




Chapter 14

Reflections on PGDips

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Introduction

This final chapter presents a critical and social realist analysis of what this volume offers to an understanding of the influence of a formal programme like the PGDip (HE)¹ as a mechanism for strengthening academics' roles as teachers of their disciplines in contemporary higher education. We start by outlining the aspects of social and critical realism that we use for our analysis. This is followed by explaining the structural and cultural aspects of the higher education context in which the PGDip is offered. We then discuss PGDips as a response to the context. We examine the structures of programmes and the main ideas, concepts and theories studied in PGDips and suggest the ways in which the pedagogical processes of PGDips enable them to meet their aims of contributing to the professional learning of academics. In this discussion we will draw on the preceding chapters to illustrate the points that we make. Next, we show how the structural and

1 Hereafter the qualification will be referred to as the PGDip or the Diploma.

cultural conditions in higher education institutions and in the country more broadly and PGDip contexts enable or constrain academics' *agency* as teachers. We end the chapter by reflecting on where the gaps might be in PGDips in South Africa and suggest possibilities for how we could address these in future.

We start by providing a brief explanation of some of the main tenets in critical and social realism that we employ in our analysis. Following Bhaskar (2016), we only use what is useful for our analysis, and do not examine all the conceptual and methodological possibilities of these complex theories.

Critical and social realism

Essentially, critical realism is a so-called under-labourer for research, by emphasising an understanding of reality as multi-layered and therefore more complex than is evident at a surface level. *Events* (the level of the *actual*) in the world emerge from the interplay of two or more underlying structuring mechanisms that operate at the level of the *real*. While these mechanisms have the potential or tendencies to cause an event, their potential may remain unrealised or unactivated. In the case of the PGDip, the chapters in this volume show that the programme has the potential for far-reaching influence on the identities, knowledge and practices of individuals; however, this potential is not always realised or not realised in the same ways for all participants. Furthermore, if an event emerges, it may be observed and experienced by some, while others may be completely unaffected by or unaware of it. Lack of awareness does not mean that there was no event. People's different *experiences* (the level of the empirical) of events, can be explained, amongst other things, by their prior histories, their vested interests, and their positions in a particular context, particularly in relation to those with power. This means that different aspects of the PGDip will be experienced in different ways by different participants based, amongst other things, on their prior learning experiences (see for example, West Chapter 7, this volume), their understanding of their role, and conditions in their institutions and departments (see the case studies in de Klerk et al., Chapter 2, and Adams, Chapter 3, this volume).

A critical realist analysis aims to uncover underlying structures and mechanisms to explain why things are the way they are in the world. This is achieved by the researcher first describing the event or situation, then identifying, analysing and reducing the number of plausible potential causal structures or mechanisms through a process of elimination based on their knowledge of the context. The analysis must explore the relatively enduring social structures at play that influence events and how they are experienced. In the case of the PGDip, we explore conditions in the South African higher education system more broadly and in universities specifically. We examine how the system and institutions are influenced by economic conditions as well as the power relations and norms and values that shape the context and how these may have shifted over time. The purpose of the analysis is to consider the ways in which formal programmes like the PGDip can contribute to the professional learning of academics. Critical realism emphasises the usefulness of considering not only what is present, but also what is *absent* that may prevent professional learning opportunities for academics to achieve their full potential so that universities can offer more students the greatest chance of success.

Archer's social realism is an explanatory methodology and framework that is supported by a critical realist philosophy and in-depth ontology (Archer, 1995). In addition to the critical realist stratification of reality into the empirical, the actual and the real, social realism contends that social reality consists of parts and people. The parts are relatively enduring *social structures* that distribute material resources, and *culture*; that is, beliefs, ideas, values, and theories that people draw on in a context and that influence their decisions and actions. Agency (people) is influenced by and interacts with structures and culture and depending on their vested interests and relative power in relation to others, people work to maintain, change or resist prevailing conditions. Agency is differentially enabled or constrained by existing structures and culture, with corporate agency, unlike primary agency, having the capacity to shape some structures and cultural items (see de Klerk et al., Chapter 2, and Adams, Chapter 3, in this volume for explanations of different forms of agency).

Time is an important element in a social realist analysis, as is the analytical separation of structure, culture and agency at particular moments in time. This separation is to allow the researcher to distinguish which component of social reality – structure, culture or agency – has had the biggest influence on conditions in a particular context staying the same (morphostasis) or changing (morphogenesis). A good example of the influence of time is captured in West's analysis (Chapter 7, this volume) of how his gaze shifted over time as a result of the feedback that /he received on reader responses and reflective tasks and his growing understanding of disciplinary differences between the fields of education and engineering. His adoption of new ideas (the level of culture) gradually changed his understanding of disciplinary knowledge structures and practices.

We will use concepts and aspects of the explanatory methodologies from critical and social realism to delve deeper into what the book chapters reveal about the role of PGDips in strengthening academics' conceptualisation and enactment of their roles as teachers of their disciplines, thus giving them the tools to design curricula, and pedagogic and assessment practices to give more students access to powerful disciplinary knowledge and knowledge practices. In the next section we discuss aspects of the higher education context in which institutions offer, and academics participate in PGDips.

South African higher education context

Academics in South African higher education² work within a complex structural and cultural system, which is shaped by the apartheid legacy, ongoing transformation needs, financial constraints and other competing national priorities (Badat, 2024). Despite thirty years of democracy, the South African higher education landscape remains plagued by deep structural inequalities. This, in combination with technological, political, economic and social changes in higher education globally, has profound implications for academic practice. As noted in Chapter 1, the academic role is multifaceted, encompassing

2 The Lesotho higher education context shares many of the same challenges as South African institutions.

teaching and research and service to the institution; it involves institutional contributions through administration, management and leadership and service through involvement in professional organisations and participation in peer review processes for scholarly journals and books. Community engagement also forms an integral part of teaching in many institutions, while academics contribute directly to changing society through socially relevant research. This complexity is exacerbated by academics having to navigate a complex landscape of competing demands, including teaching diverse student groups in an environment of perpetual underfunding, precarious labour conditions for academics and uneven resources across institutions (Badat, 2024). Furthermore, funding models driven by performance metrics and student enrolment force institutions to prioritise throughput and research output, often at the expense of pedagogical innovation. Thus, at a time when university teachers need to spend more time experimenting with teaching, learning and assessment activities that have the potential to ensure the best outcomes for students, they also have to contend with a host of competing demands. This sets up a structural and cultural milieu of a multiplicity of constraining contradictions that do not serve the needs of academics and their students well.

Higher education is governed by several national policies and legislation aimed at regulating, transforming and developing the sector in line with societal needs and national imperatives. These include the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997 (RSA, 1997); the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008 (RSA, 2008) and subsequent iterations thereof (2013, 2025) as well as the National Framework for Enhancing Academics as Teachers (DHET, 2018), all of which to varying degrees advocate for equity, redress, quality and the need to ensure that students receive quality education through the professionalisation of academics as teachers in higher education. Despite the presence of these structural and cultural mechanisms, implementation of practices aimed at access with success is uneven across the sector, which can be partially attributed to enduring inequities across institutions (CHE, 2020).

According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2023), graduation rates at historically disadvantaged institutions remain significantly lower than at historically advantaged institutions, with systemic underfunding and overcrowded classrooms deepening teaching and learning challenges. This structural reality places immense pressure on and constrain the agency of academics to deliver quality education to increasingly diverse student cohorts.

Culturally, many universities continue to grapple with the persistence of a dominant Eurocentric academic ethos, privileging Western epistemologies, languages, and forms of knowledge while silencing and marginalising others (Khumalo, 2024). Movements like #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall have intensified calls for transformation, placing academics at the centre of debates about curriculum, identity, and social justice. Considering this, the role of the academic has once again expanded beyond knowledge production and dissemination to include mentorship, advocacy, and leadership in transformation endeavours. This expanded role is complicated by the casualisation of academic labour with over 60% of academics on temporary contracts that limit their ability to contribute to institutional transformation (Badat, 2024).

As mentioned above, the entrenched hierarchy that privileges research over teaching is a constraint for many academics wanting to enhance their teaching. Despite national frameworks that emphasise the importance of parity of teaching and research, promotion and reward systems in many institutions continue to privilege publication records and grant acquisition. There is a constraining contradiction between the cultural system that emphasises the need for good teaching in the university environment that must compensate for the inadequate schooling of the majority of university entrants, and the structural system that ascribes more status to research, publication and postgraduate supervision in systems of recognition and reward. Even though Ernest Boyer demonstrated and argued for the recognition of the scholarship of teaching (that arguably also includes the scholarship of the integration of knowledge), in a 1990 publication, the educational role of academics is often not given due recognition, discouraging academics from investing

time and effort to develop their teaching (Boyer, 1990). While the actual structures like policies and frameworks that advocate a cultural system of valuing teaching and learning, at the level of underlying structures and mechanisms, the primacy of research and the amalgamation of constraining national and institutional conditions continue to limit the extent to which institutions and academics can meet the huge demands placed on them.

Institutions like the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which was one of the first institutions to change their promotion criteria to explicitly recognise teaching, have demonstrated that when teaching excellence is formally rewarded, there is a marked improvement in teaching quality (Vithal et al., 2013).

What is the PGDip and what does it offer academics?

Professional learning of academics takes multiple forms with some being of relatively short duration, lasting from one or two hours in the case of seminars, workshops or master classes, to others stretching over whole or multiple days in the case of workshops, and even longer in the case of short courses. Though we do not dispute the potential usefulness of the examples cited, we believe that programmes such as the PGDip offer participants opportunities for extensive in-depth engagement with ideas, concepts, theories and practices related to the most important aspects of the teaching role of academics, including teaching (i.e. the mediation of student learning), curriculum development, and assessment. The structured nature of PGDips creates potentially transformative spaces where academics engage deeply with educational theory, reflect on their practice, interrogate the assumptions supporting what they do and, in the process, develop a sophisticated understanding of the complexities of teaching and learning in the disciplines (Quinn, 2012). In addition to developing more sophisticated conceptions of teaching and learning that create an elaboration at the level of culture, a crucial aspect of the PGDip is that it fosters the development of scholarly teaching communities amongst and between cohorts. These supportive structures enable academics to collaborate across disciplinary boundaries (Vorster & Quinn, 2017). The communities of practice reinforce and expand on the learning in

the PGDip (see Evodia, Chapter 6 and Padayachee et al., Chapter 4, this volume) and the corporate agency that results is necessary to counteract the sometimes negative reception of new ideas that PGDip participants experience in their home departments (see de Klerk, Chapter 2; Adams, Chapter 3; and Uys et al., Chapter 5, this volume).

Structurally, the development of disciplinary expertise and a researcher identity formation happen through extensive immersion in knowledge generation practices when conducting Master's and Doctoral level research. A similar immersive process is not generally available for the development of expertise as an educator and the formation of an identity and agency as a scholarly teacher of the discipline. We believe that the PGDip is an ideal vehicle for engaging with the knowledge and practices needed to be a "good" teacher of the discipline.

The PGDip is an in-service professional learning programme for academics who have complex professional lives, as indicated above. It is therefore important that PGDip curricula and pedagogies take account of the time-consuming nature of the academic role. PGDip modules are offered through weekly seminars or week-long blocks. In our experience, weekly seminars tend to provide participants with the best opportunities for consistent engagement and incremental, sustained, and cumulative knowledge building. However, offering modules over week-long blocks, is sometimes the expedient choice in cases where academics attend the PGDip at other institutions, sometimes hundreds of kilometres away from their own campuses. These blocks offer opportunities for extensive immersion in course material and learning over short periods of time, with the expectation that participants continue their learning by reading course material, writing tasks and assignments, and reflecting on their practice in relation to their PGDip learning in the time between blocks. During the COVID-19 lockdown period, many institutions had the opportunity to experiment with offering the PGDip fully online, with useful lessons learned about how to engage students actively synchronously and asynchronously (see de Klerk et al., Chapter 2, and Uys et al., Chapter 5, in this volume).

Even though PGDips are academic qualifications, their primary aim is to contribute to the professional development of academics as teachers in a highly unequal higher education context, with institutions previously designated for white students having been much better resourced than those designated for students from other race groups. Since the opening of all institutions to all race groups, student success and failure, persistence and drop-out, have consistently been along the lines of race, class and language groups. The project of academic development has been to influence institutions to change curricula, pedagogy and assessment in ways that make it possible for more students to succeed.

A quick survey conducted by the authors, of PGDips in South Africa indicates that in most institutions there is alignment of the programme with the academic development project in that most of them emphasise developing reflective practitioners, fostering scholarly approaches to teaching and learning, and integrating theory with practice to enhance educational quality and improve student learning and success (Vorster & Quinn, 2012). A notable alignment exists between these purposes (evident in the domain of culture) and broader structural challenges in South African higher education. For instance, issues like inadequate supervisory support, limited funding opportunities, and the need for inclusive pedagogies are directly addressed through the emphasis on professional accreditation, ethical teaching practices, and reflective methodologies.

While policy alignment is not the core function of postgraduate diplomas in higher education, they do serve this important secondary function as part of a broader professional development imperative. PGDips create space for academics to examine and interpret policy requirements in relation to their practice. Through their focus on higher education practice, PGDips enable critical engagement with policy, enabling participants to explore how national frameworks impact curriculum design, assessment, and quality assurance.

Most PGDips are offered by a single institution, with the programme offered in the Western Cape, being a notable exception. Tshuma (Chapter 13 in this volume) explores an inter-

institutional PGDip co-designed and co-facilitated by academic developers from three universities in the Western Cape under the auspices of the Cape Higher Education Consortium. Academics from the three universities enrolled for the programme at their own institution and institutions took turns to convene and facilitate the different modules of the programme. The programme benefited from the range of knowledge, experiences and expertise shared by the team offering the qualification and whilst participants gained immensely from the conversations with colleagues from very different institutions with diverse histories and mandates, however, there were significant structural, cultural and agential constraints that bedevilled the collaboration.

There is widespread encouragement of inter-institutional collaboration to facilitate knowledge and resource sharing, and there are major benefits for individuals, projects and institutions, however, Tshuma's research points to difficulties that emerge in the domain of structure. Different institutional policies and procedures related to key aspects such as the use of resources, including numbers of academics and time allowed per programme, to how assessment processes and outcomes are handled, created challenges for the programme. Concerns that emerged from institutional struggles for resources caused by diminished state funding to universities, as well as struggles for status resulted in contradictory expectations, policies, and procedures that tended to constrain well-intentioned collaboration.

The cultural domain of PGDips: ideas, beliefs, values, concepts, theories and practices explored in the programme

Being a successful teacher in a specific discipline involves four main elements. First, is a strong understanding of not only the disciplinary content knowledge to be taught, but also the ordering principles particular to said discipline (MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002). One cannot teach something that one does not understand. Second, together with disciplinary knowledge, a good teacher needs an understanding of the theoretical perspectives that support teaching itself: knowledge of learning theories and aspects of pedagogy, assessment and curriculum.

Third, from a practical perspective, there is the importance of acquiring the highly contextual elements of classroom and student management. Finally, Shulman (2005) emphasises the importance of developing what he refers to the “wisdom of the practice”, something ill-defined, which points to the significance of the development of personal attributes of a stance towards education (see Uys et al., Chapter 5, this volume).

Professional identity and thus agency, develops incrementally over time. The PGDip contributes significantly to the development of a teacherly identity because of the immersion in ideas, concepts and theories about teaching and learning. PGDip pedagogies rely heavily on group discussions amongst the class of peers across disciplines as well as critical reflection on the relationships between theory and practice, considering how the theory can enable solving individual teaching and learning challenges. Academics are encouraged to experiment with their teaching by using the theory to consider ways of addressing particular curricular, teaching, learning or assessment challenges that they experience in their practice (See Campbell, Chapter 9, and Atemkeng, Chapter 10, this volume). Thus, they are required to reflect in multiple ways and via different modalities – individually, in groups, in writing and experientially (see West, Chapter 7 in this volume), through conducting “experiments” in an effort to solve teaching and learning-related “puzzles” (Atemkeng, Chapter 10, this volume).

The mechanism that leads to the identity shifts is what Archer (2003) calls reflexivity and takes place via internal conversations. In the case of the PGDip, these reflexive conversations are externalised through multiple mechanisms including reflective writing exercises as well as the conversations amongst peers (West, Uys et al., and Campbell, this volume). Structured activities in the PGDip create formal spaces for participants to articulate how their practice and teacher identity is evolving. The chapters in the book are illustrations of reflective practice and highlight the ways in which activities and exposure to theories helped the authors to improve their practices individually and as part of a collective (see for example, Mashifana et al., Chapter 8, this volume).

Every discipline has its own peculiar discourse and ways of thinking and practicing (Shulman 2005, Ashwin, 2020). Because the PGDip is a multi-disciplinary field and has participants from diverse disciplines, it is necessary for the programme to enculturate participants from fields with very different knowledge and knower structures (Maton, 2011) into the knowledge and practices of the field of HES. It is important to conduct this in ways that are not alienating to those from the hard and hard applied sciences (Mann, 2005). Academics from the arts and social sciences generally find it easier to perform the kind of learning expected in the PGDip. Those from the hard science disciplines find the discourse alien, and it generally takes them longer to become comfortable with the discourse (West, Chapter 7, Fru et al., Chapter 12, this volume).

Several chapters refer to the usefulness of the PGDip discussions between academics from different disciplines. These conversations are enriching because participants learn about the diverse perspectives on the same issue, while also finding that colleagues sometimes approach very different disciplines in similar ways. Other chapters argue that discipline-specific PGDips may be more useful precisely because participants will share similar ways of thinking and practising (Fru et al., Chapter 12 this volume). While recognising the benefits of a “generic” PGDip, Fru et al. (Chapter 12, this volume) argue that discipline-based PGDips where the theories studied in the programme are applied specifically to, for example, STEM fields, would be more useful in building academics’ understanding of teaching in their fields. They use the peculiarities of postgraduate supervision in STEM fields to argue their case.

We are aware of PGDips for educators in medical schools that may be justified if one considers the highly specialised nature of medical knowledge and practices. Our view though, borne out by some of the chapters in this volume (de Klerk et al., Chapter 2, Uys et al., Chapter 5, Fru et al., Chapter 12, this volume) is that diversity of cross-disciplinary peer learning brings richness and nuance to the PGDip deliberations.

How the PGDip (HE) shapes the formation of academics' identities as teachers

Weller (2019) argues that becoming a teacher in higher education begins with academics recognising themselves as learners. As they take on the role of students on the PGDip and are introduced to learning the new discourse of Higher Education Studies participants have a sense of what their own students experience when confronted with new or alien discourses (Uys et al., Chapter 5, Mashifana et al., Chapter 8, this volume). Weller (2019:2) continues, pointing out that even though academics “may have qualifications, expertise, knowledge and publications, in essence we are continually learning when we research and when we practice in our professional fields, as well as when we teach”. The importance of learning to become a teacher in the context of PGDips is well-illustrated in the chapters in this book. They collectively highlight the rich and nuanced South African higher education landscape and the ways in which PGDips contribute to learning and to the development of teacher identities.

For instance, Linda's journey (de Klerk et al., Chapter 2 this volume) exemplifies how reflexive engagement with pedagogy can lead to significant shifts in personal and professional agency, especially when supported by a structured programme that encourages critical self-examination. Similarly, Mike's narrative (Adams, Chapter 3 this volume) emphasises the interplay between individual agency and institutional structures, revealing that while personal reflexivity can enable transformative teaching, sustainable change often requires supportive institutional environments. The PGDip provides academics with a meta-language to talk about teaching and learning and where necessary, to defend their practices with colleagues who may themselves be reluctant to change (de Klerk et al., Chapter 2 and Adams, Chapter 3 this volume).

Perhaps one of the most enduring contributions of the PGDip is its role in developing academics as scholarly teachers. Using Shulman's (1987) taxonomy of knowledge, Uys et al. (Chapter 5, this volume) reflect on how the programme expanded their pedagogical repertoires – from content knowledge to curriculum design and pedagogical content knowledge. Importantly, this

scholarly approach to teaching does not simply involve the acquisition of skills, but the development of a disposition towards continuous inquiry, reflection, and improvement.

The chapters by Campbell, (Chapter 8) Atemkeng (Chapter 9) and Graham and Mason (Chapter 11) are examples of the kind of scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) that academics can engage in as a result of their learning in the PGDip. Campbell demonstrates how her learning about curriculum development concepts and practices, combined with her growing capacity for reflexive practice regarding her teaching and her students' learning, enabled her to align her curriculum with transformation goals for higher education and the counselling psychology profession. Atemkeng also provides an example of the kinds of experiments or puzzles that PGDip participants construct to address a teaching, learning or assessment issue that they or their students are experiencing. The concepts that participants encounter on the PGDip enable them to develop theoretically and pedagogically sound solutions to teaching challenges. Graham and Mason consider shifts in supervision practices required in a context where transformation imperatives require academics to supervise more and more students. They examine ways in which the pedagogy of postgraduate supervision could be enhanced and bring the concept of the internal supervisor from the fields of clinical social work and psychology to bear on their argument. Similarly Fru et al. (Chapter 12) acknowledge that pedagogical knowledge is social-science based, and that a curriculum for teachers and supervisors in STEM fields would take cognisance of this and recontextualise that knowledge for science educators.

A recurring theme throughout the book is the transformative power of curriculum development for shaping student identities and learning outcomes. The notion of constructive alignment (Biggs, 2012) is widely used as a tool for structuring curricula. However, it is also important to consider what knowledge, what kinds of practices and what kinds of learning and what kinds of knowers are legitimated through the curriculum (Clarence, 2017). In Chapter 9 (this volume), Campbell critically reflects on a fundamental misalignment in the curriculum for the Master's programme in counselling psychology. As a matter of social

justice, student counselling psychologists practice in their own and their clients' language(s) of preference. However, this transformative pedagogic practice is constrained by the structural imperative of conducting summative assessments exclusively in English. Thus, even if students have opportunities to draw on the rich reservoir of cultural resources afforded by practicing in a vernacular language, they are unable to display that in an examination that has to be conducted exclusively in English. Therefore, a transformative pedagogic practice is confounded by the cultural and structural constraints of assessment rules and in all likelihood, the agential constraint of examiners' inability to understand any of the African languages. These insights affirm the importance of curriculum as not merely a technical exercise, but as a deeply social and philosophical one.

Absences in PGDips

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, a key aspect of the critical nature of critical realism is to consider what is absent in a context and then to explore how the absence can be filled to achieve the desired goal of transforming it. One of the key challenges in South African higher education is that the language of teaching and learning remains English, while the majority of students' high school learning experiences would not have prepared them adequately for the high-level conceptual learning required in the disciplines. There is a gap in the contributions to this volume of how issues of language and culture can be addressed in the classroom. There is also limited discussion on how curricular and pedagogical interventions and approaches could be used to address student alienation emerging from entering alien institutional and academic environments. In this regard, Campbell's chapter where she explores the need for learning to offer therapeutic interventions in the languages of students and their potential clients as part of pedagogy and assessment (Chapter 9) and Mashifana et al.'s chapter on the need for a pedagogy of care to ease engineering students' transition from school to university, are notable exceptions (Chapter 8).

While the examples cited are indicative of cultural responsiveness (Moll, 2004), bolder and more radical responses

may be needed to address the enduring race and class-based disparities in student performance. We would therefore argue that it is necessary for PGDips to include more in-depth engagement with the implications of adopting decolonial frameworks (e.g., Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018) for examining higher education in South Africa. This would enable individuals and institutions to grapple with the political economy of knowledge production and dissemination and explore ways to address Eurocentric pedagogical norms that may constrain student engagement. Following Arendt, Khumalo (2024) argues that it is important that academics meet their pedagogic obligation towards students by designing curricula and pedagogic approaches that prepare them for critical engagement with the world that they inhabit. Lebelo et al. (2021) argue for the importance of re-thinking and re-framing modules offered in the PGDip at a university of technology in South Africa. This may be true of all PGDips and may help us to recognise the real causal powers of enduring colonial structures and acknowledge that indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) may provide epistemic access to staff and students. Such engagement will also highlight the importance of structural change, not just cultural and pedagogical change.

As the chapters are grounded in Southern African contexts (see Evodia et al., Chapter 6, this volume, for an example from Lesotho), they do not address global forces such as the influence of rankings regimes, and the marketisation of education in shaping local practices. There is a need to examine how transnational policies interact with national agendas (e.g., South Africa's post-apartheid reforms) to condition the objectives of PGDip programmes.

The chapters were written just as the disruptive power of generative AI (artificial intelligence) for the world more broadly and for education specifically became evident. As we are learning more about how AI can be used to enhance and detract from learning, PGDips will have to focus acutely on the implications of AI for decisions on what is taught, for pedagogy and assessment practices and for how we are preparing students for an unknown world.

Establishing the value of PGDips

PGDip modules or courses and programmes are evaluated through generating feedback on curriculum content and pedagogic processes and also on the learning of participants. In addition, course designers and facilitators use their own critical reflection and advances in knowledge of the field, to examine the effectiveness of the programme. However, there is also an expectation from institutions and national bodies that the broader impact of professional learning programmes is demonstrated. This is no easy task, however, Padayachee, Dison and Ganas (Chapter 4, this volume) developed what they call the 3P framework for evaluating the impact of the PGDip. This framework provides prompts and questions to enable course participants to reflect in-depth on the impact of the programme on their personal (professional) growth, pedagogic practice and professional recognition. The questions focus on these three aspects in the contexts of the participant's discipline and the institution as well as in the national and international arenas. Unlike conventional evaluation models, the 3P framework allows for an authentic and dynamic account of growth, positioning reflection and reflexivity as central to becoming a scholarly educator. The authors in this volume deliberate on the impact of their learning on their personal and professional growth, their pedagogic practice and mostly, they argue that their learning and growth is not adequately recognised by their institutions.

Institutional policies on teaching and learning, and particularly promotions policies and criteria can provide tangible evidence of an institution's valuing of "good teaching." While agency to develop teaching and learning is necessary for professional identity development, it is not enough to convince and enable most academics to pursue the rigorous professional development opportunities presented through a PGDip programme. Adams (Chapter 3, this volume) points to the importance of institutional cultures and structures that value and reward good teaching in encouraging academics to pursue programmes like the PGDip despite their time-consuming nature.

Conclusion: Way forward

The chapters in this volume collectively illuminate a rich and nuanced predominantly South African higher education landscape where transformation, identity formation, and pedagogical innovation within the context of the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education programmes across diverse institutions is evident. Through a blend of theoretical engagement, reflective practice, and empirical case studies, the authors of the chapters have demonstrated and explored how the programme as a professional development initiative serves as a catalyst for change, not only in the practices of individual educators but also in the broader institutional and disciplinary contexts in which they teach. At the heart of their explorations lies the recognition that teaching in higher education is not a static or neutral act; it is an agential process deeply embedded in structural, cultural, and temporal realities.

While many PGDip alumni have taken leadership roles in their disciplinary and university contexts and are influencing other academics to work differently and centre student learning, academic staff development programmes such as the PGDip still have a limited reach. Since its inception in the early 2000s, fewer than three thousand out of nearly twenty one thousand permanently employed³ academics have successfully completed the programme. While the ideas articulated and learning reflected on in the contributions to this volume may not be representative of the experiences and learning of all PGDip graduates, they do offer a glimpse of the ways in which the immersion in theoretically informed conversations about teaching and learning can advance the development of the identities and practices of scholarly teachers in higher education. Given the challenges of student access and success in South African higher education, it is perhaps time to consider whether the PGDip should not become more of an expectation for early career academics than it currently is.

If PGDips are to contribute to the transformation of the higher education system, then the professional development of

3 According to the CHE's VitalStats (2024) there were 20,612 permanently employed and 29,370 temporarily employed academics in South African higher education institutions.

academics as teachers must be embedded within the structures and culture of institutions and nationally. If this does not happen, then only those who are intrinsically motivated and who are obligated to attend because they are part of a programme that requires it, will spend the time and energy required to complete a PGDip (HE).

As higher education continues to grapple with rapid technological, social, and political changes, including those brought about by the disruption of generative artificial intelligence, the need for reflexive, adaptable, and ethically grounded teaching practices has never been greater. The PGDip, as presented in these pages, offers a promising pathway forward – one that empowers educators to not only survive but thrive in an ever-evolving academic landscape.

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