



Introduction

Why a book on PGDips in the field of Higher Education?

PGDips (HE) in Southern Africa

“We need a rigorously theorised approach to teaching that engages contextual realities, is based on research, and that builds scholarship on teaching and learning” (Badat, 2024:8).

Who we are as PGDip (HE) course designers and facilitators

This book stems from our immersion in the learning, teaching and assessment practices of higher education over more than three decades in South African universities. Our purpose and focus are shaped by our involvement in professional staff development and the design of PGDips in Higher Education at our respective universities. Together with academic development colleagues, we have coordinated, facilitated and evaluated PGDip courses in pedagogy, assessment, curriculum development and evaluation. Our backgrounds in academic development reflect a sustained commitment to enhancing staff development across disciplines and fostering innovation in teaching and research. We share a common interest in researching teaching and learning and in building partnerships and communities with disciplinary specialists. We have consistently highlighted the relationship between reflective teaching and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) as a central component of the academic project. We have worked collectively to raise the standard of university teaching and to advance the professionalisation of academics as university educators.



Across Southern African universities, higher education specialists have been instrumental in formalising teaching and learning, acknowledging that many academics teach without pedagogical training. These efforts are part of a broader agenda to transform higher education systems so that academics can better respond to student needs and contribute to a more socially just and equitable society. Since their introduction in the early 2000s, PGDips or equivalent qualifications, have been responsive to the broader contexts and ecologies of the higher education system and its persistent challenges. The professional development of academics as educators forms a critical dimension of transformation within this complex landscape, where patterns of student success and failure continue to be influenced by race, social class, and other structural inequalities.

Horrod (2023:144) has critiqued the way that university policy documents, shaped by a neoliberal higher education context, often marginalise the role of university teachers by employing generic references to “teaching and learning” and neglecting the “embodied practices of an experienced, skilled, continuously evolving person”. Postgraduate Diplomas in Higher Education have helped to bridge the gap between policy and practice by offering practical and reflective learning experiences while reinforcing the role of universities as catalysts for positive change in higher education. Faced with the complexities of teaching in higher education, the value of PGDips is evident in the way that they systematically support academics in becoming reflective and scholarly teachers. These reflections are supported by critical questions such as:

- How do academics balance their disciplinary expertise with the need to design teaching that supports meaningful student learning?
- How do they prioritise students’ learning experiences and the knowledge to which they are being given access?
- How do they navigate the tensions between institutional expectations, personal teaching beliefs, and the realities of diverse classrooms?
- To what extent do PGDips promote sustainable change in pedagogical practices beyond the duration of the programme?

Introduction

- What forms of support are required to help academics to turn reflective insights into meaningful and sustained pedagogical change?

This book contributes to the theory and practice of higher education pedagogy by reflecting on the nature of programmes that are designed to deepen academics' understanding of key aspects of teaching and learning. It is intended for academics working in higher education across diverse contexts who are interested in reflecting critically on their own teaching practices and the learning of their students and evaluating the impact of their practices and programmes. The research in the book is applicable to academics who teach in professional learning and Higher Education Studies programmes and across disciplines whose interests are in researching teaching and learning and postgraduate supervision.

Bringing together theoretical perspectives and practical applications, this volume explores alternative ways of conceptualising learning-focused higher education practice. It shows how PGDips have withstood local and global challenges and have engaged with the critical need to decolonise education and to meet the diverse learning needs of undergraduate and postgraduate students. The book aligns itself strongly with values that characterise “good” higher education: “equity, justice (social, economic, environmental, epistemic, data, and design justice), sustainability, pluriversality, mutuality, generosity, creativity, and collectivism - all supported by ethics including affirmative ethics, relational ethics, environmental ethics, and ethics of care” (Czerniewicz & Cronin, 2023). It emphasises the characteristics of the processes involved in high-quality teaching and learning.

The main aims of the book are to:

1. Bring together scholarly work that explores the evolving nature of PGDips drawing on a range of programmes and disciplinary contexts to offer insights into the complexity of professional learning.

2. Examine the ways in which PGDips have shaped course designers' and academics' understandings of, and approaches to, teaching and learning in higher education, and how these programmes have influenced academic identities in teaching and research.
3. Illuminate contributors' critical engagement with higher education policies, theories, frameworks, and practices, and demonstrate how PGDips are contributing to curriculum development, teaching, learning, and assessment across disciplines.
4. Explore the role of PGDips in fostering reflexivity and enabling university educators to find creative and innovative ways to rethink and transform cultures of participation.
5. Showcase critical reflections on the ways in which PGDips have meaningfully contributed to the broader transformation agenda and supported knowledge building and responsiveness in changing higher education contexts.

Chapters offer theorised and critical accounts of PGDips in a range of higher education contexts. They reflect on the influence and challenges of institutional and disciplinary contexts on the design and pedagogy of the PGDip. The book is organised around the key themes of professional knowledge, identity and agency amongst educators, discipline-specific approaches to teaching and learning, the effectiveness and influence of professional education programmes, the role of critical reflexivity in teaching practices and the complexities of supervising postgraduate research.

The structure of the book

The book is structured into five parts featuring contributions from multiple authors and incorporating multi-site analyses. It draws on a variety of programmes and disciplinary contexts using diverse methodological approaches and data collection methods. The content of the book transitions from general theoretical deliberations on professional learning to more concrete, disciplinary-based and practical applications. Overall, the approach is qualitative and consists of in-depth exploration across sites, programmes, designers and perspectives.

Part I: Theoretical Foundations and Reflective Practice

This part of the book lays the theoretical groundwork for understanding how postgraduate diplomas contribute to the development of academics as educators. It explores the intricate interplay between knowledge, agency, and identity in relation to academics as teachers, drawing on a range of theoretical perspectives to highlight how professional learning in higher education extends beyond acquiring new teaching strategies. The book emphasises that teaching in higher education involves processes of rethinking and reimagining one's place within the academy, informed by reflective practice and critical engagement with theory.

This argument is articulated in Chapter one by Dison, Vorster and Naidoo, who reflect on the rapidly changing higher education context and the need to equip academics to become reflective, scholarly teachers who can navigate and contribute meaningfully to their institutions and beyond. The authors emphasise the need for academics to become scholarly teachers who engage critically with knowledge and theory within their specific contexts. This engagement fosters reflective practice and drives transformation in teaching and learning, ultimately enhancing student success. It addresses complex challenges in higher education pedagogy within the South African context.

The chapter by de Klerk, Benvenuti and McGregor homes in on individual university teachers at a micro level. An analysis of agential change at such a micro level can provide insight into how and why a PGDip (HE) can contribute to the professionalisation of teaching in higher education. The authors argue that individuals have as much potential to advance higher education and its goals as do collectives. They demonstrate this by comparing the agential and professional identity shifts experienced by Linda, a PGDip alumnus, to other alumni whose shift in agency appears less demonstrable. Even though it focuses on one individual, the lessons learned are transferable and the analysis points to why programmes like the PGDip may not always succeed in meeting their aims.

Chapter three engages with theoretical work on professional identity to illuminate how postgraduate study supports academics in constructing and negotiating their identities as teachers, often in environments where research is privileged over teaching. Identity formation is presented here not as a linear progression, but as a dynamic and ongoing process influenced by institutional norms, disciplinary cultures, and personal histories. In her chapter, Adams theorises lecturers' (faculty's) participation in professional development initiatives and the formation of their professional identities as teachers in higher education. The case study explores the interplay of the structural, cultural and agential conditioning mechanisms in the emergence of lecturers' professional academic identity. A vignette explores how one lecturer (Mike) mediated the social contexts of the PGDip, his academic department and the university to account for the formation of his professional academic identity. The chapter strongly advocates for the significance of social realism in understanding professional academic identity development, particularly regarding an individual lecturer's capacity for autonomous action (agency) within the structural-cultural nexus.

Part II: PGDip (HE) Implementation and Transformation

Academics occupy multiple roles while situated within disciplinary communities and departmental structures. The four chapters in this section continue to explore, in diverse ways, the significance of theory and critique university practices that have contributed to a diminished sense of community and accountability amongst academics. The authors engage with the growing prominence of teaching and learning in higher education discourses and practices (Horrod, 2023) and reflect on the value of theoretical and professional knowledge gained from the PGDip (HE). The chapters demonstrate a clear understanding of how educational concepts and processes have enhanced their teaching capacity.

The chapter by Padayachee, Dison and Ganas makes a theoretical contribution through the development of the “3P Framework” for evaluating professional development impact. The framework integrates personal, professional, and pedagogical

Introduction

dimensions and draws on a combination of evaluation and professional development sources to inform teaching practice. They propose the multi-dimensional framework as a means to capture and illustrate the broad impact of the PGDip in Higher Education on teaching practices, professional agency, advocacy, and transitions in academic identity.

The chapter by Uys, Sirkhotte and Salie, using Shulman's categorisation of knowledge also offers a useful lens for understanding what academics need to know in order to teach effectively in higher education. The chapter extends Shulman's framework by proposing new knowledge categories to provide different insights into academic development. The social realist view of agency is used to examine how structural and cultural contexts enable or constrain academics' capacity to act purposefully in their teaching roles. This perspective challenges overly individualistic notions of agency, emphasising instead the contextual and relational dimensions of becoming a teacher in higher education.

The findings in the chapter by Ntšohi, Mosito and Kanjume unravel the dynamics and multifaceted dimensions that contribute to the evolution of teacher identities, focusing on the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education Programme at the National University of Lesotho. Evaluation of the programme reveals its significant contribution to transforming participants' professional identities as higher education teachers. The authors examine the experiences of PGDip participants prior to their engagement with the programme and the competencies that they believe they developed as a result of doing the PGDip and that will equip them to teach in a rapidly changing higher education context.

The final chapter in Part II, authored by West, presents an authentic autoethnographic account of identity transformation experienced during a PGDip (HE). Using the Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) semantics dimension, the chapter analyses the evolving nature of academic identity throughout the learning journey. West highlights the transformative potential of PGDip Higher Education programmes in supporting discipline experts to develop dual professional identities as subject specialists and

as educators within their disciplines. He analyses the shifts in his writing on the course as a proxy for detecting shifts in his gaze from a disciplinary expert to that of a teacher of the discipline.

PART III: Disciplinary Applications and Impacts

The chapters that are grouped in this section highlight the importance of belonging to an academic community and what Meyer and Land (2005) refer to as ways of thinking and practising in the disciplines. Each author offers an account of how the PGDip (HE) deepens their understanding of teaching as a socially situated practice shaped by their relationship with students, their disciplinary context, departmental culture, and institutional environment. The chapters emphasise the centrality of a dialogical approach to teaching and learning, emphasising that the advancement of the broader knowledge project relies on active engagement, collective inquiry, and the iterative process of critically appraising and refining ideas.

The chapter by Mashifana, Roopchund, Seedat, Mathaba and Sithole explores the transformation of engineering educators through professional development in the PGDip (HE). Using a transformational lens, the authors position teaching identity and a pedagogy of care as central skills, offering valuable insights into the gains achieved and the possibilities for enhancing teaching practice. They demonstrate how the PGDip (HE) addresses universal challenges in tertiary engineering education by equipping educators with tools for reflective teaching.

Similarly, Campbell's chapter, situated within a professional Master's programme in Counselling Psychology, highlights the transformative impact of the PGDip (HE) in shaping evidence-based teaching practices and promoting critical reflection. The author contends that the integration of theoretical frameworks with reflexive practice empowers educators to navigate and respond to the complexities of transformation within their teaching. She illustrates how the PGDip (HE) has equipped her to translate disciplinary expertise into meaningful learning experiences that actively engage students and prepare them to respond to the needs and challenges of the broader South African society.

In his chapter on a Mathematical Programming course, Atemkeng reflects on how the PGDip (HE) has influenced his approach to curriculum development. Drawing on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), he applies this framework to enhance mathematical programming instruction. He demonstrates how student feedback prompted a re-evaluation of his course design and pedagogical strategies, particularly in addressing misalignments within the curriculum.

Part IV: Postgraduate Supervision and Development

The two chapters in this section highlight the value of the PGDip (HE) in enhancing the quality of the supervisor-student relationship within postgraduate supervisory contexts. They reveal that certain supervisory approaches are more effective than others in engaging with the intellectual demands of supervision and in supporting the processes that facilitate these tasks. discussing supervision responsibilities and student support needs

Graham and Masson bridge the domains of clinical and research supervision by extending the concept of the “internal supervisor” to postgraduate research contexts. Drawing on literature from supervision pedagogy, clinical supervision, and higher education, they demonstrate how insights from the helping professions can be aligned with relational models of research supervision to enrich the postgraduate supervisory relationship. By adapting the notion of the “internal supervisor” to this context, the authors offer novel perspectives on strengthening reflective supervision capacity within the PGDip (HE) programme.

The chapter on supervision by Fru, Augustine and Fru argues that while the current PGDip (HE) programme offers foundational principles and practices in teaching and supervision, it lacks sufficient emphasis on disciplinary-specific approaches and contexts. The recommendation for discipline-specific pedagogical training in STEM supervision arises from an analysis of challenges unique to science disciplines supported by concrete examples of barriers encountered in STEM postgraduate supervision. A specialised PGDip (HE) tailored for science supervisors would support their professional growth by developing pedagogical

competence and enhancing their capacity to mentor and teach effectively throughout the postgraduate supervision journey.

Part V: Institutional Collaboration and Implementation

The chapter by Tshuma explores the experiences of facilitators of a collaborative inter-institutional PGDip (HE) offered as part of a regional collaboration agreement between three universities in the Western Cape region of South Africa. It analyses the notion of collaborative agency in interinstitutional programme facilitation, where the role of critically reflective teaching in enhancing the quality of lecturers' professional development and teaching practice is considered. It draws on Raelin's framework to understand how facilitators negotiated the collaboration through various dialogic processes.

Conclusion

This final chapter presents a critical and social realist analysis of what this volume offers to an understanding of the influence of a formal programme like the PGDip (HE), as a mechanism for strengthening academics' roles as teachers of their disciplines in contemporary higher education. Vorster and Naidoo examine the structures of the PGDip and the main ideas, concepts and theories studied in PGDips and suggest the ways in which the pedagogical processes of the programme enable them to meet their aims of contributing to the professional learning of academics. They also consider institutional structural and cultural conditions as well as those on the systems level that influence the capacity of PGDips to shape academics' identities as teachers in higher education. Finally, they explore some of the absences evident in PGDips based on the preceding chapters and their own critical reflections and consider a way forward for this formal staff development programme.

References

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