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University Teaching as a Profession: A Holistic Approach to Continuous Development in South African Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT Challenges that South African HEIs (Higher Education Institutions face, include access, admission, funding, retention, output and academic teachers falling short in creating effective spaces for quality teaching in lecture rooms. Issues of class size, workload, pressure to publish, student support and lack of effective teaching infrastructure and resource diminish the academic teacher's ability to focus on continuous professional development. This paper reviews the professionalization of teaching within a holistic approach as based on a Gestalt conceptual framework. The Council on Higher Education (CHE)'s latest institutional Audit of the Quality Enhancement Project contextualises the paper. Based on a theoretical overview on literature on challenges in CPTD the authors propose a holistic approach to CPTD within a policy context in South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Engelbrecht and Ankiewicz (2016) refer to Continuous Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) as 'an indispensable tool' albeit in the context of technology teachers. They state that CPTD has become an 'indispensable tool' due to the competitive nature of societies which is a direct consequence of 'globalisation and technological development'. Continuous Professional Development (hereafter referred to as CPD), has become an internationally-recognised area of critical value; a major driver of economic growth. The inextricable link of CPD to the quality of education, a direct factor in economic and national development, cannot be overlooked or trivialised should a country seek to remain globally competitive (Cheong Cheng and Tsui 1996; Oduaran 2015: 274; Engelbrecht and Ankiewicz 2016). There is general consensus that for school or university education to be successful, the teacher or lecturer plays a key role (Suhaemi and Aedi 2015). In order to ensure and maximise on the effectiveness of teachers in higher education a holistic approach is propagated (Cheong Cheng and Tsui 1996; Korthagen 2010).

Objectives of the Study

The paper reviews the approach to CPTD in the HEI context, presenting practices in both the national and international environment. The objective is a trajectory towards a holistic approach to the implementation of CPTD in South African HEIs, considering the challenges as highlighted. This is done through a review of literature and is thus theoretical as follows in the next section.

Conceptual Framework – A Holistic Approach

This paper propagates a holistic approach to continuous professional teacher development (hereafter referred to as CPTD). This approach is promulgated by amongst others, Cheong Cheng and Tsui (1996), who argue that teacher effectiveness can be maximized in an approach which holistically addresses competence and performance, as opposed to a fragmentary approach. Korthagen (2010) also refers to Gestalt theory and holism in the education of teachers, promulgating a holistic view of 'teachers as persons'. This approach can be traced back to the Gestalt theory of Holism (Max Wertheimer et al. 1912 as described in Korthagen 2010), where objects are viewed as a unified whole, and the 'whole is greater than the sum of its parts'. This theory is extended to Continuous Professional Development, viewing teachers holistically, considering the contexts in which they both work and live and the effect on them as persons (Oduaran 2015; Korthagen 2010; Cheong Cheng and Tsui 1996), as previously mentioned.

The South African Context and Continuous Professional Teacher Development in Higher Education - The Council of Higher Education

Through the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP), the Council of Higher Education (CHE) brought sharply into focus the 'improvement of teaching and learning in both public and private higher education institutions' (CHE 2015: 11). One of the prerequisites identified in the former's regard, is 'enhancing academics as teachers' (CHE 2015: 11). This furthers the CHE agenda of equality in education provision through capacity building as identified by the Higher Education Quality Committee (CHE 2004). The CHE (2015: 13) states that transformation (developing the capabilities of individual learners for personal enrichment, social development and economic and employment growth) as identified by the HEQC in 2004, is possibly the 'most relevant' of 'the aspects of quality informing the HEQC's understanding of quality'. Transformation in terms of development of learners, is directly linked to transformation of academics as teachers, as how else does one transform learners, if not through teaching (as part of teaching and learning)?

The CHE (2015: 16) reveals that professional development is not a singular process. Different kinds of development are needed as academics and professionals progress during their teaching careers. Initial only training, or novice training, indeed can be debated as inadequate. Yet, the CHE (2015) exposes findings that show very few lecturers or professional teaching staff at universities receive training, prior to taking up the position. The argument then is that CPTD is needed after any induction or introductory training programme, and should continue throughout a lecturer's teaching career. Current training is generally in the form of workshops, seminars, symposia and conferences. Additionally, creating a peer-learning or mentoring ethos in the academic department, where communities of practice become the norm, would offer an improvement to teaching and learning development. Some universities also offer non-credit bearing courses, but these are generally only supported through a voluntary basis. The debate is on whether 'formal training in higher education' should be required of academics in South Africa.

What constitutes a good academic teacher is debatable. Harden and Crosby (2000) point out that the changing role of the (higher education) teacher, causes unease among those entrenched in the traditional approaches to teaching and learning. There is no denying that the role of the university teacher has become more complex and demanding, due to the changing nature of their work tasks, new roles and the diversification of their previous roles (Brew and Boud 1996). Harden and Crosby (2000) provide a shift in the thinking of the university teacher, showing how complex their roles have become. Ramsden (2003) shares what is considered to constitute good teaching, as reflected in research. Included are; sharing 'the love of the subject'; to stimulate and make 'interesting' material; capacity to engage at the level of students' understanding; simply explain material; clarifying what needs 'to be understood', as well as the reason and level; encouraging 'independence'; providing and adapting 'to new demands'; encouraging active, responsible and cooperative learning through methodology and tasks; 'using valid assessment methods, a focus on key concepts, and students misunderstandings of them'; good quality feedback on work; learning 'from students and other sources about the effects of teaching and how it can be improved' (Ramsden 2003). A one-dimensional professional development initiative, such as university inductions or non-credit bearing courses, can surely not address these vast and demanding characteristics of good teaching. These characteristics demand on-going and continuous support throughout the teaching life of an academic.

One of the issues that acts as a deterrent to CPTD appears to be the tenacity with which the academic community holds onto about fundamental values and beliefs about teaching and learning. Little changes regarding academic teaching and learning, despite evidence and research that shows there might be a better way for teaching and learning in higher education to occur (Guskin 1996). Senge (2000) suggests that one of the problems with tertiary teaching settings is that individualism and competition are still regarded as important aspects, and similarly to academics and professors, who compete for status and power, this value set feeds into tertiary classrooms. Positivism, or "technical rationality" still dominates as the epistemology, and hence the product is sending young students into a world with heads full of answers and

thoughts, but little experience in producing or action. This is problematic in a world where students need to be able to problem-solve, critically analyse, and participate in solution finding.

Didactic lecture standards are still seen to be the standard method of teaching in higher education. Talking to students (Johnson et al. 1998) has been seen to promote surface learning (lower-level learning), and favour students that have a favour towards auditory learning styles. It also does not recognise the limitations of the average student's attention span. Modern day students tend to be more visually stimulated than previous generations, hence didactic styles of teaching are even less successful than with previous generations of students. In spite of new research that shows new knowledge about how people learn, and reveal increasing opportunities and methods for academics and lectures to reach students at their level, both in South Africa and abroad, figures reveal that the system continues to fail current day students. Thus the argument for a holistic developmental approach to CPTD in South African HEIs.

An International Perspective on Continuous Professional Teacher Development

The professionalization of teaching in Higher Education is not a challenge that faces South Africa alone. In fact, research reveals that globally, the phenomenon of tertiary teaching continues to elude both the teacher and student in university classrooms across the world. The National Centre of Postsecondary Teaching in America (1995) showed that over half of all students drop out during the first year of university. Similarly in Australia (Zeegers and Martin 2001), student failure rates at university stood at eleven percent, with a third of students considering leaving their studies during the first semester. Yet, the fundamental issue is that with the upward trend of continuous open access and massification of tertiary studies, students are still not stimulated in the environment that the tertiary setting provides. The most prevalent causes of this attrition include curriculum overload, student perceiving the teaching as poor, the loss of interest in the subject area and inadequate counselling or advice on their academic problems (Zeegers and Martins 2001). Russel (2001) in Lueddeke (2003) suggests that shocking attrition rates could be substantially reduced if places of higher education offered students better support during their academic studies (Lueddeke 2003). One way of achieving better support is through the continuous professional development of lecturers and academics that teach in tertiary classrooms. This is also reflected by Suhaemi and Aedi (2015) who also point to the lack of lecturer professional competences directly attributed to amongst others, the absence of a management strategy that positively impacts on 'lecturer professional competences and quality'.

Sweden and the United Kingdom (UK), amongst other countries, support the notion that Higher Education lecturers' should undergo obligatory teacher training. In some countries such as Holland, New Zealand and Australia, there seems to be some 'form of training or development of university teachers' however, it is not obligatory. In others, such as Finland and Norway, for example, it is (Trowler and Bamber 2005).Gibbs and Coffey (2004) found in a study 'that HE training can increase lecturers' student focus'. In addition, it can also improve aspects such as 'organisation, group interaction and rapport'. Of most importance is the finding that HE lecturers' training 'can improve students' learning' (2004). Gibbs and Coffey (2004) also 'highlighted that HE teacher trainees reported that in their respective departments, teaching was often not valued', instead the 'pressure to conform to traditional, teacher-focused teaching conventions' was always present. Any change or suggestion of new methods was frowned upon and colleagues often saw these recommendations as criticism of their more experienced work.

One country that has moved forward in understanding the importance of teacher development in higher education is the UK. Bamber (2008) discusses the evaluation of Lecturer Development Programmes (LDP) in the UK. This is premised on the fact that very little systematic evaluation is done regarding educational development activities (Gosling 2008). Ninety-three HEIs in the UK were surveyed and it was found that evaluation of LDPs were usually only anecdotal. Bamber (2008) defends that the danger of this provision is that it cannot be defended of justified beyond perhaps 'being a good thing'. What evolved from Bamber's discussion on the evaluations (small-scale or multi-institutionary), was the importance of continual evaluation, and the

sharing of this information across the spectrum. This is another important facet to the call for the professionalization of higher education training in South Africa.

As previously stated, Oduaran (2015: 275) argues that CPD impacts on the education system which is directly related to national development. Oduaran cites authors such as Govender, Shagrir and Murray to emphasise this point. The author further argues that historical lessons from other countries (including Britain and Germany) should teach us never to become 'complacent' and that CPTD should 'continuously be assessed' as a marker of internationally competitiveness and relevance to all spheres of national growth and development. According to Oduaran (2015: 279), the framework for implementing CPTD, was provided by the Nigerian National Policy on Education (with a number of revisions). It was informed by national strategy, as outlined in the 'Second National Development Plan'.

The alignment/ hand-in-glove reciprocal and complimentary nature of education as a vital foundation to nation-building, and nation-building as dependent on a good education system, has reinforced Nigeria's acknowledgement for the need of CPTD. In this regard financing has been provided for 'practical training courses', and opportunities for exposure to, for example, relevant industrial experiences. Professional bodies outside of higher education, also play a role in their attention to CPD. Nigeria is not without its challenges in CPTD, with teacher training evaluations reflecting 'national objectives of …development of … highly motivated, conscientious …efficient…creative, and committed' teachers 'have not been met in the last thirty years'. Resources are a challenge, as well as the means of indicating frustrations with the status quo, including 'strikes and work-to-rule', especially, in the public universities' (Oduaran 2015: 282). ICT has played a major role in sustainable economic development (Adu 2015), particularly through the education sector. The focus on the need for ICT training for teachers as part of professional development is also highlighted in research by Adeyemo et al. (2015) who found that Nigerian teachers' knowledge of ICT is inadequate for the effective use of e-learning materials for teaching purposes and as an aid to promote learning.

In research on Uganda, Ezati and Mugimu (2010) outline that CPD was introduced at Makerere University due to a number of reasons related to reduced funding of higher education. This impacted on facilities, equipment and numbers of teaching staff to continue to deliver quality education. Makerere University thus attempted to 'restructure itself, its paradigm and ways of teaching', through workshops. Findings of their research revealed that though teachers' content knowledge was good, challenges were experienced with 'teaching techniques' and that in-depth training was needed in, amongst other areas, 'e-learning, teachers' ethics and code of conduct in teaching, research supervision skills, and student support (Ezati and Mugimu 2010: 7). Their research concluded that unlike at 'other levels of education', professional development courses for university staff are inadequate if not non-existent in comparison. This may have impacted on the negative view university teachers have of continuous development courses.

Sclafani (2011) points to the challenge of the lack of coherence in most CPTD programmes. The author indicates that teachers have a variety of options from which they randomly chose, and which are not always 'tangentially connected to the needs of their students'. Sessions on CPTD focus instead on the individual teacher's needs or at times to strategic development needs of the institution. The author indicates that Singapore is one of the few countries that has attained some form of 'coherence' in CPTD, and that Japan has a system that is able to evaluate teachers' performance and development needs, that would inform the 'teacher's individual training plan'.

These empirical examples show that CPD initiatives that have been implemented are not without their challenges and obstacles. A change in view of the 'tradition' regarding higher education teaching is not something that is easily bought into by members of HEIs. However, what is apparent is the desperate need for academic teachers to upskill themselves in a holistic, integrated way, to truly meet the needs of 21st century students and adapt to the changing role of higher education teachers.

The Academic in the South African Context: Where To?

South Africa is still considered to be part of the developing world. While the national bud-

get dedicates over twenty percent of the total budget to education, South Africa consistently ranks amongst the poorest performing education systems on a variety of international educational platforms (Leibowitz et al. 2015). Within the transformed South Africa, goals of economic liberation and equality would all be served by a tertiary education system that was able to ensure a significant increase in the numbers of students from previously disadvantaged groups (Le Roux and Breier 2012). Yet, South Africa has recently faced a national tertiary student crisis in the form of mass action across the country. Students in higher education feel that liberation and equality has not materialised and that they are still disadvantaged. Universities themselves remain challenged by the need to redefine their identity, their purpose and their position in a transformative manner in the post-apartheid South Africa (Soudien 2012). South African higher education still perpetuates a system that is hierarchical, with a few research- intensive, historically advantaged universities at the top of the pecking order. The previously disadvantaged universities and technikons, whose focus is on mass education and technology-based qualifications, seldom feature. Their differential access to, for example, library resources and to land and buildings continues to impact on these institutions in current times (Bozalek and Boughey 2012). Succinctly outlined in the CHE report (2015:19), South African academics work in an extremely challenging environment that 'may conspire to limit, or even undermine, the development of academics as teachers'. This in turn impacts on the quality of graduate attributes as stated previously. Elements identified in the challenging environment include, 'workload frameworks, performance management systems and reward structures'. These make huge demands on academics' time, energy and attention. Explicit in these are community engagement, teaching and research with publication (Hall and Schultz 2003).

Central to them all is professional development which affects, and is affected by the various elements, and which arguably should be central to the workload. In terms of this context, it is also usually found that the 'young academics are given the time-consuming and difficult job of teaching large first year classes' (CHE 2015: 20). CHE argues that 'two conceptual ideas' influence this, namely, 'the lack of shared understanding and clear articulation of what constitutes quality teaching and lack of recognition of university teaching as a profession'. New staff do not have the skill, knowledge and experience 'to teach a large group of students effectively'. This in combination with the fact that new staff need more time to execute a complex task in comparison to established lecturers, ultimately impacts on quality. It is argued that new staff should have a lighter workload 'to balance the dual demands of becoming good university teachers and lecturers'. This amongst other factors, it is argued, leads to the high failure/drop-out rate of first year students in South Africa.

Promotions are a form of reward for academics and form part of implicit drivers. Few universities in South Africa promote academics primarily on the basis of teaching, and even fewer up to full professorship (CHE 2015: 21). Research, more than teaching, is attributed 'higher status and value' and it is also argues that it is 'difficult to devise reliable methods of assessing the quality of a university teacher'. 'Recognition' is also identified as an important driver by the CHE (2015: 21) with teaching excellence awards form part of most university recognition systems. However, there are only a 'small number of winners', and it is argued that excellence in teaching should be recognized in the same manner as excellence in research (as by the National Research Foundation – NRF) (CHE 2015: 21).

Perhaps it should also be considered that in the South African context, CPD of teachers (in the General and Further Education and Training Bands) has been gazetted in the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development (Department of Education 2007), in recognition of the critical need to address society's inequalities through education provision of quality. The South African Council for Educators (SACE) was also established in recognition of CPTD, allowing teachers at GET and FET levels to build a portfolio of professionalism through participation in nationally recognised SACE-accredited programmes. SACE and the Department of Education (DoE) co-prepared The Design of the Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) System (DoE and SACE 2008) in recognition that CPTD is 'an essential component of a comprehensive teacher education system of high quality'. The document provides guidelines and principles for CPTD, not removing the responsibility from the individual teacher. It allows for individual teacher professional development, as well as both school and profession priority activities. The benefits are envisioned towards 'the improvement of learner

achievements, especially in poorer and disadvantaged communities'. This system should holistically be carried through to Higher Education to continuously build capacity and professionalism in perpetuating a holistic approach to CPTD. The Department of Education released the White Paper (number 7) on e-Education as far back as 2004, with one of its policy goals as, 'every South African learner in the general and further education and training bands will be ICT capable' (as cited in Adu and Galloway 2015). Adu and Galloway also state that inadequate ICT training can be detrimental to the professional development of teachers. A holistic approach would recognise that the e-learning policy also impacts on professional development imperatives in relation to ICT in the higher education sector.

The South African context is rife with tensions and conflicts regarding CPD of academic teachers. However, there is a need, a call, for CPD in HEIs. The authors of this paper propose the following discussion and recommendations for consideration.

DISCUSSION

Tension and Conflict in the Higher Education Context

South Africa has witnessed the turmoil and chaos of a system that is flawed with inequality and lack of reflective transformation. Institutions across the country were brought to a standstill over 2015 and 2016. Within efforts of change, Leibowitz et al. (2015) emphasise the need for policy directives that are considerate of not only varying socio-economic conditions of HEIs, but how all the variations featured at each institution play themselves out in relation to each other. Bozelac and Boughey (2012) highlight issues in higher education with the misalignment within initiatives (students, lecturers and institutions are held accountable for success in tertiary settings, rather than the entire education system). The same can be said for the need to professionalise higher education teaching across South Africa. Teaching development initiatives must aim to address the issue of quality in teaching and learning, but it is doubtful that teaching and learning can be separated from the context of the lecturer's day-to-day and institutional and national experience (Pickering 2006). Any attempt to legislate the CPD framework in such a contested terrain would need to ensure a shared understanding and clear articulation of what constitutes quality teaching in higher education and what is needed to recognise university teaching as a profession. This paper calls for a holistic, deeply-integrated approach to CPD in South African tertiary settings.

Professional Development – A Policy Driven Context

As previously indicated, transformation of teachers within higher education has been identified as a key factor in the holistic development of learners by the CHE through the QEP. The approach to this, according to the QEP findings as well as reflected in the literature outlined reveals that the transformation agenda has been a more individual-driven, rather than an organisational-driven approach. Competition, rather than quality has been identified as one of the main drivers in this regard, as pointed out by Senge (2000), for example. Globalisation and technological development compels institutions to encourage CPTD, however there are variations in the models (Engelbrecht and Ankiewicz 2015). There is no common policy on CPTD in South Africa at HE level, unlike the DoE-SACE generated document aimed at teachers at GET and FET levels. It is at the discretion of each HEI to implement CPTD as a compulsory aspect of quality education, and also to determine the approach in this regard. As promotions and competition seem to be the main driving force, literature reflects that individuals seem to have taken it upon themselves to pursue one or other form of CPTD, mostly for their own interest. A national policy around CPTD, without being prescriptive can ensure that we do not become complacent as HEIs (as warned by Oduaran), and that we continuously assess and benchmark as a strategy of national and international growth and development. The Policy should be flexible enough to accommodate individual, institutional as well as professional priority areas. A framework for CPTD is therefore needed, informed by both a national strategy and developmental plan, as in the case of Nigeria, for example. This promotes a reciprocal and complimentary relationship between nation-building and quality education. Should such a policy be considered, its implementation has to be supported with the necessary resources. ICT training, for example, has been identified as having a major impact on

the success of CPTD within the age of technology and within an e-education environment.

A Holistic View of the Academic as a University Teacher

Literature as discussed reflects the context of the academic in the 21st century as extremely challenging given the issues of large class sizes, high workloads, pressure to publish, offer student support and working under resource constraints including the lack of effective teaching infrastructure and teaching and learning resources. A review of policy documents and an overview of international contexts as reflected in this paper, reveals that though the enhancement of academics as teachers is critical to the transformation of learners and society at large, this acknowledgement does not filter through in the demands placed on the academic as a university teacher. The holistic view of the teacher seems absent in higher education, and thus the approach to CPTD is one of a piecemeal ensemble of various professional development courses in the hope of developing the sum as greater than its parts. The lack of a holistic view of the academic, has led to the absence of training and support structures throughout the academic's development as a teacher. The university teacher's role has become so complex as outlined in the literature, yet this has not been aligned to CPTD which still reflects a lack of continuity and career-pathing throughout the teaching life of an academic. CPTD courses are often one dimensional, once-off in the form of indications or non-credit bearing courses, that do little if anything to contribute to the holistic development of the university teacher. Gestalt Theory emphasises that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This theory should direct, impact and filter through CPTD in a South African milieu with the complex dynamics of the 21st Century Academic contextualising Policy on CPTD (as previously propagated).

CONCLUSION

Various themes have been identified in the discussion, suggesting that there is a compelling argument for CTPD. Though nationally and internationally, CPTD does receive attention, it is haphazard and is not accompanied by the necessary authority and policy to motivate the university lecturer to consider embarking on such a process. Limiting factors such as teaching workloads, large classes, community engagement and research, are not accommodated in the structures of CPTD programmes. The result is that lecturers continue to struggle with current day tensions in both the academic and personal arena, with the ripple effect of ineffective impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The lack of coherence in most CPTD programmes, and the absence of policy perpetuates the intransigence as experienced in the current milieu. CPTD programmes need refinement so as to facilitate adaptation to the 21st Century learning environment. This needs to be accompanied by resources that address the realities of the massification of education in South Africa. The CHE may have to review, in conjunction with Universities South Africa (USaf) and DHET, the establishment and role of a professional Council, such as SACE, for the university teacher.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper focuses on a theoretical approach to CPTD, arguing for a holistic approach which stems from a national policy on CPTD in higher education that emanates from a national strategy towards nation-building. The recognition of the teacher in higher education as part of both a university structure and larger, national structure in the education of a nation is tantamount to the success of the implementation of such a CPTD Policy. The HE landscape and its tensions, together with challenges as experienced by the university teacher within the academic context, cannot be ignored and should be addressed, if not accommodated in such a policy. Quality teaching in the HE context has not been as closely been aligned to CPTD as has been the case at General and Further Education levels, where SACE has played an important role in setting national guidelines in relation to CPD. A national body that recognises developmental strategies that speak to personal, institutional as well as societal needs and issues is recommended as part of a holistic strategy to CPTD in the South African HE context.

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