

Voices of Educational Developers on the Enabling and Constraining Conditions in the Uptake of Professional Development Opportunities by Academics at a South African University

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ABSTRACT What are the cultural, structural and agential conditions which enable and constrain the professional development of academics in their role as teachers, which either encourage or discourage them to take advantage of professional development opportunities afforded by the selected South African University (named the University of Higher Learning (UHL) in this paper to protect its identity)? In order to answer the above question, this paper which is part of a wider National Research Foundation (NRF) Research project involving eight universities, sought to deconstruct the narratives of educational developers on the enabling and constraining conditions with regard to the professional development of academics as teachers at a historically White South African university. The study adopted a qualitative case study approach. Ten educational developers constituted the purposive sample for the study. Individual interviews were held with the educational developers using a semi-structured interview schedule. Using the Archerian social realist theoretical framework qualitative data was analysed by first transcribing interview tapes and coding the transcribed data. Content analysis was then used to analyse data thematically. The study found constraining factors which included perceived lack of time, overload and general undervaluing of teaching when compared to research. Some promoting factors included the existence of an established teaching and learning centre as well as the existence of teaching excellence awards. Based on the findings, the researchers conclude that there are a number of structural, cultural and agential factors promoting or hindering academics' uptake of professional development opportunities and recommend that teaching and learning centres in universities should continue to engage academics to ensure that they prioritise the undertaking of professional development courses. Professional development courses should also be tailor-made to ensure that they answer the felt needs of academics in different faculties and departments.