Chapter 13

Negotiating Collaborative Agency in an Inter-Institutional Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education: Facilitator Experiences

Nompilo Tshuma

Centre for Higher and Adult Education
Stellenbosch University
Stellenbosch, South Africa

Introduction

There is growing interest in researching educators' collaborative activities in higher education, signalling the value of collaboration for teaching and learning, research and even leadership in higher education (Jones et al., 2012; Scherer et al., 2020; van Rijnsoever & Hessels, 2021). This interest has been fuelled by a recognition that collaboration gives higher education practitioners access to resources and expertise that would not otherwise be available to them or their students. Collaborative activities can also potentially allow for deeper reflection on one's own practice while enabling a unique collective dynamic that may not be achievable at an individual level (Lock et al., 2016). Despite these advantages, collaboration in the higher education space is not without its challenges, which often hinder efforts towards, and success of, collaborative activities.

In this chapter, I focus on one such collaborative initiative - a regional Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education Teaching and Learning (PGDip in HE) programme (hereafter, PGDip) which was offered through a partnership between three diverse South

African higher education institutions. The PGDip programme is a professional development qualification for academics aimed at professionalising their teaching practice. As noted in the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) *A National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers* (DHET, 2018), academics are appointed based on their disciplinary expertise and research potential, which do not necessarily translate into an effective (scholarly and professional) approach to teaching. Additionally, the report highlights the tension between the urgent teaching activities and the valued research activities that academics have to contend with, and which ultimately influence their willingness and availability to take part in formal teaching development programmes.

Empirical studies examining similar formal professional development programmes for academic staff in South African higher education have focused on, inter alia, participant experiences (Machingambi, 2020; Manzira & Munyoka, 2017; van den Berg et al., 2018), facilitator reflections (Du Toit, 2018; Strydom et al., 2023), approaches to developing criticality and reflexivity (Dison, 2016; Quinn & Vorster, 2016), as well as attempts to mitigate the dominant institutional "research discourse" in these teaching development courses (Jawitz & Perez, 2016). Additionally, there is a recognition of the shifting status of academic development in South Africa - the field responsible for the professionalisation of the teaching function in higher education (Boughey, 2007). These shifts are taking place in a globally uneven higher education landscape where academic developers have to contend with sometimes fragmented identities and constraining institutional structures (Clegg, 2009). Consequently, there have been calls for the recognition of context in programmes of this nature, as well as the role that the professional development of the academic developers themselves may play in mitigating these challenges (Leibowitz et al., 2016; Quinn & Vorster, 2014).

The professional development of academics therefore takes place in a contested space which can potentially influence the running of these programmes. Additionally, while most of the literature on the PGDip - and on collaborative teaching in general

- focuses on teaching within a single institution, this chapter contributes to our understanding of facilitators' collaborative experiences in an inter-institutional qualification. Adding to the research that has already been conducted on this collaborative PGDip programme (Manzira & Munyoka, 2017; Strydom et al., 2023; van den Berg et al., 2018; Winberg et al., 2016), the purpose of this chapter is to map out the different levels of negotiation that were necessary to collaboratively facilitate such an offering, with the aim of drawing out lessons for inter-institutional qualifications in a context still marred by historical legacies.

The Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education programme

The inter-institutional PGDip programme was established through a regional collaboration between three universities located in the Western Cape province of South Africa: Stellenbosch University (SU), the University of the Western Cape (UWC), and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). These three historically diverse institutions represent different facets of the legacy of apartheid in the South African higher education landscape: a traditional university, a comprehensive university and a university of technology (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Cooper & Subotzky, 2001). Consequently, even though the government's post-apartheid transformation plans were framed around equity and redress, research shows that at a national level there are still some disparities in the different types of institutions in terms of institutional culture, research funding and outputs, access to structures and resources for teaching and learning, undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes, as well as the student and staff complement in the different types of institutions (le Grange, 2009; Swartz et al., 2019). This diversity between the institutions and the importance of valuing and celebrating this difference was actually a strong motivator for the initiation of a collaborative offering of this nature (Winberg et al., 2016).

The programme was instituted under the auspices of the Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC), which provides centralised professional development, resource sharing and negotiation of partnerships between the member universities in

the Western Cape. Four modules - three core and one elective - were presented on the PGDip programme over two years through a blended format (block sessions and online engagement). Each of the three universities convened one of the three core modules, meaning that the module convenor - and therefore the venue for the presentation of the block sessions - was in that university. This approach exposed the programme participants to historically diverse structures and cultures of South African higher education, and the sometimes-disparate challenges and experiences of academics in those spaces. Though the qualification was presented collectively with module facilitators drawn from all three institutions, students applied to, and registered at, a particular institution and the qualification had a separate SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) registration at each of the three institutions.

Theoretical lens: Collaborative agency

Agency in sociological thought is a contested term, with vague, slippery and sometimes contradictory definitions (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Hitlin & Elder, 2007). However, it is broadly understood as an individual's recognition of their power to reproduce or reflexively challenge social structures (Archer, 1995; 2000; Raelin, 2016). The relation between structure and agency is therefore a key component in understanding social phenomenon. While there is a tendency to view agency as an individual ability (Raelin, 2016), Archer (1995) contends that agency is plural as it refers to the shared structural positions of a collective. She proposes two types of agents - primary and corporate - based on how the collective respond to their structural circumstances. Primary agents occupy involuntary positions where they passively go ahead with their lives in the same way as others who share the same structural relations (Archer, 2000; Karlsson, 2020). Their responsive action is neither intentional nor strategic and usually works to sustain (or reproduce) structures and their enabling or constraining forces (Archer, 1995; 2000). Corporate agents, on the other hand, actively organise themselves in order to transform structures within the socio-political context (Archer, 1995). Therefore, the distinguishing aspect about corporate agents

is their ability to firstly articulate their desire to work against corporate structures towards transformation, and secondly to coordinate their actions in order to attain that collective aim (Archer, 2000; Karlsson, 2020).

In order to examine how these corporate agents could potentially carry out their transformative actions, I draw on Raelin's (2016) notion of intersubjective or collaborative agency which highlights human interaction through dialogue as key to not only how we understand the world but how we perceive our power to act in that world. Dialogue in Raelin's (2016) collaborative agency consists of the following elements, which will be used to frame the results of this study:

1. *Critical reflection* is the foundation of dialogue, and is based on how we see ourselves and others, as well as our perception of how others see us. This leads to *pre-reflective awareness* where agents enter the dialogue with particular knowledge, expertise and maybe even preferred and pre-tested outcomes.
2. *Fair dialogic exchange* entails talking freely, listening deeply and being open to a diversity of opinions. This should ideally result in *reciprocal dependence* where the give and take of the dialogic exchange results in a negotiated and co-constructed outcome.
3. A commitment to *practices that challenge structures* which have traditionally been taken for granted should ideally be one of the key outcomes of working collaboratively.

Hence, the main premise is that in order for the research participants to shift from primary to corporate agents - where they are able to express their desire for change and engage in action to enact that change - they need to be engaged in a number of dialogic processes. These processes are progressive in nature, moving from personal dialogues (critical reflection) to group engagement, with the purpose of challenging institutional structures.

Research design

An intrinsic case study design was selected for this research. This type of case study is employed when there is a unique

phenomenon that the researcher has a special interest in describing and detailing (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Stake, 2005). The case is therefore not representative of other similar cases, but its unique merits are what guide its selection (Crowe et al., 2011). For this study, the case was the regional PGDip programme, which was the only inter-institutional qualification of its nature in the country at the time of data collection. The dialogic experiences of the facilitators constituted the unit of analysis, particularly regarding their collaborative processes at module level.

Data was collected through online interviews and document analysis. A total of 10 participants were selected for this study, drawn from the three universities and CHEC. Although some of the participants were not part of the programme at the time of data collection (July to September 2022), all of them had prior extensive experience in the programme and had played an active role in its conceptualisation and/or design at programme level, or facilitation at module level. Interview data was initially analysed inductively to draw out broad themes from the experiences of the participants, after which a deductive approach based on the collaborative agency framework was followed. The PGDip programme and module documents were analysed, as well as institutional policies related to teaching, learning, assessment and postgraduate education. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from Stellenbosch University, and the requisite permissions and clearances from the participating institutions were also obtained prior to commencement of data collection.

As the researcher, I was an active member of the PGDip programme and module level teams. I also acted as the institutional coordinator for the programme, had been a rotating chair of the programme committee (which rotated every two years) and also convened and co-facilitated one of the modules on the programme. Hence, my positionality influenced not just the conceptualisation of the study, but also the data collection and analysis. Member checking was used to ensure that I had captured participants' responses and meanings accurately. Additionally, the use of a theoretical lens helped me to focus my analysis and mediate the biases that may have crept in during data collection. My prior knowledge of the programme was helpful in the data

collection, providing insights for the kinds of questions and prompts that I needed to ask.

Results and discussion

Establishing the programme

The results of this study point to a number of factors that enabled the conceptualisation and successful development of this programme. They are briefly highlighted here as some of the research participants pointed to their value for the sustainability of the programme - and hence their importance in understanding some of the structural constraints experienced by the participants.

Firstly, the programme founders had extensive international collaboration experience and had collaborated with each other on other teaching and research projects prior to the establishment of this PGDip in HE programme. Therefore, they were already familiar with the time commitment and required resources to develop a programme of this nature: "...even to construct those courses ...sometimes it took a year to a year and a half" (P1). They were also aware of the strengths that they could contribute and had an already-established relationship of trust between them, as confirmed by one of the participants: "I knew all of them, which I think was helpful. You know, I'd known them long before we actually worked on this module" (P3). There were, of course, some new team members invited to facilitate right at the beginning "with their own ideas, and they didn't know each other and they were you know, sort of trying to actually find common ground" (P1). However, the extensive collaborative experience that was in the facilitation team enabled them to address these issues.

Secondly, there was a strong shared vision which drove the development of this programme - the desire to value difference across the diverse South African higher education landscape. Based on their experience of collaborating and bringing students together across different international contexts, the programme founders were keenly aware that academics often "work in silos", are not confronted with differences outside of their "little territory", and that students and teaching staff can potentially be

blinded by their ignorance of these differences (P1). A key element of this professional learning space was therefore to allow students and facilitators to "engage with difference" (P1) for a richer and more meaningful learning experience.

Thirdly, there was strong academic leadership in all three institutions responsible for driving the initial acceptance and establishment of this programme. One of the participants labelled the programme founders as "passionate leaders" who were committed and driven to work together (P2). These leaders needed not only resilience, but also support from executive management to get the programme up and running:

> ...some people were a little bit sceptical of it actually. So we had to push quite hard against that scepticism. People said argh, we've tried this before and it didn't work [in reference to other regional academic programmes]. ...So those sorts of things need to be supported by senior management as well. They need to see the benefit of it, otherwise you know you're gonna struggle to keep things going or to get things going. (P1)

Additionally, CHEC provided infrastructural and logistical support systems, and helped to "deal with conflict resolution, ...iron out rough edges" and negotiate the alignment between academic, institutional and CHEC board requirements (P2). Hence, there was synergy between passionate leaders, executive management and the external CHEC board in facilitating the establishment of this inter-institutional programme.

Facilitator experiences of dialogic processes

In this section I discuss insights related to how facilitators negotiated the collaboration of the PGDip modules across three diverse institutions through various dialogic processes. While the programme aim was to have six facilitators (two from each institution) facilitating each module, some elective modules had fewer facilitators - and in some instances, only facilitators from one institution. This had implications for the way that they experienced the collaborative processes and their agency within

the facilitation team. As alluded to earlier, the results below are loosely framed using the dialogic processes in Raelin's (2016) collaborative agency framework, which progressively move from personal dialogue (critical reflection) to group engagement (fair dialogic exchange). This should ideally lead to institutional dialogues that seek to challenge taken-for-granted structures.

Positionality emerging from experience

The ability to be critically reflective is the foundation of effective dialogue in teams - and is guided by how we view our positionality in relation to others, but also our perception of how other team members view us. Prior experience in staff or professional development and in teaching modules with similar content was a key driver for a strong positionality at module level. The diversity in terms of the research participants' prior experience included those who had taught similar modules or content within their current or previous institutions, those who were coming in from a different context, i.e., private higher education where the purpose and structure of such courses was different, those who had been involved in the professional development of staff from a strategic or managerial role but had never taught on similar programmes, and those who were diving into academic staff development for the first time. There was also diversity in terms of teaching experience on formal qualifications at postgraduate level. The different institutions within which the participants were based did not seem to have a causal effect on how they viewed their positionalities within the facilitation team.

The value of prior experience seemed to have given the participants confidence as they had prior exposure to challenges that they were likely to face on the programme:

> …during that time [facilitating other staff development courses] I really cut my teeth and I learned to deal with a lot of resistant academics when it comes to academic staff development. (P4)

Experience in prior settings also gave them a nuanced understanding of the:

> ...complexity between ...the flexibility, the no-pressure approach that we have to professional development, [and] the pressure that you have in a *gewone* [normal] course, in a course that's structured with deadlines and marks. (P5)

Most of the participants expressed the above point in different ways - the complexity and sensitivity of their positionality in relation to their students who they considered as fellow academics. They had to balance the student-colleague dynamic in how they approached their course design, teaching and assessment on this programme.

In some instances, however, extensive prior experience resulted in the silencing of other voices - those who felt that they had less experience. One participant (P6) expressed her struggles with her initial inexperience in terms of teaching the content of the module, and how she was unable to contribute to the shaping of the course or the negotiated outcomes. When students in the module experienced challenges with a structure that she did not fully understand, she had to assist in ironing out these issues. Even in subsequent runs of the course, she was not confident enough to give voice to her objections towards change despite evidence that the structure and content proved challenging for a portion of the students.

Diversity of approaches

A strong sense of their positionality in relation to the other facilitators and the students is said to lead to a pre-reflective awareness of what knowledge and expertise the agents can contribute to the collaborative effort - and sometimes ideas on what the preferred outcomes of the collaborative activities could be (Raelin, 2016). During this pre-collaborative phase, agents may build or test artifacts or technologies, or plan and design resources to be considered during the collaborative phase. Based on their expertise within the knowledge field, they may even have a set of outcomes that they plan to contribute - although the caveat is that they need to be open to diverse views, as discussed in the next section.

All the participants in this study had a clear idea of what they could contribute in terms of an effective approach to facilitation at this level, i.e., postgraduate staff development programme. There were subtle nuances in the approaches that they aligned with, and some of the participants highlighted the need to be open to negotiation in the collaborative space and incorporate those approaches that had been agreed on collectively. One participant spoke of his teaching as attempting:

> ...to democratise my practices and by democratising my practices, I create opportunities for critical thinking [and] student autonomy – there is equalisation of the pedagogical relations. I don't see myself as this expert, but rather somebody that is part of the learning process. (P4)

Aligning with this approach to some degree, another participant highlighted how:

> I really believe that learners learn more from each other than from their lecturer. ...my best classes are those where actually I sit and they perform. ...I think you need to create the sort of culture for that. ...you need to create a safe space in the classroom for them to fail [and] it's okay. ...But it's also important how you design the learning, ...structure, ... layer and scaffold the learning. (P7)

One participant highlighted the importance of the application of theory and helping academics to map what they learnt to their own courses and contexts (P6), while another was concerned with building rapport and sharing between students in a relaxed and enabling learning space (P8). A few participants highlighted the importance of role modelling in their teaching - an aspect which was sometimes challenging to effectively carry out because of facilitators' diverse approaches that did not always align. The source of these approaches was also different, as some developed them through trial and error, while others had implemented a research-based approach to their teaching. One participant indicated that her years of teaching in academic development prior to joining the programme had exposed her to the norms and

practices espoused by other facilitators on the PGDip programme, allowing her to easily adapt to the facilitation approach on the module which she taught (P6).

A few challenges were highlighted at institutional and module level regarding the differences in approaches. One participant complained about the lack of time for planning, which sometimes resulted in a lack of "coherence within the programme" as a whole, as well as the diverse "backgrounds... and orientations" of the other facilitators, which made it difficult for him to stay true to his orientation to teaching and learning (P9). Staff changes in the facilitation team also resulted in new team members coming in who had different understandings or "not enough of a grasp" of lecturers' realities at different institutions (P6). Consequently, this participant laments having to negotiate sometimes "surface practices" which were not guided by a central theory (P6).

Another participant had a managerial role in the institution and a facilitation role on the programme, and shared her frustration with the dichotomy between the developmental approach to facilitation and its financial sustainability:

> The approach for facilitation from a pedagogical point of view, I was very comfortable with, because it's very developmental, lots of opportunity for students to work together, to revise, to get comments from supervisors, to rethink what they're doing, to work with one another. So at a teaching level or from, you know, a pedagogical approach, I would say I was very comfortable and I found ...that very, very good. But because I was also [a manager], it put me in a very awkward position because I was responsible at the same time for cost efficiency. And so the amount of time that that kind of facilitation took, the amount of energy out of – and staff time – that it took for very few students, was for me a big dilemma, because I could see that this was not cost effective from a budget point of view. (P3)

Considering that the programme had been funded by the DHET for the first few years, the initial structure was doable as programme

costs were covered by this funding and expertise was sometimes drawn from outside of the three universities for particular topics within modules. The "intense nature" of the facilitation on the programme gave the participants "a very, very rich experience" (P2). Unfortunately, since the end of the funding period, there was growing tension related to this issue. Some participants strongly rejected "rumblings from management" and what they term the "neo-liberalist" view of staff development as taking away from the pedagogic needs of academic staff on the programme (P1). Others felt that they were criticised for being too concerned with and highlighting financial issues (P3). The faculties within which some participants were based also "started to ask how can we spare this capacity for one programme?" (P2). Consequently, there were increasing concerns about the programme's economic sustainability in the long-term, considering the balance between the number of staff teaching each module, and the total number of students registered per institution.

Diverse dialogic spaces

The negotiation of collaborative agency at group level takes place during dialogic exchanges between corporate agents. For the dialogic exchange to be effective in enabling open collaboration, it has to be fair to all parties involved, regardless of their positionality within the team. This means that each agent should feel that they are able to share their ideas freely knowing that they will be listened to openly and considered fairly by all. There should also be an openness to ideas and opinions that are different from one's own (or from those that are traditionally accepted). The results of this study vary in terms of how the participants viewed the fairness and openness of the dialogic exchanges within the facilitation teams.

One participant shares how the dialogic space was highly collaborative because it was made up "...of like-minded people who are willing to share ideas openly and freely" resulting in an energising, highly structured - but also iterative - space (P8). She highlights how the module convenor was instrumental in ensuring the high levels of communication as well as incorporating each round of student feedback into the next run

of the module. Another highly collaborative space was enabled by the restructuring of a module where most of the members of the team were new. An original team member had initially struggled to contribute to previous runs of the course because of her inexperience, but felt that there was now a "good sort of basis to start off from... and I was able to contribute to the planning of the course ...with people coming in [and] starting something afresh" (P6). This participant's positionality shifted within the group when new members joined, and her knowledge and expertise over the years that she had taught the module gave her the confidence to make a valuable contribution.

In a few instances, course convenors were named as the key drivers for either good or inadequate dialogic exchanges. One participant mentions how when the collaborative space failed her in some way, she would turn to the module convenor for guidance on how to proceed. His vast experience in diverse educational institutions helped her to navigate some potentially sensitive challenges and enabled her to grow as an academic in a new environment. As she states, this convenor "had a clear vision and ...knew where he wanted us to go with the theory" (P5). He also gave the lead to others at different stages in the process in order to attempt to incorporate sometimes disparate views - a process that the participant highlighted as "difficult" (P5). A number of participants struggled with a dialogic space that did not work well for them. While one of the modules "does what it needs to do" for the students, the facilitators felt that the communication and interaction was "not as robust" as it could be between the facilitation team members (P8). They pointed to a lack of openness to new ideas or changes to the standard or inherited module templates and topics. There were also instances where "brief words in an email" were inadequate in enabling the facilitation team to carry out a particular task, and resulted in misunderstandings which could have been avoided with more open dialogic spaces (P5).

The result of fair dialogic exchanges should ideally lead to a reciprocal dependence, where the outcome of the collaborative process is negotiated and co-constructed by the team members (Raelin, 2016). While most of the participants felt that the module

outcomes had been relatively fairly negotiated, there were a few experiences that indicated a dissatisfaction with the dialogic processes. One of the reasons for this challenge was linked to the rate of turnover of academic development staff (P6) not only within the institutions, but consequently on the programme as well. As one participant indicates, "...continuity is the single biggest thing that I think we need" (P5) as facilitators leave or change roles within their institutions.

The work undertaken on the PGDip programme was also viewed differently within the institutions. Some participants felt that teaching on the programme gave them status within their institutions where they were viewed as experts in teaching and learning-related issues, and consequently were drawn into institutional discussions and decision-making spaces because of their work on the programme. Other participants, however, felt that the PGDip in HE work actually hindered their progression and promotion as there was a lack of recognition of this work within their contexts and the time committed to the programme. As one participant highlighted:

> ...I started expressing my concern that the program wasn't in the forefront of people's minds as being a faculty program. It was kind of hidden in our account of what we were doing. And I don't know why that was. ...There was no committee to which I could report and the information didn't feature in our teaching and learning committees, and by implication, it didn't feature in Faculty Board. So nobody was aware of it, of the program. And so it was very marginalised, ...not deliberately marginalised, but just not known about. (P3)

Additionally, there were indications that the shift to fully online teaching and learning during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and beyond had had a negative effect on how colleagues came to know each other, and hence how they viewed themselves in relation to facilitators they did not know (positionality) and how well they were able to engage in effective dialogues:

> I think that also it's difficult to develop relationships with your colleagues when you've just encountered them in an online context. (P6)

> ...all we really need is more time together, more time for us to be together to discuss, to get to know this thing, to get to know each other. ... we really didn't have enough time to find each other. You know, we were just on the back foot all the time [during the COVID-19 lockdown], as a team. And that meant we didn't even find agreement about how we feel about theories, how the theories hang together. (P5)

Institutional dynamics

The main outcome of Raelin's (2016) collaborative dialogues should ideally be challenging institutional structures that have traditionally been taken for granted. In other words, for primary agents to truly claim corporate agency, they need to have engaged in dialogue and practices that bring about transformation at institutional level. However, there are some fragmentations within the higher education system and the disparities within the institutions that make this desirable outcome difficult (but not impossible) to attain.

One of the challenging issues at institutional level is the "collaborative dynamic ...when you co-own a programme ... [than] if you offer a program that's owned solely by your institution and you invite people from other institutions to participate and teach on it" (P10). This issue of programme ownership leads to challenges related to taking responsibility for the quality of the programme, as well as programme-level leadership and accountability to the individual universities. CHEC has played a key role in facilitating dialogues at programme level, as have the rotating programme-level chairs and institutional programme coordinators. However, challenges still persist when there are differences of opinion at programme level, and especially when the programme committee has to gain support from the institutions and module facilitators to carry out proposed changes. Additionally, "the number of role players [is] just phenomenal" when you look at what a single programme-

level change would need to go through in terms of acceptance by multiple module facilitators, as well as department, faculty, quality assurance, senate and other institutional structures before it can be implemented - and each of these approval processes and deadlines are different for each of the three institutions (P10).

Another challenge related to programme ownership was the lack of a shared online space with document archives to support the teaching and learning function. Most of the modules were run on open-source platforms that were accessible to all. With staff employed - and students registered - at different universities as part of the programme, it was a challenge for module convenors to organise institutional access on one LMS (learning management system) for all modules. This was aggravated by the fact that all modules had different convenors, and each institution was responsible for at least one module. Hence, open-source software (like Google Drive) was mostly used, which had its own challenges, including the following:

> I didn't feel comfortable with using [it]... It puts us in a position of sharing personal details or personal drives, personal data... I don't have IT support on Google Docs... And Google doesn't promise me security of the data, so the data moves. We lost some students' submissions. Someone meddled with the study guide - we lost the study guide. Some of the readings, you know, got lost in the process. (P5)

The purpose and positioning of the PGDip programme in each institution also introduced some elements that needed to be negotiated. Depending on the institution, the PGDip was viewed as an academic staff initiative for professional development within the institution versus a qualification that needed to be opened up to academics from any institution outside of the Western Cape province. This difference in status or positioning meant that there were subtle differences in programme and module-level understandings of the purpose of the programme. As one participant highlighted regarding their own staff development initiatives in the form of short courses:

> ...we tend to take a lot more flexible approach. ...[E]ven though we have set deadlines, more often than not we say to people, that's OK, we understand ...your professional pressures... And so let's be lenient, because we evaluate it [assignment] in terms of the fact that it's staff development. (P10)

While this leniency in terms of deadlines is a relatively common practice for academic staff development initiatives, it introduces challenges for formal, semesterised qualifications, and particularly within an inter-institutional programme of this nature with different institutional requirements and deadlines for formal qualifications. Another challenge related to how facilitators from different institutions viewed the purpose of assessment where colleagues facilitating together on a course interpreted the outcomes and rubric differently (P5). Since colleagues often acted as internal moderators for each other, this proved a challenge, as expressed by one participant:

> Even if the quality's not great, our view on assessment is that it's a developmental opportunity. So we're not assessing for the purpose of determining whether you pass or fail, we're assessing with a view to how you can develop as a student (P10).

In a similar instance, a student failed a re-submission, which led to "a big discussion about where the efforts to help the student pass should end and how far they should be extended. And again there were differences of opinions across different institutions" (P10). Ultimately, in these two examples, the module convenors took responsibility by consulting the institutional policies where the students were registered and ensured that these were adhered to. In each case, the students failed the assessment and had to meet additional institutional requirements (e.g., re-submit or repeat module) in order to complete the qualification.

Conclusion

The successful development and running of an inter-institutional PGDip programme is a complex and challenging endeavour. In this chapter, I first briefly highlighted the motivations for setting up a programme of this nature and what factors ensured its successful development. The main focus of the discussion, however, was facilitator experiences of teaching the modules and the different levels of negotiation necessary to successfully accomplish this. There were also a range of institutional issues related to programme ownership and how members of the programme team viewed the purpose of the programme. While institutional change or challenging taken-for-granted structures should ideally be the result of the personal dialogues and group engagement (Raelin, 2016) at facilitation level, this was difficult to attain for an inter-institutional programme of this nature. This could be because each institution has a different purpose for taking part in the collaboration (P10), and these purposes may sometimes be divergent. Additionally, what counts as taken-for-granted structures in one institution may not be an issue in another - and facilitators sometimes did not agree on how far this "challenging" aspect could go within the programme and also in their own institutions.

However, it is important to note that despite the challenges, the module convenors had an influential role in setting the tone of the facilitation dialogues. The way that they acknowledged differences of opinion, handled disagreements, communicated module-related information, mediated discussions and allowed team members to lead at different points, was instrumental in enabling positive dialogues within the facilitation team. It was also important for them to have an intimate knowledge of institutional policies from the three universities that affected the teaching, learning and assessment within the modules so as to offer sound guidance when challenges arose.

An inter-institutional qualification of this nature should also potentially consider having "a good, sound …operational or policy infrastructure" (P10) that will enable the sustainability of the programme. Issues like the high turnover of academic staff and the different positionalities that the programme has

in the different institutions may affect the administration and operation of the programme without such documents. Additionally, managerial changes within the institutions may affect the continuity of the programme and the shared vision for collaboration, if these are not well-documented.

References

Archer, M.S. 1995. *Realist social theory: The morphogenetic approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511557675

Archer, M.S. 2000. *Being human: The problem of agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511488733

Boughey, C. 2007. Marrying equity and efficiency: The need for third generation academic development. *Perspectives in Education*, 25(3):1-11.

Bozalek, V. & Boughey, C. 2012. (Mis)framing higher education in South Africa. *Social Policy & Administration*, 46(6):688-703. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9515.2012.00863.x

Clegg, S. 2009. Histories and institutional change: Understanding academic development practices in the global 'north' and 'south'. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 19(1):53-65. https://doi.org/10.1080/09620210903057715

Cooper, D. & Subotzky, G. 2001. *The Skewed Revolution: Trends in South African Higher Education, 1988-1998*. Bellville: Education Policy Unit, University of the Western Cape.

Creswell, J.W. & Poth, C.N. 2016. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. (4th ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crowe, S., Cresswell, K., Robertson, A., Huby, G., Avery, A. & Sheikh, A. 2011. The case study approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 11:100. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-11-100

DHET (Department of Higher Education and Training). 2018. *A National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers*. DHET. [Online]. Available at: https://heltasa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/National-Framework-for-Enhancing-Academics-as-University-Teachers_signed.pdf

Dison, L. 2016. Scrutinising the role of reflection in a postgraduate diploma in higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 30(6):39-55. https://doi.org/10.20853/30-6-718

Du Toit, P. 2018. Reflecting on more than 20 years of involvement in a postgraduate higher education qualification for academics: May I dare use an auto-ethnographic lens? *TD: The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 14(2):1-12. https://doi.org/10.4102/td.v14i2.481

Emirbayer, M. & Mische, A. 1998. What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(4):962-1023. https://doi.org/10.1086/231294

Hitlin, S. & Elder, G.H. Jr., 2007. Time, self, and the curiously abstract concept of agency. *Sociological Theory*, 25(2):170-191. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2007.00303.x

Jawitz, J. & Perez, T. 2016. Asserting agency: Navigating time and space for teaching development. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 30(6):112-126. https://doi.org/10.20853/30-6-722

Jones, S., Lefoe, G., Harvey, M. & Ryland, K. 2012. Distributed leadership: A collaborative framework for academics, executives and professionals in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 34(1):67-78. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2012.642334

Karlsson, J.C. 2020. Refining Archer's account of agency and organization. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 19(1):45-57. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2019.1663031

le Grange, L. 2009. A survey of educational research in the second decade of South Africa's democracy: A focus on higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 23(1):1115-1125. https://doi.org/10.4314/sajhe.v23i4.51052

Leibowitz, B.L., Vorster, J. & Ndebele, C. 2016. Why a contextual approach to professional development? *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 30(6):1-7. https://doi.org/10.20853/30-6-714

Lock, J., Clancy, T., Lisella, R., Rosenau, P., Ferreira, C. & Rainsbury, J. 2016. The lived experiences of instructors co-teaching in higher education. *Brock Education Journal*, 26(1). https://doi.org/10.26522/brocked.v26i1.482

Machingambi, S. 2020. Academics' experiences of a post graduate diploma in higher education (PGDHE) programme: A case of one university in South Africa. *International Journal of African Higher Education*, 7(1). https://doi.org/10.6017/ijahe.v7i1.11553

Manzira, F.M. & Munyoka, W. 2017. Collaborative postgraduate studies in higher education: A case study of South Africa. In: Tatnall, A. & Webb, M. (eds.) *Tomorrow's learning: Involving everyone. Learning with and about technologies and computing*. Cham: Springer, pp: 134-148. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74310-3_16

Quinn, L. & Vorster, J.A. 2014. Isn't it time to start thinking about 'developing' academic developers in a more systematic way? *International Journal for Academic Development*, 19(3):255-258. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2013.879719

Quinn, L. & Vorster, J.A. 2016. Pedagogy for fostering criticality, reflectivity and praxis in a course on teaching for lecturers. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 41(7):1100-1113. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2015.1066756

Raelin, J.A. 2016. Imagine there are no leaders: Reframing leadership as collaborative agency. *Leadership*, 12(2):131-158. https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715014558076

Scherer, H.H., O'Rourke, M., Seman-Varner, R. & Ziegler, P. 2020. Coteaching in higher education: A case study of instructor learning. *Journal of Effective Teaching in Higher Education*, 3(1). https://doi.org/10.36021/jethe.v3i1.37

Stake, R.E. 2005. Qualitative case studies. In: Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp: 443-466.

Strydom, S., Titus, S., Waghid, F. & Gachago, D. 2023. Enabling inter-institutional co-design and co-facilitation of a postgraduate diploma module in educational technology: Uncovering sites of struggle, negotiation and accommodation among course facilitators. In: Shangase, P.Z., Gachago, D. & Ivala, E.N. (eds.) *Co-teaching and co-research in contexts of inequality: Using networked learning to connect Africa and the world*. Wilmington: Vernon Press, pp: 15-36.

Swartz, R., Ivancheva, M., Czerniewicz, L. & Morris, N.P. 2019. Between a rock and a hard place: Dilemmas regarding the purpose of public universities in South Africa. *Higher Education*, 77(4):567-583. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0291-9

van den Berg, C.L., Verster, B. & Collett, K.S. 2018. Flipped out in the blended classroom, the good, the bad and the ugly: When academics become students. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 32(6):440-459. https://doi.org/10.20853/32-6-2984

van Rijnsoever, F.J. & Hessels, L.K. 2021. How academic researchers select collaborative research projects: A choice experiment. *The Journal of Technology Transfer*, 46(6):1917-1948. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10961-020-09833-2

Winberg, C., Bozalek, V. & Cattell, K. 2016. An inter-institutional postgraduate diploma for university teachers: Exploring formative feedback data from the position of socially just pedagogies. *Journal for New Generation Sciences*, 14(3):144-161. https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC-6cf078d7b