# Chapter 3

# Professional academic identity development: The significance of the agency, structural-cultural nexus

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## Professional academic Identity formation: Setting the scene

I locate my discussion in discourses on academic development (AD)[1] theorising lecturers' (faculty's) participation in professional development[2] initiatives and the formation of their professional identities as teachers in higher education. As a vignette, my discussion reports on a snapshot of the data from a more extensive qualitative case study exploring the interplay of the structural, cultural and agential conditioning mechanisms (see below for a detailed explanation) in the emergence of lecturers' professional academic identity. This vignette explores one lecturer's (Mike's)[3]

1 In international higher education contexts, AD is known as Educational Development (ED). The terms Academic Development (AD) and Educational Development (ED) are used interchangeably in the literature.

2 Though some scholars distinguish between the terms "professional development" and "professional learning" (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2015), I have chosen to use the former term throughout the chapter given its general used in the South African and international higher education context.

3 Upholding confidentiality and anonymity, I use pseudonyms to protect the identity of my research participants. Unless indicated

mediation of prevalent social contexts to account for the formation of his professional academic identity. For consistency,[4] I use the term professional academic identity to refer to lecturers' identities as teachers in higher education.

Worldwide, AD practitioners like myself conceptualise, coordinate and facilitate professional development initiatives to support lecturers' teaching in diverse learning and teaching contexts. My exploration of the conditions that may obstruct (constrain) or promote (enable)[5] lecturers' professional academic identity development contributes to research on AD practice and policy beyond the scope of my research site. For example, awareness of the enabling and constraining conditions for professional academic identity development ideally positions AD practitioners to support lecturers in navigating contextual constraints as they participate in their professional development and, ultimately, professional academic identity development. Such awareness is essential for strategic planning and decision-making concerning professional development initiatives within institutions. The central argument of this chapter is that agency (viz., lecturers' capacity to act autonomously and make decisions) is an integral part of the structural-cultural nexus. However, despite its significance for professional academic identity development, agency is insufficient.

## Context matters, or does it?

Several empirical studies show that research-intensive universities as workplaces influence lecturers' interest in and commitment to quality teaching and professional academic development (e.g. Benvenuti et al., 2022; Jawitz & Perez, 2016; Leibowitz, Bozalek, Garraway, Herman, Jawitz, Muhuro, Ndebele, Quinn, Van Schalkwyk, Vorster & Winberg, 2017; Petersen, 2016; Leibowitz et al., 2014; Quinn, 2006). Pedagogical training to

otherwise, the quotations within the text are used verbatim.

4 These varied understandings of professional academic identity present multiple terms such as social identity, academic identity, professional identity and teacher identity to refer to the professional academic identity of lecturers.

5 In Archerian terms, these mechanisms are respectively known as constraints and enablements (Archer, 2000).

support learning and teaching through professional development is essential since many lecturers, despite being discipline experts, still need formal training as teachers when entering academia. Moreover, lecturers' teaching role often tends to be secondary to their role as researchers or discipline experts (Bitzer & de Jager, 2016; Nevgi & Löfström, 2015). Given these and other contextual realities such as the worldwide and national crisis related to student participation, throughput and success in higher education (Atherton, 2022; Baume, 2016; Kilfoil, 2021; Ramrathan, 2016; Scott et al., 2007), the distinct link between professional academic identity formation, lecturers' confidence, and motivation to contribute effectively towards learning and teaching, and their willingness to participate in professional development initiatives are central to this discussion (Bitzer & de Jager, 2016; Ödalen et al., 2018).

## The nexus between professional academic identity and teaching excellence

Cognisance of the nexus between professional academic identity and teaching excellence is essential as the former may influence the quality of the content lecturers teach and how they teach (Leibowitz et al., 2017). Professional identity, therefore, plays an essential role in lecturers' capacity to help to improve the crisis in higher education mentioned earlier. My understanding of teaching excellence is in line with scholars' view of teaching performed by teachers who, as critically reflective practitioners, use scholarly, informed and contextually relevant pedagogies to create optimal conditions for meaningful learning for their students (Behari-Leak & McKenna, 2017; Lueddeke, 2003; Vorster & Quinn, 2012).

## Structure, culture and agency: A brief glimpse

I used Margaret Archer's (1996) Social Realism as a theoretical lens and analytical tool to explore how Mike's professional academic identity as a teacher was shaped by the interplay between structural, cultural and agential enablements and constraints within a professional development course such as the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDip HE)

(hereafter, Diploma)[6], his academic department, and the broader Rhodes University and higher education context. The domains of structure, culture and agency are not separate entities and do not act independently (Archer, 2000; 2003). These concepts extend Critical Realist Roy Bhaskar's (2008) construct of the social world into the "parts" (consisting of structures and cultures) and the "people" (referring to individuals' agency). In Social Realism's stratified understanding of humans, individuals are known as actors able to occupy powerful social roles in society, and groups of individuals able to change the material structures or the ideational culture of their social contexts are known as agents (Archer, 2000; 2003).

Structures within academia are institutional policies, roles and designated positions with properties and powers such as Vice-Chancellor (VC), Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC), Director of Learning and Teaching, Faculty Dean or Academic Development Practitioners. Although strong social actors occupy these roles and execute powers, the roles and actors are independent of each other since each social actor may exercise their role in unique ways (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Cultural conditions within academia include concepts, theories, beliefs, and ideas about learning and teaching and professional academic identity development expressed through dominant discourses. Agency refers to Mike's capacity to act autonomously, purposefully and make decisions concerning his teaching practice and professional development (Archer, 2000; 2003; Elder-Vass, 2010; Giddens, 1984). As demonstrated in my discussion, the influence of agency and contextual social and cultural conditions has significant implications for the formation of lecturers' professional academic identity.

## Exploring hidden conditioning mechanisms

Social Realism enabled me to explore the emergence (or non-emergence) of social events and experiences, such as the formation of Mike's professional academic identity resulting from

6 The Diploma is registered as a 120-credit honours-level course on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) (CHERTL, 2020).

the interplay of structural, cultural and agential mechanisms over time (Archer, 1996). As an underlabourer, Critical Realism offers a differentiated, structured and stratified view of the social world consisting of more than what we observe through our senses such as underlying, unobservable mechanisms found in three overlapping strata of reality known as the *real*, the *actual* and the *empirical* (Bhaskar, 2008). Mike's engagement in the Diploma is located at the level of the *actual*, which is a hidden dimension shaping his direct or indirect observations and experiences of the Diploma (an event), his academic department and the wider university and higher education context. A deeper potentiality with causal powers known as the *real* exists, which can be natural or physical objects (such as the environment or buildings) or social forms of organisations (such as bureaucracies) (Sayer, 2000).

Empirical manifestations such as Mike's participation in the Diploma or his professional academic identity only occur if and when the causal powers or generative mechanisms of the *real* are activated (Bhaskar, 2015). However, since these empirical manifestations may not always be visible in the *empirical* and the *actual* sphere (Elder-Vass, 2010), I used abduction and retroduction to explore the causal powers at the level of the *real* which may have given rise to them (Danermark et al., 2002). Abduction involves using theory to understand empirical data, and retroduction involves moving from empirical data, such as Mike's reflective accounts about his experiences in his academic department, to infer the conditions that may have led to the emergence of these experiences and his professional academic identity as a teacher in higher education. Retroductive reasoning also involves finding out what should exist in the different social structures (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Danermark et al., 2002) to influence the formation of Mike's professional academic identity. In addition, judgemental rationality allows researchers to evaluate and compare the explanatory power of the theoretical concepts that they work with. Researchers can thus select the concepts which most accurately help them to explain the effect of causal mechanisms at the level of the *real* (Hu, 2018). In other words, judgemental rationality allowed me to theorise about what the world must be like at a research-intensive university to enable

the formation of lecturers' professional academic identities as teachers.

## Analytical dualism and the morphogenetic cycle: intransitive conditioning mechanisms and judgemental rationality

I used Archer's (1995) methodological framework, the morphogenetic/morphostatic cycle, to determine whether I could attribute the shifts in Mike's professional academic identity development as a teacher to structure, culture, or agency. Emergence and analytical dualism are essential concepts in the morphogenetic/morphostatic cycle (Archer, 1995). The stratified depth ontology of analytical dualism allowed me to analyse structure, culture and agency separately before examining their interplay. Analytical dualism thus enabled me to explore how, over time, the interplay between the intertwined, intransitive, unobservable and relatively enduring properties of mechanisms conditioned the emergence of experiences and social phenomena (Archer, 1995, 2000). Here, I refer to the conditioning influence of the structural emergent properties (SEPs), cultural emergent properties (CEPs) and Mike's personal emergent properties (PEPs), viz, his agency on his participation in professional development initiatives and his professional academic identity development.

Thus, history and context are essential in Archer's (1995) morphogenetic cycles, which consist of three chronological or temporal phases: the first phase is known as T1, where T denotes time; the interaction phase is known as T2-T3; and the elaboration phase known as T4 (Archer, 1995; Behari-Leak, 2015). T1 constitutes the period before 2005 before Mike enrolled in the Diploma. In this conditioning phase, existing SEPS and CEPS in the institutional and higher education contexts have already shaped the historical context that he entered into. Interrogating the sociocultural (S-C) interaction during T2-T3 (2005-2006, the period of social interaction in the Diploma) enabled me to explore whether and how Mike, through mediation, exercised his agency to respond to conditions within the cultural system presenting enablements or constraints to his vested interests or personal

project (Archer, 1995; 2007; Luckett, 2012). Mike's personal project was the course of action that he intentionally engaged in in his social role as a teacher. This project stemmed from his ultimate concerns, viz. those "internal goods" that he cared about and mattered most to him as a teacher (Archer, 2007:7; Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Mike's ultimate concerns related to the practical order since his participation in the Diploma indicated his interest in and commitment to becoming and being a particular kind of teacher in his discipline.

In the final temporal stage, known as T4 (the period after Mike participated in the Diploma), the outcomes of Mike's sociocultural interaction culminated in either morphogenesis (transformation) or morphostasis (reproduction) of structure, culture or agency (Behari-Leak 2015:74-75; Danermark et al., 2002) and Mike's professional academic identity. As an explanatory methodology, analytical dualism guided me in avoiding upward conflation, where I accorded more importance to Mike's agency in bringing about structural and cultural conditions within his academic context, or downward conflation, where structure and culture within these contexts deterministically defined his agency (Archer, 2000; Boughey & Mckenna, 2021; Danermark et al., 2002; Sayer, 2000).

## Deepening my analysis with situational logics

Situational logics are the unique positioning of SEPs and CEPs that set up prior differential power relations within Mike's social contexts. These situational logics shaped the practical situations, daily experiences and events within the Diploma, Mike's academic department, the broader university and higher education context that he encountered and, despite having a free will, predisposed him to act in certain ways (Archer, 2007). In Table 3.1, I use a simplified version of Archer's (1995) situational logics adopted from Luckett (2012:341) to present the potential situational logics in the four configurations of structures and cultures. Situational logics describe the types of pressures or opportunities that people face depending on the kind of existing relationships and structures already in place in society.

Although these types of pressures or opportunities conditioned the social context for Mike, he could draw on his reflexivity to respond to or mediate the structural and cultural mechanisms and the situational logics. Reflexivity refers to his internal conversation with himself in which he continuously and critically reflected upon his circumstances and made decisions based on what mattered most to him (Archer, 1995; 2000; 2003; 2007) as a teacher in higher education.

**Table 3.1**: Situational logics in the domain of culture or structure (Luckett, 2012:341)

| | **Contradictions** | | **Complementarities** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Necessary | Contingent | Necessary | Contingent |
| Situational logic | correction | elimination | protection | opportunism |

In the structural domain, potential situational logics result from the type of relations between different parts of the structural system. In the domain of culture, potential situational logics result from the relations between ideas (Archer, 1995; 1996). When the SEPs and CEPs are mostly aligned and compatible, they are complementary and mutually reinforce each other. In other words, in necessary complementary relations, different parts of society, viz., the SEPs and CEPs, depend on each other and work best when they cooperate to mutually reinforce vested (material) interests (Archer, 1995; Case, 2013). As shown in my study, the relations between the Diploma and lecturers who participated in this professional development initiative were necessary and complementary because these initiatives were only meaningful because of their uptake by lecturers (Adams, 2024). Similarly, when the SEPs and CEPs do not need each other to exist but can benefit from working together, people are encouraged to form alliances or partnerships. The synergy between the material resources and positions (SEPs) and agents' ideas and beliefs (CEPs) results in compatible, complementary situational logics, which create the potential for social reproduction (morphostasis) (Archer, 1995).

In contrast, when the SEPs and CEPs are not aligned but are mostly incompatible and contradictory, the structures and culture create tension because they conflict. Likewise, contradictory ideas (configurations of cultural interests) may lead to constraining necessary contradictions between mechanisms (Archer, 1996). For example, because of their engagements in the Diploma, lecturers' initial resistance and ideas about the importance of teaching and learning and professional development most likely had to change to address contradictions. As can be deduced from the information shown in Table 3.1, a correction of ideas is the most likely outcome. On the other hand, incompatible, contingent contradictions between mechanisms (configurations of structural interests) will require that something be removed (Archer, 1995; Case, 2013; Muthama, 2018). For example, if the institutional context threatened or undermined the traditional standards of the Diploma, the likely outcome would be elimination. In other words, this elimination could lead to the proponents of teaching and learning and professional development and those who oppose or do not prioritise teaching and learning and professional development experiencing "a situational logic of polarisation" (Luckett, 2012:344). Thus, competitive (contingent) contradictions (configurations of cultural interests) in which the situational logic of elimination of one set of ideas is created, result in morphogenesis (Archer, 1995; Luckett, 2012) of the status quo. Notwithstanding, as I will show in my discussion, holistic institutional approaches and practices indicate that there is much in the cultural context at Rhodes University that values teaching.

Identifying whether the cultural and structural conditioning mechanisms were complementary or contradictory, was a helpful first step in analysing the cultural and structural conditioning that influenced Mike's decisions about whether and how he should respond to prevalent enablements or constraints. It is large interest groups instead of individual agents who engage in the potential four types of strategic action (correction, elimination, protection and opportunism) shown in Table 3.1 (Archer, 1995; Behari-Leak, 2015:70; Kotta et al., 2014: 516). Situational logics were thus helpful in analysing how Rhodes University as a research-intensive institution and the broader higher education context conditioned Mike's socio-cultural interaction

in general (Archer, 1995; Behari-Leak, 2015; Kotta et al., 2014; Vorster, 2010). Methodologically, the situational conditioning of complementarities and contradictions enabled me to analyse how the cultural and structural context shaped Mike's professional academic identity formation.

Our understanding of reality may not be absolute, given that agents and their choices are fallible, and the interplay between structure or culture is more complex than simply being either contradictory or complementary (Archer, 1995). Therefore, in this vignette, I applied the situational logics to the data in a light manner to explain rather than give direct conclusions about the influence of the various situational logics on the formation of Mike's professional academic identity (Cruickshank, 2003; Moyo, 2018).

## Research design tools in crafting a vignette

This vignette consisting of verbatim input includes data sources generated between 2019 and 2021, such as the extant literature, institutional documents related to learning and teaching, a survey questionnaire, a semi-structured and focus group interview and Mike's teaching portfolio submitted for summative assessment in the Diploma. A qualitative research design involving case study research allowed me to search for generative mechanisms to provide causal explanations related to explanatory questions of *how* and *why* when I engaged with the ideas, perceptions, experiences, and social practices of my research participants (Alvesson, 2003; Yin, 2003).

## Rhodes University: its significance as a research site

I purposefully chose Rhodes University as my site of inquiry to understand whether and how its differentiation as a research-intensive institution conditioned the interplay between structure, culture and agency and, in doing so, enabled or constrained the professional academic identity formation of lecturers at this institution. Characteristic of a research-led institution research is core to the academic project at the University (Muthama, 2018). Thus, unsurprisingly, Rhodes has consistently been amongst the top universities in the country for highest research output per

capita[7] (Rhodes University, 2019b). Being a research-intensive institution had significant implications for learning and teaching and lecturers' participation in the Diploma, mainly because national structures (e.g., policy directives stipulating funding formulas for research), institutional structures (e.g., university policies on personal promotion), and culture (e.g., dominant discourses) prioritised research over teaching. Perceptions that there are more rewards for research than teaching may influence lecturers' commitment to teaching or the extent to which they seek opportunities to develop their teaching (Jawitz & Perez, 2016; Muthama, 2018; Petersen, 2016). However, as shown by Mike's remark below, despite being a research-intensive institution, there is a strong, competing culture of valuing teaching at Rhodes University:

> Well, I think there are kind of two discourses. I mean, there's the official discourse, let's call it the CHERTL[8] discourse that teaching is valued and that your promotion documents and other things like that are valuable, but if you just catch dissatisfied academics over a beer, then they will always emphasise how much their research should be, some of them can be actively dismissive of their teaching, but they will always say, "You need research to be promoted." I don't think it is actually so true in the way they want to put it.

## Conceptual framework: Agency, reflexivity and professional academic identity formation

Reflexivity,[9] viz., Mike's internal conversation and deliberation with himself, was essential to exercising his agency and

7 The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) calculates accredited research output per capita as the annual research output of higher education institutions in relation to their University Councils' costs per academic staff member (Rhodes University, 2019b).

8 Mike refers to the Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL) at Rhodes University.

9 These modes are communicative, autonomous, meta-reflexives and fractured. Each of them results in different outcomes because research participants verbalise their internal thoughts in a different

shaping his professional academic identity (Archer, 2003; 2007; Giddens, 1984). As reflexivity is fluid and not fixed, Mike may have used different modes of reflexivity in different situations (Archer, 2003; 2007). However, throughout the data generation process, his most dominant mode of reflexivity demonstrated a sophisticated level of self-discipline, independence, and self-reliance on his abilities to identify the best course of action to establish satisfying, sustainable practices to bring his personal project to fruition (Archer, 2007).

As shown in the vignette below, Mike expressed his agency by adopting a personal project, which was borne out of his interest in learning (more) about a particular aspect related to his teaching and becoming a particular kind of teacher in his discipline. However, through teaching and his interactions within the Diploma and his academic department to bring his intended project to fruition, the structural and cultural mechanisms were activated. Depending on whether and how he exercised his agency, these structural and cultural mechanisms thus either constrained or enabled the formation of his professional academic identity as a teacher. His commitment to his project and his professional standing as a discipline expert accorded him certain powers that enabled him to reflexively mediate constraining conditions to establish satisfying, sustainable practices to make his project a reality (Archer, 2007; Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Therefore, it is through prioritising his concerns that his professional academic identity as a teacher was shaped.

## Personal and professional academic identity formation

Archer's (2000) analytical dualism helped to distinguish between four strata of identity development: the self, the person, the social agent and the social actor. This distinction implies that people have different layers of agency, with personal abilities and characteristics, such as confidence, commitment, self-understanding and decision-making ability (PEPs), that develop through experiences at different levels of society (e.g. family

manner and respond differently to prevalent structural and cultural constraints and enablements (Archer, 2003).

life, school, spirituality and the workplace) (Archer, 2000). Our sense of self is the foundation for our personal and social identity as agents and actors. Our sense of self and social identity, also called professional academic identity, are intertwined and emerge simultaneously (Archer, 2000; Behari-Leak, 2015). Thus, our professional academic identity develops in relation to our personal identity and depends on whether we have already developed a continuous sense of self (Archer, 2000; McAlpine et al., 2014). This continuous sense of self refers to our understanding of who we are as individuals and who we are in relation to other people. In Mike's case, his social self emerged as he involuntarily engaged in a society with unequal material resources. He reflected on his experiences and deliberately made choices about his future and role in society and about whether to accept or reject society's roles and expectations. For example, despite his initial resistance demonstrated in the quote below, and the influence of structural (SEPs) and cultural (CEPs) powers, Mike's PEPs enabled him to become an academic and higher-education teacher:

> It's my personal character that I love teaching and that's something that I've come to understand over time, more and more in my 30's. Because I think my mom had said, when I was a kid, 'Oh, you'll be a great teacher one day.' And I always swore I will never become a teacher, because both my parents are teachers. I remember telling my mom, I said, 'I will never be, I would rather die and starve, than become a teacher. And, yet, here I am'.

The emergence of professional academic identity is relational (Archer, 2000) and, as in Mike's case, his choices and how he navigated social systems and cultural expectations within his personal, social and work contexts shaped his personal and professional academic identity. The aforementioned implies that an indicator of professional academic identity was when Mike had adopted his role as a teacher (through teaching) and invested himself in personifying what it meant to be a teacher in a particular context as he engaged in learning and teaching-related activities to support his students' learning. This indicator of Mike's professional academic identity links well with an interactionist

understanding of identity, suggesting that lecturers' teacherly identities emerge from their professional status and interactions with their colleagues and role players in academia. In addition, lecturers' teacherly identities emerge through how they interpret these experiences (Gee, 2000; Kaasila et al., 2021) and, I would add, internalise and embody such experiences.

## Feeling like a fish out of water: Analysis of the Narrative of Mediation at T4 of the morphogenetic cycle

When enrolling in the Diploma, Mike was in his late twenties. At that time, he had already developed a mature and strong sense of self (personal identity), which is unique and personal (Archer, 2000). Structurally, Mike's sense of self was shaped by the social context that he was born into and his racial demarcation as a white[10], middle-class intellectual. Imbued with certain powers resulting from this involuntary placement in society (Archer, 1995), Mike's towering physique and outspoken assertiveness commanded attention (Archer, 2000) amongst his colleagues and students.

During T1, Mike involuntarily entered a social context where attendance and participation in the Diploma yielded anticipated results such as knowledge and practice-based competence about being a teacher in a research-intensive context such as Rhodes University. Unbeknown to Mike, during his engagement in the Diploma (T2-T3), and to achieve his personal project, he would have to mediate undercurrents underneath the seemingly calm and uneventful surface in the form of existing structural and cultural emergent properties within the Diploma, his academic department, Rhodes University, and the broader higher education context. These SEPs and CEPs, which uniquely shaped these contexts, materialised in the form of institutional policies and processes prioritising research on the one hand and supporting learning and teaching on the other hand. SEPs and CEPs in the form of heavy workloads, and resistance from colleagues also

10 Until the inception of a democratic government in 1994, South Africa was a racially segregated country with an inequitable distribution of resources for different racial groups.

shaped teaching and learning at the University. In contrast, as structural and cultural enablements, CHERTL (Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning) and the Diploma influenced the learning and teaching context at the institution.

In some instances, he traversed the tranquil ebb and flow of waves when confronting enabling structural enablements such as CHERTL, who enacted its teaching support mandate for lecturers through offering various workshops, seminars, the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL)-based[11] writing retreats and other awareness and capacity-building initiatives such as curriculum development:

> Learning and teaching is supported by CHERTL, which is very visible in the faculties and the committees. So, you can't forget that CHERTL exists or at least, you know. And that really again kind of pushes the learning and teaching agenda.

In other instances, CEPs in the form of ambivalent interpretations of national and institutional policy directives felt like hitting a sandbank or rocky bottom. These ambivalent interpretations influencing the social context included established discourses about the benefits of focusing on research, as evidenced by most of the professors who accrued substantial social capital attributable to their research output. These discourses influenced lecturers' participation in professional development initiatives by lamenting learning and teaching as invisible, often unrewarded labour and additional work on top of an already over-burdened work schedule. Mike highlighted these anomalies when he reflected on whether the Diploma has influenced his career:

> It encouraged me to take my teaching seriously and gave me the tools that help me enjoy and find validation in my own teaching. This intersects with the Rhodes promotions

11 The term SoTL is accredited to Ernest L. Boyer who attempted to redefine the nature of academic practice or scholarly work in 1990. This redefinition of academic work involves transcending the divide between research and teaching and recognising that scholarly work is equivalent to the "traditional view of scholarship as disciplinary research" (Brew, 2006; Simmons & Poole, 2016:13).

> policies that explicitly reward teaching (much more than at other universities). I also published a paper on SoTL and will write more in the future which I have found incredibly rewarding, but at the expense of developing my research in my own discipline to some extent. So, while I have no regrets whatsoever about it, it probably has not made me more marketable elsewhere.

Mike's comment refers to the competing discourses about whether the personal promotion criteria at Rhodes University validated research or learning and teaching. These competing discourses resulted in a situational logic of constraining necessary contradictions. However, during his engagement in the Diploma, the socio-cultural interaction between Mike, his peers, the facilitators, and his colleagues influenced how he responded to the cultural system. Through collective action involving participating in institutional learning and teaching events, showcasing innovations in their teaching and through SoTL, viz., disseminating their research on their teaching in their disciplines, Mike and these role players endeavoured to change or correct these ideas by strategically doing what was within their sphere of influence despite the contradictory discourses.

Mike confidently expressed a strong sense of self when reflecting upon his appointment as a lecturer shortly after completing his Master's degree. He had already acquired substantial cultural and social capital on a personal and professional level, which included "material and non-material resources" such as ingrained habits, values, and skills in the form of a PhD in a highly specialised field (obtained in 2005) and dispositions and growing status as a researcher and discipline expert, which he acquired because of his involuntary placement within a particular social class within society (Bourdieu, 2000; Kloot, 2011:30; Norodien-Fataar, 2016:87). At that time, Mike had already demonstrated acumen as a scholar and leader in his field through his extensive research output and as the co-editor of four academic volumes in his discipline. Mike's cultural capital contributed to his positive self-esteem and afforded him high recognition within his disciplinary field and academia. These are

all indicators that Mike had already developed his sea legs as a discipline expert in academia.

Mike attached a high value to and prided himself on his performative competence in a highly specialised disciplinary field. When joining Rhodes University, he felt that his expertise was valued because, at that time, he was one of only two disciplinary experts in the country who knew how to conduct a "very technical", "precise", and "abstract" kind of analysis in his disciplinary sub-field. In the same way that Mike's internal acknowledgement and validation of his sense of self carried weight concerning his insights about his personal identity and accomplishments as a discipline expert, receiving external acknowledgement was essential. Such acknowledgement is a necessary "prerequisite" for lecturers' professional academic identity formation (Archer, 2000; Behari-Leak, 2015:377). This vignette provides support for research in which scholars identified a sense of appreciation, connectedness competence, commitment and the opportunity to advance in their careers as essential psychological processes in shaping lecturers' identities as teachers (Van Lankveld et al., 2017).

Mike's sense of self was thus validated and affirmed in the unique collegial context at Rhodes University. With fewer staff members than at bigger institutions, new academics like himself who could fulfil multiple roles in addition to their teaching duties, such as serving on senate committees and being members of task teams and working groups, were welcomed at the institution. For Mike, this recognition entailed being accepted into a collegial, intellectual community of practice whose scholarly footprint extended beyond the borders of the University.

Contrary to these positive experiences as a new academic, Mike had to mediate tension in the form of "dissonance" between his strong disciplinary identity and his identity formation as a teacher. This "dissonance" existed because "everything was completely different" from what he was used to as a student. These differences included disappointing learning experiences involving persons he regarded as role models:

> I was trained at universities where it was the big researcher that does everything. I've found some professors were much worse than other professors, just because they just didn't care. They would stand in the class and mutter to themselves. I mean it was absolutely shocking. So, I'd experienced that negative part of it and I always thought I don't want to be like that.

Mike's experiences also included differences in terms of his own experiences as a student, the increased student diversity and class sizes, and his own "assumptions about knowledge and learning":

> I never had any teaching background at all. I did not know what a learning outcome was, I did not know what a criterion was. I had no idea about assessment, other than, like, an intuitive idea of validity and reliability. I did not know what the CHE[12] was, or SAQA[13] or the NQF,[14] nothing - I knew none of that stuff. But, basically, my entire teaching was framed by what had happened to me when I had been a student. I thought that whatever my experiences are, they're just not applicable now.

As a distinguished achiever, Mike continuously strove to be good at what he does, and he thus drew on these insights to align his drive to succeed with intrinsic satisfaction derived from his teaching. As a result, frustrations associated with feeling inadequate were unfamiliar to him. Through reflexive deliberation, Mike strategically weighed his options about the best course of action to benefit his teaching. In a task-oriented manner, he exercised his PEPs by capitalising on the probationary requirement for new lecturers[15] and completing the full qualification (the Diploma) instead of only the Assessment course:

12 Council on Higher Education (CHE)
13 South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)
14 National Qualifications Framework (NQF)
15 New lecturers at Rhodes are encouraged to enrol for the Assessment course (now known as the Conversations about Teaching, Assessment and Learning, CATALyst course), which provides lecturers with a space to critically reflect on and enhance their curriculum, teaching, and assessment practices to meet the learning

> Oh, and plus all the institutions had kind of, like, merged and been reformulated, so I was like a fish out of water. And I thought, no, I want to know more about this environment and how I can teach in it. That's why I decided to do the whole [Diploma].

In this case, the compatible and complementary relationships between SEPs and CEPs resulted in a situational logic of protection. The internal relations between the systemic structures at Rhodes University, viz., institutional directives for new lecturers and the Diploma as a structural enablement influencing the learning and teaching context, were congruent and thus mutually reinforced each other. Likewise, in the domain of culture, a situational logic of necessary complementarities existed between the ideas promoted in institutional directives about teaching being taken seriously by the University and Mike's beliefs about the value of engagement in a professional development course. Supported by interest groups such as CHERTL colleagues and other strong social actors at the University such as the VC and DVC: Academic and Student Affairs who worked to protect these interests, these necessary complementarities thus resulted in a situational logic of opportunism as they predisposed Mike to attain his personal project through engaging in the Diploma:

> The Rhodes University promotion policy explicitly puts a big value on learning and teaching, and I support that move entirely. So, if you're going to work at this university and you don't value teaching, you're not going to get promoted. And so that meant that I was forced to take teaching and learning, seriously.

As demonstrated above, Mike purposefully enacted his private deliberations by recognising an opportunity to prioritise his concerns about his performative competence as a teacher. Bolstered by the institutional support for learning and teaching as reflected by cultural and structural conditioning mechanisms, Mike thus fine-tuned his personal project, demonstrating his

needs of their students. The Assessment course is equivalent to the Assessment of, for (and as) learning module in the Diploma.

commitment "to find out more about how higher education works and how it works in South Africa". These cultural and structural conditioning mechanisms were in the form of affirmative discourses conveyed through the guiding principles in the institution's mission statement and a suite of institutional policies related to learning and teaching. These affirmative discourses demonstrated the institution's commitment to creating a learning and teaching environment supported by scholarship and promoting excellence and innovation in learning and teaching.

However, Mike found himself swimming against the tide when his strong sense of self and his experiences within the Diploma sharpened his critical gaze about the misalignment between his personal project and the seemingly taken-for-granted practices in his department:

> I was new and hot and, you know, ready to go and I came from this intense disciplinary training and I just kind of [realised that] the department just accumulated a bunch of courses that were really not relevant. So, I kind of went in all hot-headed.

In his self-disciplined, self-motivated, and self-reliant, albeit "hot-headed" manner, Mike agentially responded to the situational logic of constraining contradictions existing because of incompatibilities between ideas and discourses reflected in institutional policies related to learning and teaching about scholarly informed pedagogical practices (Rhodes University 2019a) and the common-sense pedagogical practices within his academic department. Moreover, the disjuncture between his understanding of disciplinary knowledge and that of his academic department solidified his undertaking to pursue his project regardless of the potential ramifications to his career:

> Now you see where I'd been and where I'd been taught [his studies overseas] [my work] is a very narrow, formal, mathematical kind of [field], in fact it's insanely abstract … that's what I thought I was going to teach. And then they gave me a course on [something else] … And I turned

> around and said, 'I'm sorry, this is not [what I'm supposed to teach]'.

Through reflexive deliberations, which solidified his commitment to his personal project, he actively drew on the structural and cultural enablements within and associated with the Diploma to mediate the structural and cultural conditions within his academic department. These enablements came about because the Diploma represented a community of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998). Mike's participation in the CoP also shaped and validated his beliefs about his role in contributing to the purposes of higher education. His contribution to the CoP involved meaningful and mutual engagements and interaction with his peers and the facilitators through which they negotiated shared understandings about the synergy between their teaching philosophy (e.g., their beliefs, values, attitudes, and their roles as teachers in academia). Through participation, they built reciprocal relationships in which sharing information and generating and validating knowledge, insight and shared discourses about learning and teaching enabled members of the CoP to support and learn from each other (Roberts, 2007; Smith et al., 2017; Wenger, 1998).

Enablements deriving from Mike's participation in the Diploma also came about because of the facilitators who, through their scholarly work and contributions within the higher education professional community, were significant social actors who contributed to the cultural conditioning on learning and teaching and professional development at the international, national and institutional levels[16]. They were thus ideally placed to draw on the established and emerging discourses about learning and teaching and professional identity development to shape the ideational context within the Diploma. Through engagements and practices that emerged from the pedagogic discourse in the Diploma, the facilitators enculturated Mike and his peers into a community of teachers who demonstrated their concern for

16 The facilitators' life-long contribution to building the disciplinary field in higher education learning and teaching resulted in them receiving the 2018 CHE-HELTASA National Excellence in Teaching and Learning Award (HELTASA, 2018) (Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa [HELTASA] 2018).

learning and teaching. These practices involved the facilitators emulating, promoting and regulating what taking up and enacting "discipline-specific pedagogic identities" as teachers entailed (Singh, 2002:577). Consisting of the "regulative discourse (RD)" and "the instructional discourse (lD)" (Bernstein, 2003; Singh, 2002:576), the pedagogic discourse describes the guidelines, procedures and principles which the facilitators used to convert "domain-specific, expert knowledge" (Singh, 2002:577) into a practice-based course such as the Diploma.

Within the Diploma, the instructional discourse refers to the facilitators' selection, sequencing, pacing and evaluation of content or knowledge to be included in the curriculum (Vorster & Quinn, 2012). The content of the Diploma was thus carefully selected to support lecturers in building a strong knowledge base of the field of learning and teaching in higher education so that they were able to design their course curricula and teach in ways that enabled students' access to their disciplinary discourses and associated practices (Vorster & Quinn, 2012; 2015). These practices involved supporting Mike and his peers to meet the outcomes of five modules: learning and teaching in higher education, curriculum development, assessment of, for (and as) learning, evaluation of teaching and courses and one elective module[17]:

Like most lecturers, Mike capitalised on these and other enabling mechanisms in the form of practical tools such as learning theories and constructive alignment to understand his practice and student learning and to bring about and advocate for much-needed shifts in his departmental curricula:

> We [his academic department] accumulated a bunch of courses that were really not relevant. You know, so there

17 The elective module, which is completed mainly through self-study, focuses on research in higher education on any area of their practice that lecturers would like to investigate. During the period under investigation, viz., between 2005 and 2017, examples of electives were: Design and implement eLearning, Design and implement experiential learning, Research Supervision in Higher Education, Leadership in Higher Education, Design and implement Service-Learning, Social inclusion in Higher Education (e.g., integrating HIV-AIDS, race and gender issues into the curriculum) and Decolonisation or Africanisation of Higher Education (CHERTL, n.d.).

> was just a bit of mish mash rather than "Let's develop the students' analytical ability in this area from first to third year." That was my feeling and so, because I didn't know better, because I was, like, way more confident than I had any right to be and I was, like, you know, raring to go, I *spat Bosberaad*, [18] I basically did a very stupid thing - I said, we must change all our courses like this. There's no continuity, there's no coherence.

As an enablement, the regulative discourse (RD) instilled the values that inform the curriculum that Mike as a teacher, was encouraged to personify in learning and teaching contexts. Apart from observing how the facilitators embodied these values, Mike also had opportunities to internalise how to adhere to the expectations and guidelines of the teaching profession and how to enact its appropriate disposition, conduct, character and manner (Singh, 2002; Vorster & Quinn, 2012; 2015). In addition, Mike's receptiveness to learning about how to support his students in gaining access to disciplinary knowledge and discourses was contingent on his ability to demonstrate affinity with the transformation-oriented perceptions of his role as a teacher and the role and purpose of higher education, viz., its benefits for students and society (Vorster, 2010; Singh, 2002). In higher education institutions worldwide, the increasing massification and resultant change in student demographics necessitated capacity-building of lecturers like Mike, who was able and eager to engage in "curriculum and pedagogic reforms" to contribute to all students' academic success (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Vorster & Quinn, 2012:55):

> I'm very critical of Criterion Reference Assessment, because I think 99% of the time, I think it's done in a way that is actually not criterion referenced, but, you know, very norm referenced. So, I developed a rubric - which I still use for everything from second year right up to post-grad work.

18 These two words are unique to South Africa. The word *spat* is an Afrikaans colloquialism used for "said" or "shouted", and a *Bosberaad* is a term for a strategic meeting held away from the usual work context, such as at a game reserve.

> And that is something I gave to my department who uses that in various ways.

In addition, Mike engaged in various other curriculum development initiatives, which demonstrated his commitment to pursue his personal project in knowing more about teaching in his discipline and influencing pedagogic practices in his department in a scholarly manner:

> I tried changing the modality of what we did, so I created an online glossary. I've integrated research into the classroom, where part of the assignment is, they must go out and interview people with a questionnaire, and so then you actually create research - real research in the classroom, not as in create some toy project that I've invented for the sake of the learning experience but doing real stuff.

Through these initiatives, Mike articulated how he ascribed to and enacted his beliefs in the holistic purpose of education, which is not only to shape students' intellectual development but also to shape their personal, social, and moral development and, in doing so, prepare them to make a meaningful contribution to society as responsible and productive citizens (Vorster & Quinn, 2012). This orientation aligns with the main principle supporting the regulative discourse of the curriculum (Vorster, 2010) within the Diploma, which centres on what Biesta terms "the axiology of education" (Biesta, 2015:18; Vorster & Quinn, 2012). Mike's willingness and enthusiasm to innovate his practices provide support for research by Leibowitz et al. (2017), who found that some lecturers who engaged in professional development initiatives do not see teaching as a standalone activity but instead regard it as a core aspect of their various roles as researchers, academic administrators, managers, and participants in community engagement initiatives in academia.

Given its practice-based nature, the Diploma focused on supporting and developing lecturers' practices. Mike and his peers were thus encouraged to experiment in their teaching with the learning and teaching strategies introduced in the Diploma.

However, a lack of support in his academic department often curtailed Mike's excitement and commitment to adapting and applying these strategies. For instance, Mike had to strategically circumvent contextual constraints such as a heavy teaching load in pursuit of his personal project:

> I did not get a light teaching load; I had a full teaching load, a full supervision load, I was coordinator of the third years at that time. I pulled my weight just like anybody else. So, there were no allowances made, but, yeah, I attended in the time that was available and I published during that time, I wasn't a slacker.

Several studies have reported the realities of academic workloads as a constraint for lecturers' meaningful participation in professional development initiatives, and ultimately, their professional academic identity formation (Behari-Leak & Le Roux, 2018; Hassan, 2013; Leibowitz, 2016; Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2016). Although not explicitly mentioned by Mike, a heavy teaching load and large classes can be associated with increased administrative tasks. As identified in other studies and articulated by Mike, a heavy workload contributes to lecturers' inability to transfer, implement, or experiment with the practices introduced in professional programmes to their departmental contexts (Behari-Leak, 2015; Fanghanel, 2007). In contemporary higher education, there are constraints such as increasing demands on lecturers' time to conduct research, be involved in community engagement, and contribute to knowledge-building in their professional fields. These constraints may intensify the tension between conducting SoTL research as opposed to mainly disciplinary research.

Mike's engagement in his academic department personified an ongoing battle against multiple waves of resistance, wanting to crush his dreams and commitment to bring about changes in his teaching practices. Confident about his judgement and authority on this subject, he went about his work in a focused and disciplined manner to relentlessly mediate cultural constraints in the form of resistance from some of his colleagues. He thus

actively drew on his personal powers and properties in forging ahead to propose carefully thought-out plans:

> I am quite a stubborn guy; I can be quite forceful. So, I decided I was going to let my first years collect data so they can be inducted into the research creation process. We're going to use that data that they collect to write their essay topic. And, you know, some staff came to me and said, 'Oh, yeah, that's really very difficult, you know. Yeah, I don't think it's really very viable, you know'. And so, they expressed their doubts and I'm, like, 'Fine, I'm going to do it anyway'.

It seems that Mike's department valued his input in teaching matters, albeit "grudgingly" and in a conditional manner. This half-hearted approach to his proposed innovative practices could indicate that if new lecturers were not as assertive, outspoken, and steadfast in refusing the monotony of circling in a fishbowl of complacency, they might not be able to bring about changes in their curricula, let alone influence their colleagues' archaic beliefs and attitudes:

> There is a qualitative difference between staff who have done the Diploma and those (generally older now) who have not. When I arrived in my department, I was the ONLY one who had done it. I found that it gave me some theory and some metalanguage to talk with authority about my courses and also made me more open to innovation - I found colleagues who had not done the course were more "flying by the seat of their pants".

As shown in the literature, academic departments that explicitly value teaching positively shape lecturers' professional academic identity (Van Lankveld et al., 2017). Other cultural constraints such as territorial dispositions, fears of being undermined and beliefs, ideas and values about power and hierarchy usually held by older, more experienced lecturers may influence the extent to which lecturers like Mike may innovate in their practices and influence departmental practices that would translate into student success.

This resistance to changes in learning and teaching is similar to those found in studies involving the professional learning of experienced and new academics (Behari-Leak, 2015; McKenna & Boughey, 2014; Quinn, 2012; Vorster, 2010).

Mike's narrative about the qualitative difference between colleagues who have undertaken the Diploma and those who did not demonstrate his willingness to positively contribute to assuming responsibility, autonomy and control over the trajectory of learning and teaching within his department. The value that he ascribed to his performative competence as a teacher was evident in his description of himself as someone who does "not like to fail", "admit defeat," or be "the worst lecturer in the department". Furthermore, for Mike, being a discipline expert who "loves teaching" and being a "completely committed", albeit new teacher, and being "well-versed" in his disciplinary norms and values and accepted social practices were two sides of the same coin. He thus made purposeful, deliberate decisions about the best ways of inducting his students into the disciplinary identity of his subject.

Since the issue of transformed learning and teaching concerning departmental practices mapped directly onto Mike's ultimate concerns, he strategically aligned himself with like-minded colleagues who have also undertaken the Diploma. Confident about having reviewed feasible options available to him in achieving his ultimate concerns (Archer, 2013), and their likely outcomes, he garnered their support for the learning and teaching practices that he had in mind:

> I get an idea, I push with it. I try and get people on board. I identify my allies; I say, 'Oh, yeah,' you know, 'I can see this person, you know, has got the same idea.' I talk to them; we build a rapport. I talk to someone else and then they say, 'Well, I'm kind of okay with it but I've got these problems,' and I'd go, 'You know, you're right, maybe if we shift it around a bit like this that'll make a bit more sense.' And that's really important.

Although these corporate agents did not need each other to exist, viz. perform their duties as teachers, they benefited from working together to achieve a collective goal. Having engaged in professional development initiatives offered by CHERTL, they were able to capitalise on enabling mechanisms to transform from primary agents into Corporate Agents who articulated their needs and strategised accordingly (Archer, 1995; 2007). These enabling mechanisms were their combined resources in the form of educational discourses about learning and teaching and their network of peers. In Archerian terms, these corporate agents agentially responded to the contingent complementarities, which presented a situational logic of opportunism by extracting gains from institutional resources made available through CHERTL to enhance learning and teaching. Collectively, as corporate agents, they could endorse Mike's contributions and have informed discussions about teaching-related matters in their department. They could thus capitalise on their vested interests in influencing departmental learning and teaching matters.

The elaboration of Mike's agency and professional identity as a teacher can also be observed in how his continued enactment of the professional role as an academic (Billot, 2010) was visible within but also transcended his institutional context. His initial perception of feeling like "a fish out of water", which evolved into lasting footprints in the sand, viz., his ongoing contribution to the discourse and practices around teaching and learning within his department and at Rhodes University, demonstrate the formation of his professional academic identity as a teacher. Since he participated in the Diploma, he has become a strong social actor who strategically shaped the teaching and learning discourses and practices of his discipline and the University and his active participation and leadership roles in numerous CHERTL initiatives such as authoring a case study about using the institutional learning management system (LMS) to generate student feedback for course coordination. In addition, he actively and strategically shaped teaching and learning through his participation in the institutional language committee and other senior-level committees, such as the HoD forum and as an editorial team member of various academic journals.

## Coming full circle

In this vignette, I explored one lecturer's mediation of the structural and cultural mechanisms constraining and enabling his personal project and, ultimately, shaping the formation of his professional academic identity as a teacher. Through reflexivity, Mike exercised his agency to act back on these conditioning mechanisms to realise his ultimate concern in becoming and being a particular kind of teacher at a research-intensive university. The implications of this vignette are profound for AD practices and academic leadership. They highlight the importance of knowledgeable and skilled academic developers who have the capacity and are committed to modelling good practice. The vignette also highlight the essential role of communities of practice emerging from professional development structures. In addition, the vignette signals the possibilities of academics' agential journey in becoming the kind of teacher that they envisaged and the significance of agency in shaping professional academic identity. Moreover, this study contributes to existing literature by identifying agency as an integral part of the structural-cultural nexus. Mike's response to the situational logics brought about by the interplay of enabling structural and cultural conditions within the Diploma and the University and constraining structural and cultural conditions within his academic department points towards the importance of creating enabling contexts for lecturers' professional academic identity development. These enabling contexts and conditions must be available throughout the University and not only at the policy level or within professional development programmes. In conclusion, understanding why and how to create supportive contexts within professional development initiatives and academic departments is crucial for all role players concerned with lecturers' professional development and ongoing support as teachers through policy development and practice-based initiatives.

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