

Managing the Link between Academic Development and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: The Case of South African Universities

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ABSTRACT The link between Academic Development (AD) and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) in the South African Higher education quality context is as blurred as the conceptualisation of the terms. Academic development is a relatively 'young' discipline. It has come into being due to a wide variety of education pressures and needs locally and worldwide. Currently in South Africa, there appears to be no unified understanding of the purpose, role and practices among Academic Development practitioners. As such, managing AD practices is still quite 'ad hoc' and needs driven to the extent that even in one institution there are possible differences in how the practitioners conceptualise their roles and practices as data herein will show. Using three South Africa Universities and the 'Best Practices' frame of reference, this paper attempts to reveal the assumptions and perceptions that underline AD practitioners' understanding of their (AD management) roles which ultimately shape their (scholarship of) teaching and learning practices. The intention is to establish if respective AD models and practices influence significantly on teaching and learning within respective institutions. Five purposively selected AD practitioners responded to a questaview that sought to unravel these assumptions and perceptions. Data were qualitatively analysed to discern trends if any. Recommendations and implications on higher education quality and access and teaching and learning policy are discussed within the context of the results.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In 2004, the University of Fort Hare (UFH) through its Institutional Operational Plan (IOP), identified the Academic Development Programme and the Staff Development and Training Programme among others, as projects that were at the time described as 'vital interventions' (Woods 2007: 2). These projects were to be located in the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) which was established in the same year. The strategic priorities of the Centre from the foundational years ranged from providing academic support to both staff and students, advancing curriculum renewal initiative through to the development of policies that promote teaching and learning excellence. The strategic priorities were further espoused in the structure/organogram of the Centre. The practical implications of the organogram were such that staff and teaching development activities were located in one unit, the Teaching Development Unit

(TDU) whilst student support and learning were placed in another unit, the Learning Advancement Unit (LAU). The Teaching Development Unit (TDU) focused on capacitating academic staff on matters of teaching and learning. The then Learning Advancement Unit was born out of 'well established Supplemental Instruction principles and processes' (Skead 2006) that integrated academic initiatives such as language and subject matter programmes in traditionally difficult courses (Makura et al. 2011). It used a peer collaborative strategy in offering academic support to students. The third unit, eLearning Unit, was conceived as a hub for blended learning where electronic media initiatives would be explored and integrated into teaching and learning.

The units have since been amalgamated into a unitary entity. While the Unit system has been discontinued administratively (and replaced by a unitary/homogeneous one), the Teaching and Learning Centre's mandate has not fundamentally changed. Academic staff continues to be capacitated on issues around teaching and learning. The intention is to enable them to offer academic support to some 'lowly qualified and disadvantaged' students enrolled in a former Black university (Makura et al. 2011). Most of the students in the South African higher education

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context are beneficiaries of access and massification of education. McKenna (2003), writing on the changing discourses of academic development in South Africa argued that academic development work shifted its provision from a small racial group to entire curricula nationally. Moreover, student interventions were integrated with academics' efforts and syllabi. Hence her advocacies for an Academic Literacies (AL) approach where student writing was fused or integrated into academic programmes. Today, all South African universities have Academic Development centres whose mandate is to improve teaching and learning among staff and students.

Context and Content of the Paper

It flows from the foregoing that AD is potentially understood and interpreted in various ways. This paper explores the various interpretations of AD and implications thereof. The researchers further look at 'developments' within some of our institutions that speak to how AD practitioners (also termed Teaching and Learning consultants) approach their work. The term academic development (AD) was infused however, in all the units and activities of the University of Fort Hare's Teaching and Learning Centre. As much as there were conscious efforts to shift teaching practices from a teaching vantage to put emphasis on learning, academic development remained nebulous as most (if not all) activities of the Centre imbued academic development, hence the emphasis on academic literacy. This example of the University of Fort Hare epitomises the efforts by most South African universities in their quest to provide academic development or support to staff and students. But such support is not without its challenges. Perhaps one possible source of challenges associated with changing discourses and shifts relates to academics' understanding of the term 'teaching'. Krebber (2005) posited that though academics may understand teaching as 'reflection', their understanding remains poor. McAlpine et al. (2009) propositioned that academics view teaching differently. Some common terms cited included 'conceptions', 'beliefs' and 'theories' (p. 263). The authors in question preferred using the phrases 'espoused theories of action' as well as 'theories in use'. Such phrases encapsulated academics' notions and percep-

tions of the teaching process. Consequently, theories and practices placed the student at the centre of learning. It is this understanding that informed academics notions and practices about academic development and the centres that provide such services. As corollary to the foregoing, Hughes (2009) outlined the roles of academic development centres as revolving around teaching, institutional research, service, practice, policy support and leadership.

What Literature says About Academic Development?

Universities as centres of learning have been invariably described. Holmes et al. (2012) view them as 'territorial spaces' where material and conceptual claims flow in multifarious directions. Such a notion, in the writers' opinion, implies partiality in the knowledge claims there from. It is from these multifaceted directions that the meaning and interpretation of the academic development concept stem. These various directions of knowledge flow demand that Universities respond to the demand, hence, the proliferation of formal courses and the professionalisation of teaching and learning in higher education (Kandlbinder and Pesetab 2009). Regrettably, some academic staff is apathetic towards such professional development (Makunye and Pelser 2012). This, according to the authors, is premised on the notion that teaching and learning are researchable and teachable episteme of knowledge. Due to the dynamism around knowledge production (Ondari-okemwa 2011) and other social practices, South African higher education system has witnessed shifting discourses in academic development. This, perhaps, stems from its chequered history. Such a history has ushered in the multifarious interpretations. Writing on academic development in Australian universities, Lee et al. (2010) noted that its focus has been on teaching and learning though much of the activities went on undocumented. Academic development according to them, focused on educational and institutional work in higher education. They suggested for an understanding of the practices and meaning of higher education teaching and learning. Such an understanding was assumed to inform and support its development. In that vein, Hutchings et al. (2011) have highlighted the shift in focus from teaching towards learning in higher edu-

cation contexts. The elevation of academic development issues to policy prominence (Lee et al. 2010; Hutchings et al. 2011) has seen the proliferation of centres of academic development in universities and the re-envisioning of the teaching and learning agenda. It is in this context that academic development is said to have carved itself 'new regions of knowledge and practice'. The preceding notions fit quite well within Goslin's (2009) proposition that academic development is composed of three elements (a) that which is being developed (the subject of development) (b) to what end they are being developed (goal) and (c) the processes or procedures through which the subjects are being developed. Goslin (2009) went further to explain that early AD practitioners were motivated by a desire to improve teaching despite their divergent perceptions and notions.

Assumptions about Academic Development

Assumptions about a concept or phenomena revolve around our conceptualisation and attendant processes or practices. Hughes (2009) and Lewis (2010) for instance have shown that the practitioners' entry modes into higher education and the context specific scenarios they operate in preclude any assumptions of a shared body of knowledge. As such, their *modus operandi* is shaped by their contexts particularly institutional imperatives. Universities generally focus on teaching, learning and research. Such assumptions are context specific; hence vary from one institution to another. The field of academic development being a para-programme in higher education is abounding with varying underlying assumptions on its nature, relevance and practices. McAlpine et al. (2009) opine that AD epistemological assumptions had value that revolves around three aspects namely: Evidence of impact, perceptual models and processes. They posited that AD evidence of effectiveness could not be established through satisfaction surveys only but attending to the goals and needs of stakeholders. Secondly, theories about academic development did not always resonate with practice or espoused models. As such, it was imperative that there be some alignment. Lastly, the authors noted that while academics tended to focus more on teaching and research, academic developers tended to ignore these processes particularly how they complement or disrupt teaching.

Stemming from these varying assumptions, academic developers' perceptions of their roles and practices differed. A common assumption among academic developers was the centrality of learning in the process of teaching. The practitioner is not perceived as an 'academic functionary' but a 'student'. They always strive to learn best practice in order to inform teaching and learning and research in higher education. Benson and Brack (2009) refer to this strategy as inquiry. The growth and massification of academic development (Lee et al. 2010; McKenna 2003) has ushered in new institutions whose mandate is to respond to social demands. This repositioning of AD according to Lee et al. (2010) in the era of massification has not been matched by 'unity in the field'. Academic development practitioners are said to exhibit varying and fragmented practices. Hence Lee et al. (2010) describe them as 'a family of strangers' (p. 308). Even in this diversity, the practitioners exude some commonalities of what constitutes AD particularly its definition and purpose. Such family of strangers', according to Brew (2002) or teaching commons or communities of educators (Hutchings et al. 2011) tend to focus on supporting academic staff in their professional development without abrogating their institutional accountability. This is more of a quality assurance mandate that compel academic development practitioners to be conscious of their academic mandate. Hence, according to Brew (2002), academic practitioners need to continuously ask themselves questions around the efficacy of their activities as perceived by clients particularly on multifarious teaching approaches, students' learning experiences and outcomes. In doing so, evidence (or evidence-based practice according to Goslin 2009) should be provided for any claims made. This is where the importance of evaluations comes in handy. These and other activities are in essence part of the realm commonly referred to as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

The concept referred to as Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) was originally advanced by E. Boyer in 1990. This concept falls within the higher education realm than any other (Benson and Brack 2009). The SoTL is

premised on the idea that teachers have a moral obligation to inform teaching and learning to a community of practice. Teachers pass on epistemologies derived from teaching praxis, research and community engagement as is the case with some South African Universities. Writing documents is a common routine among academics or teachers. A study by Lea and Stierer (2009) among a sample of lecturers in England demonstrated that writing was part of a lecturer's professional and academic practice. They provided compelling evidence showing that by engaging with texts academics not only learn to know and develop knowledge about practice but come to realise writing as practice. Textual analysis of the lecturers' writing revealed that issues of power and authority, for instance, featured prominently and yet such aspects were a rarity on academic developers' agenda. The study by Lea and Stierer (2009) concluded that lecturers' documents possessed both concrete and symbolic significance of AD practitioners' conceptions of their professional practice. These served to express and extend one's academic identity. Such identities revolved around teaching, research and administration. In general though, most of the writing among academics focuses on students' pedagogy particularly student learning. The role of students' learning is highly regarded as all learning is focused on, not only what but how they learn in a democratic or learning-friendly environment. The role of the teacher or professional is that of exuding robust engagement with teaching theory and reflexive practice and the dissemination of research knowledge. Hence Benson and Brack's (2009) contention that 'the discourse about SoTL has focused on passing knowledge derived from the practice of teaching' (p. 72). Reflexivity is a cardinal component of the SoTL. Reflecting on one's teaching and learning enables the practitioner to inform his or her practice by conceptualising knowledge as a derivative of practice (Benson and Brack 2009) since knowledge construction is partially based on experience. The authors continue to posit that the theories emanating there from have implications on ones' conceptualisation of the SoTL. The practitioner engages with action research in the teaching and or the learning of the students. As such one is able to construct meaning and perceive the world from a different angle. In contributing to the debate, Hughes (2009) argued that academic

development work needed to be scholarly and grounded in authoritative peer reviewed knowledge and evaluation that is consistent with profound scholarship. For Hutchings et al. (2011) the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning realm need to focus on four critical sites namely: classroom teaching, professional development, institutional assessment and the recognition and reward of pedagogical work. To them, it is these areas that bring the SoTL into institutional life's quest to achieve goals for student learning and success. And in Boyer's (1990) words cited in Hutchings et al. (2011), "The scholarship of teaching has become 'the scholarship of teaching and learning'....and the serious study that undergirds good teaching (includes)... the latest ideas about teaching the field."

Theoretical Framework

Kreber's (2005, 2007) Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) model informed our paper. Deriving concepts heavily from Mezirow's (1990) Transformative Learning Theory, Kreber opines that academics that practice the scholarship of teaching engage in content, process and premise reflection. In content reflection, or "reflection-in-action" (Harfitt 2012) academics question their epistemic levels and beliefs. Process reflection enables them to question their pedagogical effectiveness while in premise reflection they engage in critical reflection of their practices particularly with smaller classes. Such academics construct their knowledge or notions of teaching either from constant teaching practice (experience) or education theory (or both). As they practice, they constantly refer to relevant research literature and participate in formal educational gatherings to perfect their trade. The SoTL model is informed by instruction, pedagogy and curriculum theory or knowledge domains. Instructional knowledge covers issues of the design or preparation of instructional process for example, objectives, tests and material while pedagogy focuses on how students learn and are taught. Curriculum knowledge looks at the rationale of teaching (the goals and purposes of learning programmes). Such knowledge addresses issues of alignment (the extent to which goals and purposes relate to, or speak to the broader curriculum). In summary, Kreber's (2005) model views teaching knowledge as consciously con-

structed and reflected upon by academics. It is this knowledge and experiences (which inform their practice) that we sought to elicit from selected academic practitioners.

Research Questions

1. What do some academic development practitioners perceive as the purpose of Academic Development (AD)?
2. What are the assumptions in academic development according to AD practitioners?
3. How do AD practitioners conceptualise their role in academic development?
4. To what extent does the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning inform AD practitioners' work?

METHODOLOGY

The interpretive research design informed this study. Data were collected through a questaview administered to five purposively selected and consenting academic development practitioners at three South African higher education institutions. In upholding high ethical standards, pseudonyms were assigned to both the five respondents (A, B, C, D and E) and their institutions (X, Y and Z). Respondents A, B and C were based at institution X while respondents D and E were based at institutions Y and Z respectively. The instrument sought to unravel their assumptions and perceptions in relation to their roles in academic development. The choice of the sample was therefore, informed by convenience, reliability and knowledgeability, cost and time. The questions developed were guided by the purpose of the study and the four research questions. The instrument was pilot-tested prior to its administration to ensure reliability. On administration, participants were assured of data and bio-data confidentiality. As such, their identity and that of their respective institutions remain anonymous. Qualitative data analysis techniques were used to discern trends.

RESULTS

Results were presented in accordance with the research questions.

Purpose of Academic Development (AD)

The first research question sought to investigate the academic practitioners' understanding of the purpose of the concept academic development [What, in your opinion is the purpose of Academic Development?]. Responses indicated that the respondents described academic development from a functionalistic viewpoint. They saw it in relation to its function vis-à-vis their roles (that is, what they do in their roles). Respondent A at University X was emphatic:

"For me the purpose of academic development is to offer support to staff and students and to improve the teaching and learning practices in the academic environment."

An academic (B) at university X indicated that AD

"...equips one and affords one the opportunity of improving one's position and status... It is aimed at improving the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of a person; it keeps you abreast of developments in your field of expertise..."

The respondent went on to opine that academic development's function is to

"professionalise a qualification [for example,] by doing the Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education and Training [PGDHET] a lecturer is gaining more knowledge and experience of matters relevant to higher education which can then be used to improve facilitation in the lecture hall."

Another respondent (C), at University X claimed that for AD to be purposeful, one needed

"...to constantly impart new theoretical paradigms that inform teaching and learning."

The respondent went further to argue that

"Academic Development should question assumptions within the academy for purposes of bringing transformation".

The response from respondent D at University Y summarised the sentiments of the group. The respondent argued that academic development:

"...seeks to further the goals of the teaching and learning agenda in higher education. Its express purpose is to create conditions that promote and accelerate teaching and learning. The final aim being to improve student success/throughput rates so that they are well equipped to become useful members of the communities"

and economy in which they find themselves. AD thus seeks to improve the functioning of the Higher Education ecosystem in South Africa and beyond”.

AD Practitioners’ Assumptions in Academic Development

Research question 2 was central to our study. It sought the respondents’ perceptions regarding some held assumptions in academic development. Varied notions were discerned. The following are some of the central notions held:

Respondent A at University X submitted two assumptions revolving around challenges and qualifications.

“I think the assumptions in AD are that challenges faced by academics are there because of the poor or disadvantaged students that we get from our primary and secondary education system. Another assumption is that, because academics have no teaching and learning qualification, they need to be capacitated in dealing with different aspects of the teaching and learning environment.”

Respondent C at University X echoed the second sentiment of Respondent A by positing that

“AD assumes that academic practitioners need support, something needs to be fixed or ‘developed’ in the academy- it can be the practitioners or the practices or both.”

Respondent B at University X submitted divergent views centering on career choices, age issues and economics. The respondent said:

“Many people assume that AD is a choice; they do not all see it as their professional responsibility to keep improving and staying abreast of developments in their field of expertise. Some also feel it is for the younger generation who still has many years in which to see the fruits of their labour. Some also feel that the institution for whom they work should carry all the costs for such development – they shy away from becoming involved if they have to contribute financially.”

Respondent B’s sentiments were echoed by Respondent E based at University Z. Said E:

“The assumption of AD is that lecturers need to continuously improve their facilitation skills to meet the needs of students. Students come with various needs and deficiencies that impede their learning. A lecturer should be found ready to address such issues. The students’ need

change every now and then and the lecturer could be kept in abreast with such changes through AD.”

Respondent D viewed the assumptions from the practitioners’ and students’ viewpoint

“Academic development concerns all those efforts and support systems in universities that are meant to enhance the efforts of academics as well as the learning efforts of students. It revolves around the assumption that everyone has the capacity to learn and to succeed in higher education as long as optimum conditions are put in place. The thrust of AD is success in higher education.”

The Role of AD Practitioners in Academic Development

Question 3 sought to establish what AD practitioners saw as their role in the institutions that they operated in. Such roles varied from one institution to another. The following are illustrative:

Respondents A and B who are based at institution X saw their role as supportive. Respondent A said her/his role was to

“...support staff in their teaching and learning practices mainly in the field of ICT’s/ eLearning, learning programme design and development, evaluation and foundation provisioning...[through]...one on one consultations, workshops and training sessions.”

Respondent D at another institution was more elaborate. Said the respondent:

“My role in academic development revolves around the following

- (a) Professionalizing the teaching skills of academic staff members throughworkshops, one-to-one sessions, small lunch-time meetings.*
- (b) Assisting academics in course and curriculum design*
- (c) Coordinating the Vice-Chancellor’s Teaching Excellence Awards*
- (d) Participating in the orientation and induction programmes of new academic staff members*
- (e) Participating in the evaluation of Instruction*
- (f) Designing and implementing a specialised diploma in higher education (PGDHET)”*

Respondent C also confirmed the supportive role characterising Academic Development work. The respondent noted that his/her role was

that of assisting in the training of Peer Facilitators and staff enrolled on the PGDHET to enable staff to “...professionalise their qualifications”. The respondent added that he/she had an administrative role involving the coordination of the induction programme for new staff members. The induction programme, according to C had “...strong academic overtones.” Respondent E saw his/her role as that of facilitating AD programmes to academic staff at institution Y. The respondent was optimistic “*I see Academic development as an essential service for academics which helps in the student retention and throughput rate.*”

How Academic Development shapes the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

The final question sought AD practitioners’ views regarding how AD shaped their Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). In essence, the question was meant to unravel how AD impacted on their teaching and learning efforts. Four respondents were unanimous that AD had a positive impact. A characteristic that stood out was that AD informed teaching or practice. The following are the model responses:

Respondent A said:

“Self reflection on my practice ...which means I need to...Research my practice in order to make informed decisions...Continuous development, because we are dealing with very diverse environments people from different perspectives and disciplines.”

Respondent B said

“By teaching, learning, researching, I am able to be part of knowledge creation; I can use my academic voice and talk with more authority on certain subjects as I share my knowledge and skills with my students. By role modelling good practice I might be able to inspire others.”

Respondent C submitted that AD helped him/her to “*reflect on my practice in lieu of emerging teaching and learning perspectives*”. Respondent E said that his/her knowledge of AD was sharpened as he/she had to read and research more in the process of “...improving my scholarship and expertise in an area”. Respondent D was however indifferent. The respondent argued that

“There is no demarcation between my work and academic development. Whatever I do is informed by the goals and assumptions of AD.

My research should reflect issues... academic development issues.”

DISCUSSION

The data presented in the preceding section reflect divergent views regarding an understanding of the purpose, role and practices among the selected Academic Development practitioners at three South African Universities. Such divergent views are not surprising as Lee et al. (2010) noted that AD is composed of a “family of strangers” each pursuing a particular role in academia. Goslin (2009) feels that there is a lack of clear boundaries even in the literature of academic development. Regarding the purpose of AD, respondents subtly perceive it from a functionalist perspective. Respondents A, B and C who were based at institution X presented us with varying views. All respondents explained the purpose of AD on the basis of what they do. What they do or did is/was needs-driven. This entailed giving academic support to staff and students. Some AD practitioners saw the purpose as that of self improvement while working with academics. A respondent saw the purpose as that of enhancing teaching and learning. Its purpose according to McKenna (2003) has shifted from a small racial group to entire curricula nationally. Respondent A actually made the observation that “*I would hate to believe that academic development is there because of access by black students to Universities. This says if there were no underprepared or disadvantaged Black students academic development wouldn’t exist.*” Moreover, Respondent D buttressed McKenna’s (2003) and Respondent A’s assertions by dismissing the narrow-minded racial notion arguing that AD sought to improve the functioning of the higher education ecosystem in South Africa and beyond. Hence respondents view AD as premised on enhancing staff and students’ proficiencies in their respective niche areas.

A critical question to this study pertained to unraveling AD practitioners’ notions of the assumptions in managing Academic Development activities. As intimated earlier, divergent views ensued here as well. Two respondents presented a ‘deficit notion’ regarding the role of AD in universities. They propositioned that students (and some staff) have shortcomings that needed to ‘be fixed’. Staff needed teaching qualifications to improve their teaching efficacy. As such,

they needed constant renewal, courtesy of academic development. An aspect that was not raised by the respondents related to what Hughes (2009) and Lewis (2010) have alluded to as relating the context-specific scenarios AD practitioners' operate in. We confirmed that their assumptions precluded any notions of a shared body of knowledge. In essence their perceptions converged on routine functions characterising their roles.

The third question intended to establish if AD practitioners were not only aware of their roles but how they articulated these. They saw their role as that of offering academic support to staff and students. Respondent D's role encapsulated what typical AD practitioners do. The roles encompassed provision of teaching/instructional skills and curricula evaluation and redesign, ITC support, professionalisation of teaching, and other administrative duties. While such roles were varied, the practitioners were in unison as regards the listing of particular activities as academic. The practitioners described themselves as 'academic functionaries' in sharp contrast the notion advanced by McAlpine et al. (2009). They viewed themselves as providing some academic function rather than being 'students' in their respective roles. The existence of a formal course (such as the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education and Training as revealed by two respondents and their role therein) was meant to professionalise teaching (Kandlbinder and Pesetab 2009) than for the AD practitioners' to be 'students'.

The researchers' last research question sought to establish AD practitioners' views regarding how academic development shaped their Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). The respondents agreed that academic development had a positive impact on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Most AD practitioners saw the impact through self reflection of teaching and research. Such notions confirm Benson and Brack (2009) idea that teachers have a moral obligation to inform teaching and learning to a community of practice. The discourse about SoTL according to Benson and Brack (2009: 72) has focused on passing knowledge derived from the practice of teaching. Hence reflexivity was cited as a cardinal component of the SoTL. Kreber's (2005) Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) was thus, found to be useful in conceptualising the roles and activities of AD practitioners. Academics that practice the schol-

arship of teaching engage in content, process and premise reflection. As they practice, they constantly refer to relevant research literature and participate in formal educational gatherings to perfect their trade. As such, the SoTL model is informed by what the practitioners do particularly in instruction and curriculum theory.

CONCLUSION

This research revealed that there appears to be no unified understanding of the purpose, role and practices among Academic Development practitioners in South Africa. Some AD practitioners view academic development from a functionalist perspective where each AD practitioner defines it in the context of their work. The managing of AD activities and practices is therefore is still quite '*ad hoc*' and needs driven. Practitioners at one institution revealed differences in how their conceptualisation of the roles and practices they are engaged in. As such, the assumptions and perceptions that underline their understanding of AD management are divergent. But a critical role which shapes their academic practices relates to the supportive role they play in institutions of higher learning. The roles are embalmed in teaching, curricula evaluation and redesign, ITC support, professionalisation of teaching and other administrative duties. These are academic roles which, of course, vary from one practitioner and context to another. It was our contention therefore to conclude that the link between Academic Development and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is rather blurred given that not all practitioners agree on how AD informs the SoTL and vice versa. As such, the conceptualisation of the terms varies from one AD practitioner and context to another. But this does not take away the cardinal role played by academic development in a higher education context particularly in South Africa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study, the researchers suggest the following recommendations. The study proposes the mounting or enhancement of specific programmes/qualifications on academic development. It is envisaged that such an approach could possibly mitigate the divergent views characterising some AD practitioners. The current pool of AD practitioners is

derived from teachers with little or no training in higher education and let alone academic development. As suggested by one author, there are no formal requirements Academic Development as regards knowledge or qualifications to enter this field. Hence the need to have distinctly AD programmes that could possibly counter the multifarious disciplinary variability characterising AD practitioners.

Concerted efforts also need to be done to change and dispel the prevailing 'deficit' notion and practices regarding the nature and purpose of AD. Most AD practitioners (and the academic public) view their (AD) role as supportive (para-professionals). As such, AD work is seen as a (policing) or 'quick fix' to the 'deficiencies' exhibited by staff and students. And yet AD theory and practices need to focus on the professionalisation of teaching and exuding teaching excellence. Finally, this study proposes imbuing notions on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning among AD practitioners and academics. Practices and policies could back such an effort. Perhaps, through this way, teaching will be greatly valued and be seen as a scholarly pursuit characterised by constant and critical reflection. The implication for engaging in scholarly teaching will further ensure higher education quality and access for the students. Our higher education teaching and learning policies should of essence, highlight the centrality of scholarly teaching if our impact is to be fruitful. Hence the need to manage academic development programmes and teaching activities well.

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