

Academics' Experiences of a Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education Programme: A Case of a University in South Africa

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Abstract

The Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDHE) is widely accepted as a standard qualification that inducts and orients academics for their roles as university teachers. It equips academics with pedagogical knowledge and competencies, thereby helping them to cope with the learning needs of academically under-prepared and diverse groups of students. Research conducted in South Africa and elsewhere has shown that in order to be effective facilitators of learning, academics require sound understanding of the knowledge of their disciplines as well as knowledge of teaching and learning. This study examined the experiences of 15 academics at a South African university that had recently graduated with a PGDHE. A qualitative methodology was adopted and data were gathered by means of an unstructured questionnaire. The major finding was that the PGDHE significantly empowered academics in their roles as university teachers. The participants were thus of the view that the programme should be a pre-requisite for appointment as a university teacher.

Key words: scholarship of teaching, pedagogy, higher education, academic under-preparedness, learning

Le Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDHE), ou diplôme d'études universitaires supérieures, est communément accepté comme la norme de la qualification qui intronise et oriente les universitaires dans leur rôles en tant que membres enseignants d'université. Cela dote les universitaires de savoirs pédagogiques et compétences, les aidant ainsi à gérer

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les besoins éducationnels de divers groupes d'étudiant·es sous-préparé·es sur le plan académique. La recherche menée en Afrique du Sud et ailleurs a montré que, afin d'être des facilitateurs et facilitatrices d'apprentissage efficaces, les universitaires ont besoin d'une parfaite compréhension des connaissances propres à leur discipline ainsi que des connaissances spécialisées de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage. Cette étude a analysé les expériences de 15 universitaires d'une université sud-africaine qui avaient récemment obtenu leur diplôme PGDHE. Une méthodologie qualitative a été adoptée et les données ont été collectées au moyen d'un questionnaire non-structuré. La principale conclusion est que le PGDHE a donné un pouvoir non négligeable aux universitaires dans leur rôle en tant que membres enseignants d'université. Les participants et participantes ont donc estimé que le programme devrait constituer un pré-requis pour la nomination à un poste d'enseignant·e d'université.

Mots clés: science de l'enseignement, pédagogie, Enseignement supérieur, insuffisance de préparation universitaire, apprentissage

Introduction and Background

The imperative to democratise higher education (HE) through broader student participation continues to be a major tenet of post-apartheid South African HE policy as encapsulated in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013). The White Paper and related legislation is driven by the need to redress past apartheid-based educational practices and the resultant imbalances with a view to improving student access, success and throughput rates (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2016). Democratisation of the HE sector has led to massification and diversification of the demographic profiles of both students and staff, and programmes of study as HE gradually ceased to be a privilege of the elite (Bozalek and Boughey, 2012). However, increased access by marginal and non-conventional beneficiaries (Subbaye and Dunpath, 2016) was not met with a corresponding increase in the quality of graduate outputs and outcomes across the sector (CHE, 2014). Scott, Yeld and Hendry's (2007) study that focussed on the 2006 first-time entry cohort revealed that only one in four students in contact universities graduated in expected time. The study further revealed that by the end of the first year of study, 24% of students registered for a contact three-year degree, and 21% of those registered for a contact four-year degree would have dropped out.

A CHE (2018) analysis tracked the graduation and dropout rate for a student cohort of 2013, for contact universities, over a period of four years. It revealed that only 23% of the students registered for a 360 credit-diploma

graduated in regulation time in 2015, while 36% dropped out. With regard to the cohort registered for a three-year degree, 30% of registered students graduated at the end of three years and 34% dropped out during the same period. For the four-year degree, 46% of the students graduated at the end of four years in 2016 while 27% dropped out during the same period. While this study shows some improvement in throughput rates as compared to Scott, Yeld and Hendry's (2007) research, it is clear that much remains to be done to improve the throughput rates in substantive terms.

Universities are called on to grapple with the reality that the bulk of their student population is "underprepared or unprepared" for HE. This is epitomised by the unsustainably low student success rates as clearly evidenced by low graduation and throughput rates (CHE, 2016). It is important to note that the increased entry of underprepared students to HE rendered lecturers, many of whom were not adequately pedagogically equipped to deal with such students, underprepared to teach in the changed environment. The role of effective teaching comes to the fore in an environment to which students bring different types of cultural capital, prior knowledge, and social and academic experiences (Apple, 2010). The CHE (2016), observes that good teaching was not high on the list of concerns in previous eras when university classes comprised carefully selected students, as most were easily able to cope. This contrasts sharply with the current HE condition where a substantial number of students fail to cope with the demands of learning. It necessitates that lecturers adopt appropriate learning scaffolding approaches so as to reach out and respond to the needs of students who struggle with learning.

The South African HE system is paradoxical in the sense that, while a massified and diversified system requires good facilitators of learning, very few academics receive training in university teaching prior to being appointed (CHE, 2015). Since 2010, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has earmarked funding for teaching development in the form of a Teaching Development Grant (TDG) aimed at enhancing teaching competence (Subbaye and Dhunpath, 2016). This was reconfigured in 2017 into a University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG) that aims to support university teaching and support staff. While this is a step in the right direction, the reality is that most academics are still expected to acquire teaching competences in the context of their practice, as possession of a teaching qualification is not a prerequisite for appointment as a university lecturer. The situation is further exacerbated by what the CHE (2017) refers to as the lack of a clearly defined institutional and consensual view on what constitutes quality university teaching in many institutions. Current practice thus still rests on the dominant paradigm that an academic's disciplinary competence and research productivity are adequate for effective

teaching competence (Dhunpath and Vithal, 2013; CHE, 2016; Machingambi, 2017; Scott, Yeld and Hendry, 2006). This practice has become a ritual that needs to be unsettled. It presents a sharp contrast to many European countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden where lecturers receive formal pedagogical training before being appointed (CHE, 2015).

Research reveals that there is general under-performance in the South African HE system across all race groups when compared with similar developing countries (CHE, 2016; Scott, Yeld and Hendry, 2007; Letseka, Breier and Visser, 2009). The standard of teaching and the ability to transform practices to meet the needs of diverse students have been identified as key factors in low throughput rates, although the impact of poverty and academic under-preparedness among students also play a role (Letseka, Breier, and Visser, 2010; Vithal, 2016). Commenting on of the South African HE situation, Scott (2018) observes that university teaching is problematic as most academics are discipline experts without any formal teaching qualifications. In such circumstances, lecturers tend to draw on their own past learning experiences instead of engaging students in the knowledge generation and production process through research-driven and critical thinking skills. As a result, they tend to use uninformed and/or inappropriate teaching, learning and assessment practices (Ramsden, 1998). Such practices need to be disrupted since they are considered as contributing to the current generally unsatisfactory levels of student performance and low graduation rates across the sector (CHE, 2016; Scott et al., 2007). The decision to enrol academics in the PGDHE at the university where this study took place was a response to the problem of student failure. Premised on the idea that there is an inextricable link between student success and staff competence, the study examined experiences of the programme among a group of academics who recently completed this diploma at a university in South Africa. It was also based on the view that there is a need to evaluate the programme and strengthen its processes.

Disrupting Rituals of Academic Practice

Much of what is perpetuated in teaching in HE reflects largely taken for granted approaches and assumptions. Such practices are referred to as rituals of academic practice (Fraser; Henderson; Price; Aitken; Cheesman; Bevege; Klemick; Rose and Tyson, 2009). If not disrupted, they can unconsciously be internalised and legitimated by the HE system and academics alike, leading to their perpetuation. In the HE education context, these rituals include the idea that any lecturer with a master's or doctoral degree in his/her discipline will be able to teach well, and that a university teacher can learn how to teach while engaged in the process of teaching. Efland (in Fraser et al., 2009) cautions that the validity of these and other rituals of

academic practice needs to be examined since many tend to constrain or even thwart student learning rather than promoting it.

A dominant and rarely questioned paradigm that has shaped HE practice in South Africa and probably elsewhere is the belief that an academic's disciplinary proficiency and research productivity are adequate for effective teaching competence (Subbaye and Dunpath, 2016). This requires deconstruction as aptly demonstrated by Boughey (2010) and Dhunpath and Vithal's (2013) research which showed that to be an effective facilitator in South African HE, one does not only need disciplinary knowledge but also good grounding in pedagogical approaches.

While it may be normal for an academic to be indebted to his or her past learning experiences, and the manner in which these shaped his or her understanding of teaching, there is a need to subject such experiences to scrutiny (Groundwater-Smith, Ewing and Le Cornu, 2003). Many new and early-career academics tend to hold on to and continue to be influenced by rituals and memories of their own learning to the extent that they tend to teach as they were taught. This ritual can prove unsustainable due to changing student profiles, the content of the curriculum, teaching and learning methods and the changed learning environment (CHE, 2013). This study was framed by the assumption that the PGDHE will help develop academics' competencies as university teachers as well as disrupt the attendant rituals of academic practice discussed above.

The Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDHE)

The PGDHE is an extensive, theoretically grounded formal two-year programme that engages academics in learning theory and practices in HE settings. Those who pursue the programme develop their capacity to engage deeply and critically with the scholarship of teaching and learning. It thus aims to induct academics into the prevalent teaching and learning culture in HE at institutional, national, and international level, and disrupt the rituals of academic practice discussed above through the SoTL (Subbaye and Dunpath, 2016; Quinn, 2012).

The programme comprises five modules that focus on professional development and professional learning. The modules develop and enhance professional knowledge, competencies and skills in teaching praxis by emphasising how to become a reflective practitioner, learning and teaching in HE, curriculum development, assessment, and moderation of learning and evaluation. Furthermore, the programme seeks to enhance the professionalism of academic staff members who in many cases would have been recruited without a professional teaching qualification. Ramsden (1998) and Waghid and Davids (2017) observe that HE is experiencing a shift from "learning to teach" to "professional learning". Thus, academics who

go through the programme are expected to acquire systematic knowledge related to teaching and learning. In addition, the actions and practices of such professionals will be undergirded by a systematic knowledge base that also acts as their fall back strategy when dealing with teaching and learning problems (Winch, Oancea and Orchard, 2015).

Assessment involves an evaluation of teaching portfolios developed and submitted by the participants. These require academics to show evidence of attainment of the programme's outcomes through critical reflection on their current practices and how these evolved as a result of engagement with the programme. Development of academics as university teachers is thus enhanced through engagement with the PGDHE programme.

The PGDHE that is the focus of this article was offered through a partnership with a research-intensive university in South Africa tasked to deliver the programme, assess participants and certify them, while the host university's role was offering support to participants and monitoring and evaluating the programme. The study sought to establish the extent to which the programme met the needs of academics as university teachers and the researcher evaluated the experiences of 15 academics who had graduated with a PGDHE in the preceding year.

Theoretical Framework

This study drew on the SoTL approach, a form of enquiry that is predicated on the idea of making teaching and learning scholarly (Shulman, 2011). It entails university teachers engaging in research on their teaching and their students' learning with the findings being made public. Thus, the SoTL approach represents a significant departure from a situation where university teachers engage in teaching as if it were a routine activity. As Boughey (2010) and Machingambi and Mhlanga (2017) observe, it requires teachers to base their teaching on what prevails in the literature as sound practice. This links well with McKinney's (2007) view that scholarly teachers professionalise their practice and consider the body of knowledge on teaching and learning as a discipline that requires development and pursuit in its own right.

Scholarly teaching should be firmly rooted in research on teaching and learning. Maphosa and Mudzielwana (2017: 10) regard the SoTL as "...studies that probe teaching and learning, examine the problem using methods that are appropriate to the discipline, apply the results to practice and communicate the results to others". Hay (2012) postulates that the SoTL goes beyond mere teaching as it seeks to understand how students learn and how carefully designed teaching enables learning to occur. This suggests that the incorporation of scholarship in teaching elevates teaching to a specialised science and not a practice to approach from a common

sense perspective. Nonetheless, the tendency to treat teaching as common-sense practice is prevalent in the South African HE system, amply manifested by the fact that most academics are employed to teach without any qualifications in teaching or educational training (CHE, 2016). This is predicated on the false assumption that teaching can be mastered by acquiring a generic set of best practices (Voster and Quinn, 2015). Instead, scholarly teaching seeks to promote theorised accounts of teaching and learning and more nuanced approaches to understanding constraints to and enablers of student success. Hence, as Boughey (2010) states, SoTL research is a significant departure from the transmission mode towards more student-centred or problem-based approaches to teaching.

Waghid and David (2017) contend that academics who believe in the SoTL regard teaching as critique, anchored on the need to cultivate the possibility of dissent, and diverse in its interpretations of what has always been taken for granted. This requires academics to acquire a range of theorised understandings from which they will draw when deliberating on teaching and learning. This is particularly important given Niven's (2012) observation that the current stock of theories used by South African educators to understand and address current educational problems is scant. In the same vein, the CHE (2017) made the insightful observation that although South Africa makes a significant contribution to international educational debates, it remains atheoretical in its everyday teaching and learning discourses. The CHE adds that institutions can make use of substantive theories in order to enhance teaching and learning practices that improve student learning outcomes. Hence, the significance of the PGDHE programme, as it capacitates academics with critical and reflective skills and helps them to develop theorised accounts of teaching and learning, which is the essence of the SoTL. This notion is encapsulated in the Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework (HEQSF) (2013, p. 31), which states that "the primary purpose of the Post Graduate Diploma (under which the PGDHE is subsumed) is to enable working professionals to undertake advanced reflection and development by means of a systematic survey of current thinking, practice and research methods in an area of specialisation". The Sub-Framework explains further that the post graduate diploma entails a high level of theoretical engagement and intellectual independence to enable participants to relate knowledge to a range of contexts. With regard to the current study, academics on the PGDHE programme are expected to develop critical and reflective skills in the area of HE as a sub-field of education. Equipped with such skills, it is hoped that university teachers will be more effective in transforming teaching and learning practices and outcomes (DHET, 2013), in line with the goal of disrupting the rituals of academic practice discussed earlier.

Research Questions

The study's main research question was: What are the academics' experiences of a PGDHE programme? The sub-research questions revolved around the relevance of the PGDHE programme to academics' current teaching role;

- the programmes' impact on their conceptions of teaching and learning;
- how academics' engagement with the programme impacted students' learning and,
- how these academics planned to showcase their acquired knowledge and skills.

Research Methodology

This study was located within a qualitative research methodology as it sought to gain a deeper understanding of how academics felt about the efficacy of a PGDHE which they had just completed. Qualitative research enquires into the ways in which people interpret and derive sense from what they have experienced (Mc-Millan and Shumacher, 2010). The data is synthesised inductively to produce findings that are normally expressed as descriptive narration in words. The qualitative methodology enabled the researcher to collect and interpret detailed narrative data from the participants through an unstructured questionnaire. The use of open-ended questions was key to the generation of rich descriptive data that forms the mainstay of qualitative research. In order to mitigate the potential limitation of using an unstructured questionnaire, the participants were given ample space and time to type detailed responses in the comfort of their offices and homes, with the researcher making an appointment to collect the responses. No restrictions were set in terms of the depth of responses. By studying and interpreting the data, the researcher was able to co-construct it through the generation of multiple subjective realities (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). The researcher observed ethical considerations in line with social science research norms.

The sample comprised 15 academics – eight men and seven women – who had recently graduated with a two-year PGDHE qualification at a South African university. They were among the 20 academics registered for this course in the previous year. Although the researcher intended to engage all the participants, this was not possible as five were not available. Nonetheless, the fact that these academics had two years of deep, critical engagement with the programme meant that, they were information-rich and were able to articulate their understandings and experiences of the programme, its perceived value and the principles that underpin it (Creswell, 2009).

The questionnaire comprised of two major sections. The first focused on personal details, such as the name of the respondent, faculty, year enrolled, and modules covered in the programme. The second part of the

questionnaire requested respondents to share, in detail, their experiences and reflections on various issues related to the programme. These included its perceived importance in relation to their teaching roles, how the course had helped transform their conceptions of teaching and learning, how it would enhance the way students learn, and how the academics intended to showcase the acquired knowledge and skills.

The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Open coding was used and the data were analysed inductively to identify emerging patterns, themes and categories (Creswell, 2009) that related to the research questions. The data were also analysed using verbatim statements by the respondents, which helped to give life to the data (Creswell, 2009).

Results and Discussion

The results are presented and discussed under the four themes that emerged from the data and were then subsumed under the four research questions, namely, the relevance of the course to the academics' current teaching roles; the programme's impact on their conceptions of teaching and learning; how the programme influenced students' learning; and how the academics intend to showcase the acquired knowledge and skills.

A. Relevance of the Course to Academics' Current Teaching Roles

The participants were unanimous in their view that the PGDHE programme was of tremendous value to their current and future teaching roles in HE. A thread that ran through all the responses was that the programme should be a requirement for all those who intend to join the sector as lecturers. This response is important to both university leadership and the DHET that is the custodian of most policies that regulate university processes. It suggests that university teachers should receive pedagogical training prior to appointment. However, from a practical point of view, this may be difficult to implement, since many South African universities do not offer the PGDHE qualification and those that do, may not have the capacity to offer it at the magnitude required. The following statement typifies the responses on this issue:

I feel the PGDHE is extremely important and relevant ...Every prospective lecturer should engage with the content ... before he/she takes up a position at a higher education institution; anyone whose position entails facilitating learning or imparting knowledge to students in one way or another. Currently, most university lecturers have knowledge of their specialised fields but lack ... teaching skills and competences (Participant 4).

The comments by the participants are consistent with Scott's (2018) observation that most South African academics are discipline experts and

lack formal teaching qualifications. This presents a sharp contrast to the international HE sector. For instance, in Sweden university academics undergo mandatory training in pedagogy prior to attaining tenure (Olson and Rosa, 2013).

Therefore, the major highlight from all the participants' responses is their call to improve teaching skills. It should be noted, however, that many were either early career academics who have not engaged extensively with pedagogical theories, or academics without teaching qualifications. At this stage of their teaching career, academics probably attach more value to the PGDHE qualification.

B. The Programme's Impact on the Academics' Conceptions of Teaching and Learning

The participants reported that the programme had a significant impact on their conception of teaching and learning. Many indicated that they had very limited understanding of what it means to facilitate learning before engaging with this course. They added that their conception of teaching and learning was directly derived from their experiences of being taught years previously when they were students. The disadvantage of this tendency is that they might rely on outdated methods that are no longer relevant given the changing times and the diversity that characterises student profiles (Quinn, 2012)

There was general consensus that the participants gained valuable educational theory to guide and explain their teaching practices and decisions through their participation in the course activities and processes. One indicated that the course empowered him with skills to reflect critically on his work as an academic. This is understandable given the fact that the course is predicated on the need to promote scholarship and reflective practice. A participant responded as follows:

Before the course I used to blame the students entirely for failing, thinking that they lacked motivation and interest in learning. However, after going through the course I have come to realise that it is not sufficient to [attribute] ... student success to factors that are inherent to individual students without also considering the important role played by the student's social context in influencing success (Participant 5).

According to Kember, Leung and Ma (2007), developing a theory of teaching is important as this influences one's decisions on teaching approaches, which in turn influence student learning approaches and ultimately learning outcomes. However, Boughey (2010) and Boughey and McKenna's (2011) studies, which used data produced by the first cycle of institutional audits, reveal that very few theories are used to explain and

explore teaching and learning in universities across South Africa. When teaching and learning are conceptualised as the acquisition of generic skills, they run the risk of becoming a mechanistic and ritual process that achieves limited student success. This approach can be disrupted through engagement with the PGDHE. A participant indicated that the programme capacitates academics to design and implement teaching and learning activities that locate students at the centre. This is the essence of constructivist learning, which was cited by many participants as being central to the programmes' content and process.

C. How the Programme Might Influence Students' Learning

Many participants made insightful observations in response to this question. They underlined the importance of the PGDHE course in enhancing their understanding of the role of the lecturer and students in the learning process and commented that it enabled them to recognise the central role that students play in this process. The participants added that the PGDHE places particular emphasis on the situated learning approach, which is premised on understanding students' individual needs and designing teaching and learning that responds to these needs (Yarkova and Cherp, 2013). These responses are consistent with Subbaye and Dhunpath's (2016) contention that real learning is predicated on understanding students' diverse and unique needs and realities.

It also emerged that engagement with the PGDHE helped to enhance the participants' understanding of sound assessment practices and the way teaching and assessment reinforce each other. One noted:

In the module on assessing learning in higher education, I have learnt that the assessment that we do should support teaching and learning. If we as lecturers always ask simple questions in tests and exams, students will notice this and will not deeply engage with their study materials (Participant 10).

This response is important in that it foregrounds the need to align one's teaching with the assessment strategy. It also indicates that assessment should resonate with what Biggs (1993) refers to as the backwash effect of assessment, and be used strategically to influence the way students approach their studies or future learning. The backwash effect refers to the use of assessment in such a way that it predisposes students to approach their studies in certain desirable ways. Thus, the participant notes that a lecturer who sets simple questions in tests and examinations prompts their students to use the surface learning rather than the deep learning approach. It is therefore clear that, participation in the PGDHE programme helped empower academics in their approaches to student assessment and in understanding the theory informing the assessment.

A further observation was that engagement with the PGDHE and its associated processes enhanced academics' competence in providing appropriate learner support. The following excerpts from two participants are representative of these responses:

Prior to my enrolment on the PGDHE programme, I was not aware that students do not just learn because they are in the classroom or the lecturer has spoken to them about something. I did not know that students need educational scaffolding in order to understand what they are learning (Participant 7).

With the diversity that characterises the modern university class, learner support becomes extremely important (Participant, 9).

These responses link with the contention that lecturers should invest more of their planning in thinking about how students learn and finding the means to support this learning (Marris, 2010). In one of his seminal presentations, which examined the complex forces that shape student success, Vincent Tinto (Distinguished Professor at Syracuse University, New York) concluded that a lack of meaningful support results in the failure of many students, especially those who are academically under-prepared. Providing students with support enables them to translate their access to programmes into real success (Tinto, 2013). The current study's findings and the literature as espoused by Tinto (2013) seem to suggest that the PGDHE programme plays a significant role in capacitating academics with a theory of educational scaffolding which is an important prerequisite for student success. However, this remains an area for further research.

D. How Academics Intend to Showcase Their Acquired Knowledge/Skills

The academics' responses to this question indicated that they would showcase their acquired knowledge/skills in multi-faceted ways at the institutional, national and international level. Suggestions included participation and presentations at school and faculty staff development workshops. They suggested holding communities of practice sessions as another means to disseminate the acquired knowledge and skills at the institutional level. This suggestion is evident in the following response:

I intend sharing my knowledge with departmental colleagues as well as presenting in the faculty research day (Participant 3).

Further key strategies include publishing articles in accredited journals on teaching and learning, and presentations at national and international academic conferences. The following responses are representative:

I may consider writing and publishing papers on the subject after I have completed the course (Participant 7).

I plan to publish around the scholarship of teaching and learning in the future (Participant 9).

My contribution will be in the form of paper and conference presentations that I will make at national and international conferences (Participant 12).

These responses are not surprising given the PGDHE's thrust on sharing knowledge, information and practices. The programme is indeed predicated on the SoTL approach, which requires that academics conduct research into their teaching and disseminate the results to fellow academics in the field (Hay, 2012). This is one way of making teaching communal, a principle that is at the heart of the SoTL approach (Shulman, 2011). Shulman observes that any form of research or teaching, however brilliant, remains almost worthless until it becomes community property. Hence, publishing or showcasing one's research on teaching and learning is an important way of elevating teaching from the private transmission zone, which Shulman (2011) refers to as pedagogical solitude, to a status where it becomes communal in character.

Finally, it was noted that the PGDHE provided a firm foundation and impetus for academics' further studies. Some participants who had no prior qualifications in education noted that they were considering reading for doctoral studies in this field. This would enable them to contribute to the development of the SoTL through research and publications at a deep level. One participant remarked:

I intend pursuing a PhD in education and hope to publish in journals around the scholarship of teaching and learning (Participant 6).

It can thus be concluded that, the participants felt profoundly empowered in multiple ways through engaging in the PGDHE.

Conclusion

This study examined the experiences of academics on a PGDHE programme. Its empirical findings and the literature on current practice in HE point to the need to engage academics in professional development programmes such as this so as to develop their knowledge and skills as effective university teachers. The study revealed a major paradox in the practice of HE in South Africa, namely, universities' tendency to employ academics on the strength of their research ability rather than teaching expertise. This inconsistency is of concern given that most university classes in South Africa and beyond comprise academically under-prepared students who are largely dependent on good and supportive teaching from trained university teachers to succeed. It suggests the need for robust debate on a possible mandatory professional qualification for university teachers, bearing in mind the practical limitations associated with such.

The study also found that, academics tend to draw on the teaching methods that they experienced as undergraduate students. This is

untenable given the changed nature of university classes, which include students from diverse academic backgrounds, with different cultural capital and prior knowledge. The situation calls for informed, innovative and dynamic ways of engaging students and the disruption of rituals of academic practice that tend to constrain student learning. It is also becoming increasingly clear that many academics are themselves under-prepared for teaching, due to a lack of both adequate professional training in teaching and learning, and experience in facilitating learning in diversified learning contexts. Thus, academics who are proficient in disciplinary and pedagogic skills and are able to disrupt rituals of academic practice, remain central to the enhancement of student learning outcomes and student success. This article argues that the PGDHE programme could be part of the answer.

Recommendations

In line with emerging international trends, it is recommended that the DHET, university leadership, the CHE and academics engage in robust debate on a possible standard professional qualification for university academics. This recommendation is grounded in sound research (Boughey, 2010; Subbaye and Dhunpath, 2016; Quinn, 2012) which reveals that, a university teacher requires a good blend of disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical grounding in order to facilitate effectively. However, in practice, it may prove costly, idealistic and difficult to implement in a developing knowledge economy like South Africa. It is also suggested that universities actively promote the use of learning communities as spaces to enable university teachers to share, critique and validate existing teaching practices, and thereby disrupt rituals of academic practice that tend to constrain learning.

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