development programme as a condition of employment for new staff in academia. This would be a mechanism to establish buy-in to the process from the early academic. Furthermore, motivation could be generated through a grant into the academic's research fund upon successful completion of the programme, thus leveraging even greater opportunity for the academic whilst simultaneously preparing the ground for furtherance of the institution's research objectives.

6 Conclusion

The value embedded in an accredited academic development programme is choked due to the resistance of academics towards these programmes. Were they to dismantle their resistance, we believe they would unlock immense value for themselves, their students and their institutions alike.

Our reflections **at the start line** reveal that having taken the steps to enrol, we experienced a mixture of emotions. We displayed hesitance, resistance and fear, all negative sentiments, yet we also exhibited interest in the programme offerings and appear to be expectant, both of which are positive emotions. Larsen and McGraw (2011) report that it is possible to experience positive and negative emotions at the same time. This instance of

mixed emotion can be compared to a child's first day at school: a mixture of fear and excitement.

During **the hard slog** we report experiencing anxiety arising from the added workload and time pressures, as well as difficulty associated with familiarising oneself with new discourses and the challenge of developing our academic writing skills.

The sentiments reported upon completion of the programme, **crossing the finish line**, are in stark contrast to those reported previously. Our satisfaction and pleasure at the extent of learning that has taken place is tangible. Success drives motivation, which in turns fuels further success (Dickinson 1995). Pajares (2003) elaborates that success is one of the most powerful factors contributing to one's self-efficacy belief, and he expounds that one's belief in oneself becomes habitual. Hence our confidence grew with each mastery experience.

Our experience is one of venturing into the territory of an unfamiliar field, namely the higher education discipline. Tamdgidi (2009) encourages academics to roam across multiple disciplines and paradigms. He posits that in order to understand, learn about, and change oneself and the social realities of the world we live in, one must be capable of moving between contrasting theories, ideas and disciplines. Recognising the intrinsic value in the ability to migrate between disciplines, we are now persuaded to approach future learning opportunities, in whichever discipline, perspective or paradigm, with a fervent attitude, and we encourage other academics to do the same.

7 Limitation

The findings reported here are subjective by nature and we acknowledge the presence of author bias, since we were both participants in the study and researchers conducting the study. Whilst this may be construed as a limitation, it may be justified by the richness of data gathered through self-reflection processes. We believe there is value in these findings which fill the gap found in the literature: personal experiences of the academic journey within an accredited academic development programme has not previously been reported on.

In addition, we believe this study adds value to academic programme developers who can use the findings to review, re-design and revise current development initiatives to raise their appeal to their target population, and

academics contemplating their participation in such programmes may reflect on their own attitudes towards such an investment of their time.

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