

# AN INTER-INSTITUTIONAL POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHERS: EXPLORING FORMATIVE FEEDBACK DATA FROM THE POSITION OF SOCIALLY JUST PEDAGOGIES

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## Abstract

In January 2014, after many years of preparation, the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education Teaching and Learning [PG Dip (HETL)] – a collaboration between the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, the University of Stellenbosch and the University of the Western Cape – was offered. The qualification is a two-year part-time course, and the first cohort of participants graduated in December 2015. The question that this paper seeks to address is whether a collaborative qualification, offered to academic staff across very different institutions, can make a contribution towards socially just teaching and learning in higher education. The study draws on Nancy Fraser's (2003) conceptualisation of social justice, with its three dimensions of redistribution, recognition and representation, as a framework for reflecting on the extent to which the programme contributed towards the development and understanding of socially just pedagogies in professional learning. This paper draws on data collected from participants' and facilitators' formative feedback on the postgraduate diploma over a two-year period (2014 – 2015). We conclude that offering a single PG Dip (HETL) collaboratively across three universities was socially just in that knowledge and resources were shared, differently placed institutions were brought together, with their different attributes being valued, and participants were given opportunities to interact with and learn from one another across differences. Applying the research findings to practice suggests that programmes in support of socially just professional learning should enhance alignment across the redistribution of facilitator and participant resources, recognise and address participants' concerns and build participants' academic voices – elements key to participatory parity.

**Keywords:** socially just pedagogies, inter-institutional collaboration, professional learning, academic staff development

## 1. INTRODUCTION: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN A CONTEXT OF INEQUALITY

South African higher education is marked by social and material inequalities that continue through deeply embedded cultures and practices to reproduce these inequalities (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Cooper, 2015).

While funds have been made available to redress historical imbalances, many of the difficulties are systemic and related to broader socio-economic factors, such as disparities in staff-student ratios, access to resources and the demography of student populations across different institutions (Leibowitz, *et al.*, 2015). Within this understanding of inequality across the higher education sector, it is recognised that socially just teaching can make a difference, although it is not a panacea (Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2016). The question that this paper seeks to address is whether an inter-institutional collaborative teaching qualification, offered to academic staff across very different institutions, can make a contribution towards socially just professional learning in the diverse South African higher education sector.

The PG Dip (HETL) is a collaboration between the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, the Stellenbosch University and the University of the Western Cape. The qualification is a two-year part-time course, and the first graduations took place in December 2015. The candidates who enrolled for the programme were academic staff from three Western Cape-based universities (8 – 10 academic staff members from each university), as well as 11 academic staff members from the University of Venda.

Table 1 highlights some of the variances across the collaborating institutions, including differences in staff qualifications, permanent staff allocations, staff-student ratios, and institution type. There are also additional inequalities associated with institutional histories and their geographical location. The table does not show patterns of institutional cultures, where the institutions draw their students from, or how their fee structure might contribute to their resources and infrastructure. Stellenbosch University, for example, has a strong research culture that is foregrounded in staff practices. The three historically disadvantaged universities, because of their student populations, need to focus on teaching (despite their research aspirations or achievements) and lack many of the facilities of the more prestigious university. The geographical location of the University of Venda creates difficulties in terms of access to infrastructure, resources and attracting and retaining academic staff. The students who attend historically disadvantaged institutions are generally not sufficiently prepared for tertiary studies as they are predominantly drawn from disadvantaged educational backgrounds.

**Table 1:** Institutional descriptions

Institution	Cape Peninsula University of Technology	Stellenbosch University	University of Venda	University of the Western Cape
<b>Location</b>	Urban	Urban	Rural	Urban
<b>Differentiation</b>	Teaching intensive	Research intensive	Teaching intensive	Teaching/Research
<b>Type</b>	Technology	Traditional	Comprehensive	Traditional
<b>Ranking cluster</b>	2	1	3	1
<b>Student numbers</b>	32,167	27,372	10,679	18,009
<b>Staff/student ratio</b>	1:42	1:21	1:33	1:32
<b>Total permanent staff</b>	765	1,281	328	559
<b>Staff with PhDs</b>	195	1,065	114	389

Data from the Council on Higher Education Vital Stats 2013; Ranking data from CHET (2014); Differentiation data from Bunting (2014).

The 'ranking' categories were taken from a CHET (2014) report in which South African public universities were compared with regard to a) academic staff input (i.e., the qualifications and NRF rating of academic staff), 2) undergraduate to Master's student output (or graduation rate), and 3) high-level knowledge output. The universities were clustered into 3 groups, depending on their scores in the three categories above. Cluster 1 includes the traditional 'Top 5' South African universities (e.g., Stellenbosch University), but also shows that this cluster is changing, for example, the University of the Western Cape is now included in Cluster 1. Cluster 2 includes several previously disadvantaged institutions, but also includes the University of the Free State and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Cluster 3 includes most previously disadvantaged universities and the University of South Africa. The CHET data makes the point that institutional positions are changing and that, empirically, South Africa has a differentiated system 'that is more unequal than what it is diverse' (Bunting, 2014). Universities included in the PG Dip (HETL) thus included universities across the different ranking clusters, differentiations, in different locations and with different access to resources.

The PG Dip (HETL) had three broad aims: 1) to develop, enhance, change and contextualise participants' practices in ways that would benefit and value diverse students' 'learning, doing and being' in their departments, disciplines, and programmes, 2) to provide opportunities for participants to investigate (and challenge) their own practices through critical reflection and educational research; and 3) to develop participants' ability to act as change agents in their own, and wider, higher education contexts for the purpose of challenging dominant discourses in higher education, particularly those that undervalue and undermine the importance of the teaching role of academic staff.

We understood that the contextual differences shown in Table 1 would impact on teaching and learning practices across contexts. For example, teaching in a poorly resourced institution with a 1:42 staff to student ratio of largely underprepared undergraduate students in predominantly STEM disciplines makes different demands on academic staff than teaching in a research-intensive institution where it is expected that staff will supervise large numbers of postgraduate students. The key contextual features associated with history, geography and resources cannot be ignored in an unequal society like South Africa and it was anticipated that a deep understanding of the contextual enablements and constraints of the institutional contexts would inform how socially just pedagogies might be attained through inter-institutional collaboration.

## **2. INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Researchers and theorists have focused on issues of social justice in primary and secondary education, perhaps because social injustice is more clearly visible in basic educational provision in terms of socioeconomic disadvantage, racism, and cultural oppression. Concerns around social justice in inter-institutional collaboration in higher education has tended to be limited to research collaboration (Lang, 2002) or North-South research and teaching linkages (Farrel, *et al.*, 2015; Sidhu, 2015). Inter-institutional teaching, particularly across advantaged and disadvantaged institutions, is relatively uncommon. Bozalek, *et al.*, (2010) argue that there is a need for innovative approaches for engaging with difference in South African higher education, and that one means of achieving this could be through innovative pedagogical approaches. In the international context, Verbaan (2008) and Santamaría, *et al.*, (2014) propose inquiry-based learning in inter-institutional collaborations towards social justice. These (and other) studies point out that higher educational institutions are both implicated in and reflect the social, cultural and economic norms and values of their societies; thus:

The social justice goal of constructing societies which are more inclusive, fair and democratically enabling remains a central normative and policy challenge, both in relation to the contribution of higher education to societal progress as well as within higher education itself (Singh, 2011: 491-492).

A number of theorists have attempted to bring education and equality into a productive relationship, seeking principled ways in which to achieve socially just structures, systems and practices in higher education. Rawls (1999), for example, understands the concept of social justice as 'fairness' in terms of individuals' right to a quality education and educational provision to the least advantaged. Several theorists have challenged the understanding of social justice as distributive justice, because it equates education with the distribution of material goods.

Iris Young (1990) argues that this type of social justice neglects the institutional context and social structures that determine distributive patterns of resources. Gerwitz (2006) and North (2006) similarly note that it is too convenient to equate social justice with distributive justice and to overlook the institutional processes and social structures that are the producers of these distributions in higher education. Gerwitz (1998) emphasises social inclusion, the humane treatment of all, equal recognition of the worth of all members of society, empowerment, and the celebration of diversity. Gale and Tranter's (2011) view of social justice values a positive regard for group differences and for educational processes based on group representation. Young's (1990) conceptualisation of social justice encompasses collective emancipation that is closely intertwined with individual liberation.

In a more radical perspective on social justice, Amartya Sen (2009) understands social justice as an ongoing task that needs to be understood in context. At the core of Sen's argument is respect for 'reasoned differences' in our understanding of what a 'just society' might be. Patton, Shahjahan and Osei-Kofi (2010) contend that social justice in higher education requires a multi-faceted, holistic, and contextual approach to understanding the concept of social justice:

In light of the questions we raise, what we are certain of is that higher education must deliberately move toward advancing a social justice agenda comprised of more theoretical scholarship and data driven research, grounded in social justice that can inform policies, practices, and decisions that influence post-secondary institutions (2010: 276).

We draw on Fraser's (2003; 2009) trivalent conceptualisation of social justice with its dimensions of redistribution, recognition and representation to 'advance a social justice agenda' in our own study.

### **3. SOCIALLY JUST PEDAGOGIES: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Applying Fraser's (2009) trivalent conceptualisation of social justice to inter-institutional professional learning requires what Maton and Chen (2016) call a 'translation device' to bridge the discursive gap between the theoretical concepts and the research context. In 'translating' the concepts of redistribution, recognition and representation into their equivalents in the context of inter-institutional pedagogical practice, the following concepts and exemplars were proposed:

**Table 2:** A translation device for socially just pedagogies in inter-institutional professional learning

Fraser's modes of social ordering	Dimensions of social justice	Inter-institutional collaboration	Professional learning on the PG Dip (HETL)
Redistribution	Economic	Sharing of resources	Sharing of knowledge and experiences
Recognition	Cultural	Parity of esteem	Affirming diversity (disciplinary, institutional and individual)
Representation	Political	Collective decision-making	Enabling different voices through critical reflection

Table 2 shows how Fraser's modes of social ordering were adapted for the purpose of local sense-making in an inter-institutional collaboration in a context of inequality in order to enable socially just professional learning on the PG Dip (HETL). Socio-economic justice is achieved through the equal redistribution of the resources of society; redistribution in educational contexts is achieved through sharing of expertise and experience. Cultural oppression and misrecognition can occur when there is no parity of esteem or affirmation of difference. The third pillar of social justice, representation, is necessary to avoid excluding participants on the assumed attributes of their institutional affiliation, race, gender, age – and instead to enable their own voices to develop. Representation in professional learning goes beyond ensuring that course participants have a say in what is learned and how it is learned; it is about developing one's own professional and academic voice. Bringing the three principles together, we can say that social justice would be achieved if course participants were provided with the resources, status and voice necessary to enjoy parity of participation. Thus sharing the resources of knowledge and experience, affirming disciplinary, institutional and individual diversity and creating a space for 'voices' to develop through critically reflective practices emerge as key indicators of a socially just pedagogy for professional learning in a context of inter-institutional collaboration.

Socially just pedagogies and pedagogies for social justice differ, although both intend to bring about social transformation. While a PG Dip (HETL) for social justice would require content that was specifically focused on the theory and practice of social justice in higher education, the inclusion of socially just pedagogies implies a critically reflective approach to curricular content, concern for participatory parity, equality of provision and support. Socially just pedagogies understand higher education both as a positional good and as a means of affirming and valuing students' experiences of teaching and learning (Bozalek & Dison, 2012). Socially just pedagogies require that all course participants should have equal access to educational resources and should experience positive relationships with facilitators and peers. Socially just pedagogies focus on the inclusion of participants' experiences and concerns in their professional learning.

These course elements contribute to 'participatory parity' (Fraser, 2009) or the ability to interact equally with one's peers, which is the corner-stone of social justice.

#### **4. A METHODOLOGY FOR ASSESSING SOCIALLY JUST PEDAGOGIES**

The larger aims of the PG Dip (HETL) were: to develop teaching and learning practices that benefitted and valued students' 'learning, doing and being'; to provide opportunities for participants to investigate and challenge their own practices through critical reflection and educational research; and to develop participants' ability to act as change agents in their own, and wider, higher education contexts. Conceptualising these aims within the theoretical framework provided by inter-institutional professional learning, using socially just pedagogies, suggests a research methodology that is similarly grounded in socially just research principles and practices.

When the inter-institutional context is as diverse as it is in our study there need to be many opportunities for participants to voice their concerns and to provide feedback to their facilitators. Accordingly, the main source of data for the study was from formative feedback on the three core modules of the PG Dip (HETL) qualification (namely, Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (TALHE), Assessment in Higher Education (AHE) and Research for Enhancing Teaching and Learning (RETL)). Participants' formative feedback to the course facilitators was a component of their 'representation' on the course. Participants' feedback was elicited during and after each of the modules; feedback was obtained from survey responses, short reflections and focus group discussions with an external observer who sat in on the module contact sessions and wrote reflective reports. The formative and final assessment comments on participants' work made by the course facilitators were available for this study, as were the progress and end-of-module reflective reports written by the module convenors. In addition, each module was externally examined and the examiners' reports were included as study data. Ethical clearance was obtained to use the data described above, and the participants provided us with informed consent to use their work (such as their reflections and assessment tasks) for scholarly and course evaluation purposes.

Participants' feedback was taken extremely seriously by the facilitators as a key aspect of socially just teaching and learning – and although not all the participants' requirements could be addressed, their feedback was discussed during face-to-face sessions and was used to inform planning for the following module and for general course revision.

## 5. REDISTRIBUTION: SHARING KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES AND EXPERIENCES

Sharing knowledge and experiences across institutions and between participants and facilitators was at the heart of the PG Dip (HETL). In academic staff development there is never a homogenous group. In the case of the PG Dip (HETL), participants came from a range of different disciplines, had different levels of teaching expertise – and each one expected the course to meet his/her own particular needs. Participants were placed in inter-institutional groups to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and practices across institutions. Participants valued these opportunities to share their practice as university teachers, whether this was at the level of theoretical engagement or at the level of sharing practical skills or experiences with facilitators and colleagues. All the assignments were designed to be interactive and to include elements of collaboration. The sharing of knowledge and experience was central to the success of the programme.

There was concern amongst the participants themselves about whether the intended sharing of knowledge was as effective as it could have been, given participants' diversity. Commenting on a theory-based group task, a participant comments:

I'm a little unsure if the topic itself was not a bit too 'heavy' or difficult as a group project. Some people really struggled to understand what they needed to do, but maybe that is and will always be the nature of group work. But a topic like this I would have preferred to tackle myself and rather do a 'lighter' concept as a group project (Participant 1).

There was considerable variation across candidates' submissions – with some participants producing a very high level of work. Some participants were already established academics and paid noteworthy attention to scholarly detail in their assignments, while others produced quite superficial work or struggled with the assessment requirements (particularly theory-based reflection). These disparities in achievement did not go unnoticed by the candidates themselves (as the quotation above indicates) or by the facilitators. Reflecting after the completion of the first module, the convenor writes:

...we perhaps should have a kind of optional pre-introduction to the basics – or some basic material on the TALHE website for those who have come to the course without having done some basic teaching and learning course (such as one or more of the CHEC courses, or institutional new lecturer introductory course on teaching and learning etc.) The TALHE course will necessarily bear the brunt of 'underprepared' candidates, being the first course in the programme (Convenor 1).



While some candidates initially felt that the differences within groups inhibited collaboration, as the course progressed most participants found benefit in collaborative learning, despite the challenges posed when working with colleagues from different contexts or at different stages in their teaching trajectories:

I have gained more confidence in myself in terms of academic writing and through the processes of giving and receiving feedback. Patience was important in this process as everyone is not on the same level in terms of their varied research journeys. Collaboration with colleagues from other disciplines has been enriching and has indeed broadened my knowledge (Participant 2).

Participant 2's feedback was provided towards the end of the programme. As collaborative engagement across difference become the 'norm' on the programme, the growth provided by balancing peer review and facilitator support was increasingly valued:

The peer review results from the presentation were critical in building the research proposal before its final submission. It gives a third party opinion that will be critical as both facilitators and peers made significant contributions (Participant 3).

The relationship between participants and facilitators emerged as an important aspect of a socially just pedagogy for professional learning: participants valued clear, constructive feedback on their work, and appreciated facilitators taking on more of a mentoring role, paying attention to their own contexts, their identities as colleagues, and acknowledging the particular difficulties that they were experiencing:

The feedback received was very helpful in re-channelling certain concepts in a different direction. This meeting also was a non-threatening environment where a diverse group of colleagues and educators felt encouraged to interact in a conducive manner that will benefit all of us (Participant 4).

## **6. RECOGNITION: PARTICIPANTS' OWN CONTEXTS AND PRACTICES**

Enabling the participants to bring their own institutional contexts, disciplinary concerns and individual practices into the course was necessary for 'recognising' the participants. The focus on participants' own practice at a range of levels, including theorisation that supported practice, was valued:

I enjoyed the idea of Assignment 1, as I always wanted to understand the learning theories and was it actually out there, but often don't have the time.

So Assignment 1 'forced' me to spend time reading and reflecting on a theory (Participant 5).

Difficulties were experienced, however, when the level of theoretical engagement seemed too far removed from participants' own practice, or was over-challenging, or 'mis-recognised' them:

I was still at a loss as the explanations went by very fast and what I still lack is how this theory is useful for me as a lecturer. Where does understanding a theory come into play? (Participant 6)

Facilitators expressed concerns about the focus on practice at the level of the PG Dip (HETL). As a postgraduate qualification, convenors and facilitators initially felt that the course should be a preparation for Master's level studies in higher education, but came to realise that the focus should shift more strongly towards practice:

The implications for practice (for all aspects) were not sufficiently included (e.g., either through the presentation, or through follow-up small group discussion) (Convenor 1).

The module is about assessment but we did a somewhat meta-assessment course by framing it as feedback...we did not focus enough on principles etc. (Convenor 2).

Following the module on Assessment in Higher Education, the convenor asks:

Did we adequately link this module to their own assessment practice? ... not enough about assessment tools, hands-on stuff. Varieties of assessment methods and approaches, the more practical aspects, were not addressed in the five days. The focus is on how to think about assessment and not about how to 'do' the assessment in your module. We need to concretise things more – to make it more applicable to their practice. We did not think a practice focus was appropriate at PG Dip level ... (Convenor 2).

Similar concerns about the need to focus more on practice are echoed by the external examiner:

...should there not be more emphasis on relevance to their own teaching and learning context? especially if this is a diploma course, where I assume many of the participants are wishing to improve their own practice? (External Examiner)

In reflecting on whether we affirmed our diverse group of participants, we believe this was only partially achieved, and only achieved with some candidates.

The three core modules did not give sufficient attention to the candidates' own contexts and did not sufficiently foreground practice as the structuring logic of the programme. We, the facilitators, were perhaps too eager to share our own (academic development) knowledge with participants, rather than use our academic development knowledge to support them in their own practice. 'Practice' increasingly came to be seen as a proxy for 'recognition', and perhaps the reason why it was so important to the participants and for the achievement of a socially just pedagogy. 'Recognition' comes from the world of classroom practice. To avoid 'misrecognition' we would need to more effectively integrate authentic instances of candidates' practice within the PG Dip (HETL) programme. As course facilitators we need to understand more about how participants' experiences in their own classrooms could be integrated into the programme to realise more meaningful and socially just professional learning. Foregrounding practice does not imply neglecting theory; theory is present in the programme to underpin practice and to develop the conceptual tools for critical reflection.

## **7. REPRESENTATION: STRENGTHENING PARTICIPANTS' VOICES**

An inter-institutional programme must enable all to participate; to do this it has to deliberately create spaces where participants are able to develop their own voices. Developing one's own voice is central to participatory parity – whether on the programme itself or in other contexts. Developing one's own voice is achieved only in part from theoretical learning; the main way to develop one's voice is through critical reflection as a consistent practice. While learning through critical reflection is a key concept in the arts, humanities and social sciences and many professions, such as nursing or architecture (Edwards & Daniels, 2012), for some colleagues in the STEM disciplines critical reflection was something unfamiliar and needed to be more formally taught, or made more explicit.

Reflective practice is the bedrock of professional identity (Schön, 1987). Reflecting on practice and acting on reflection is a professional imperative. Critically reflective practice is understood as the process of learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and/or practice (Edwards & Daniels, 2012; Reich & Hager, 2014; Siebert & Walsh, 2013). This involves examining the assumptions of everyday practice, requiring practitioners to be self-aware and to critically evaluate their own responses to practice situations. By engaging in critical reflection, practitioners open up their actions to scrutiny, and although they might become subject to self-control and self-surveillance (Zembylas, 2006), if implemented meaningfully, reflection invites practitioners to question the ethics, values and underpinning theory that form the basis of their practice.

As such, critical reflection on practice offers a potential challenge to existing practices in higher education and is the basis of development towards a more scholarly, research- and theory-informed 'voice':

Application of research skills to a different field certainly develops my researching and writing approach to topics outside of my academic 'comfort zone' (Participant 7).

Stretching candidates beyond their 'comfort zones' to develop their voices was precisely the intention. Such 'stretching' should not, however, 'over-stretch' candidates. We take the metaphor of 'fit-stretch' from the literature on technology assessment (e.g. Rip & Joly, 2012). In the introduction of new technologies 'fitting to ongoing local practices is only one possible strategy ... local practices might have to be stretched' (Rip & Joly, 2012). Similarly, in learning to critically reflect on practice there is an optimum fit-stretch balance. The following comment suggests the fine line between fitting the course to candidates' practice and stretching candidates beyond their current practice:

...maybe we can't change all our practices, but we'll be more aware of them. Adopt own style, for people new to academia we learn from others, a bit confusing ... I thought constructive alignment was the right thing...now I have to look more deeply into it... (Participant 8).

One of the convenors reflected that the facilitators need to model 'fit' and 'stretch' by drawing on theory to reflect on the PG Dip (HETL) itself:

The theoretical overview was very useful ... but should be used to frame the approach that is chosen [i.e., in the module] – there were too many theories – this was confusing ... (Convenor 1).

In other words, we should have made explicit the theoretical underpinning of the PG Dip (HETL) itself, and modelled the process of reflection against theory in our own teaching practice. This concern was echoed by the external examiner:

My main concern is for greater alignment of tasks with a golden thread and with sequencing between tasks (External Examiner).

The 'golden thread' of reflection against theory would provide the principle of structural coherence, while the sequencing of tasks should aim towards deeper levels of understanding practice. The logic of this structure and sequence would enable a stronger emergence of participants' voices. The opportunities that the programme did create for participants' own voices to emerge through interaction with one another across institutions and through critical reflection on their own practice were valued:

I really appreciated the peer feedback. In fact, thanks to these sessions I have learnt to give, receive and respond to feedback in a critical manner, which I believe helps my voice as an author (Participant 9).

Participant 9 points to a key paradox: the emergence of a strong, individual voice is made possible through interactions with others. The external examiner framed this as the 'public-personal continuum':

Teaching is a strange thing: on the one hand it is informed by public, social issues, but on the other, one has to think deeply and personally about what one does, one's style etc. I am wondering aloud where one pitches a course like this, on the public-personal continuum (External Examiner).

If we want to achieve a more 'public' level of professionalism in the programme, we would need to set tasks that are relevant to this requirement, such as requiring candidates to advise others, to attempt to effect change within a department, or contribute in some way to teaching and learning beyond their own practice. To achieve this, candidates would need to have confidence in their own professional voices (Walker & McLean, 2013). There were some examples of feedback from the candidates that suggested that this level of professionalism had been attained; one candidate explained that she was drawing on what she had learned in the course 'to provide feedback on end-of-semester reviews' in her department (Participant 10). For such capability to emerge from the programme more attention should be paid to both the necessary underpinning knowledge and practical support for the emergence of voice. To adapt Nancy Fraser's (2009) dictum: there can be no sharing of knowledge or affirmation of participants without the development of voice.

## **8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS TOWARDS ENHANCING SOCIALLY JUST PEDAGOGIES ON THE PG DIP (HETL)**

In offering a single PG Dip (HETL) collaboratively across very different universities, we attempted to engage in a socially just process in which knowledge and resources were shared, differently placed institutions were brought together, with their different attributes being valued, while participants across these institutions were given opportunities to interact with one another in spite of differences. Following the analysis of the formative feedback data, we conclude that our programme needed greater alignment across the three key areas that were identified as the basis of socially just pedagogies: 1) the sharing of knowledge resources, 2) the recognition of participants' concerns (particularly with regard to their own practice) and 3) the development of participants' own voices that is a necessary pre-condition for participatory parity.

We conclude that socially just professional learning should more consciously draw the curricular logic from the world of participants' practice. In this regard we need to develop better synergy between areas of candidates' work and the curriculum of each module.

We need to pay more attention to the different contexts of the participants and provide a wider variety of assignments that play to their strengths (i.e., a 'fit' strategy). Some candidates are deeply immersed in research cultures, some are working in non-teaching posts (e.g., library, technical support), some have a greater degree of familiarity with educational issues (e.g., have worked on curriculum renewal, or played a teaching and learning role in their department) while others are newcomers to higher education and to teaching and learning. We also need to 'stretch' candidates with regard to supporting their engagement with the theories that underpin their practice. While critical reflection was foregrounded as the 'golden thread' across all modules, and is key to the development of participants' voices, this needed to be explicitly taught as some participants were unfamiliar with this concept, which is basic to socially just professional learning in educational fields.

'Professionalising' university teachers is commonly understood as bringing academic staff from a variety of different disciplines (e.g., engineering, nursing, botany, chemistry, etc.) into the discipline of education. Most academics feel comfortable in their home disciplines; this is their knowledge base from which their expertise develops. Moving away from this comfort zone can feel threatening and de-stabilising (Vågan, 2011). It takes considerable investment to establish expertise and it can be uncomfortable to re-assume the role of novice. Colleagues in our training rooms are simultaneously occupying the roles of expert and novice. The colleagues whom we seek to 'professionalise' are therefore understood to be 'strangers in a strange land' (Adendorff, 2011). Along with the understanding that academic staff are 'strangers' in the staff development training room, PG Dip programmes often insist that participants be 'rigorous' in their use of 'theory' (Brew, 2011), 'problematise' their own practice (Reich & Hager, 2014) and engage in reflective practice (Hanraets, *et al.*, 2011). As part of the professionalising process, it would be 'necessary to disrupt participants' existing beliefs about teaching and learning' (Vorster & Quinn, 2012). In this paper, we argue that these generally held beliefs need to be reconsidered with a view to promoting socially just pedagogies to support academic staff for the challenges of working in a diverse and unequal society.

It is our responsibility as academic developers to understand more about the teaching spaces that are participants' primary sites of practice for the purpose of 'recognising' our colleagues and offering meaningful support. It is crucial to build a supportive network to enable the transition from PG Dip (HETL) candidate to professional university teacher. Supportive networks contribute to individual learning and growth, and professional identities are produced in and through such participation. Such networks are also a means of involving oneself with a larger, perhaps even a global, landscape of university teachers. Professional learning is dependent on relationships built between peers and facilitators, who will be the initial contacts in the candidates' distributed network of fellow teachers, collaborators, mentors and advisors.

Socially just professional learning requires the extension and maintenance of meaningful professional networks and professional dialogues.

## **9. FINAL REFLECTIONS: APPLYING THE RESEARCH FINDINGS TO PRACTICE**

We were able to apply findings from the formative evaluation to the second cycle of the PG Dip (HETL) (2016-2017), and offer these final reflections on how the research findings might be applied in practice to a formal professional learning programme. With a view to enhancing participatory parity, we offered an optional three day pre-start off-campus breakaway in February 2016 in order to create a space in which to introduce the key concept of critical reflection as well as build the foundational knowledge that would be elaborated on in later modules. Building the 'discourse' around teaching and learning before the official start of the programme supported participatory parity by enabling all participants to meet at the same level at the official course start. The time away created a nurturing environment conducive to the 'recognition' of participants; it was a space in which participants could get to know each other and the facilitators. The facilitators learned about participants' contexts, concerns, disciplines and programmes and were able to adapt and personalise course content and assessment requirements in ways that could both address participants' contexts of practice as well support their deeper level engagement with theory. With regard to sharing resources, the breakaway enabled participants and facilitators at the different institutions to connect across institutional boundaries, share knowledge and learn from one another.

In our own critical reflections we have come to realise that while there is much we can do to improve the PG Dip (HETL), we should also maintain those aspects of the course that were valued by the participants. As we apply the research findings and implement changes to our programme, we need to also remind ourselves of its achievements:

I was provided with the support from both my peers and the facilitator and was afforded the opportunity to be myself and also allow my voice and personality to be interwoven into my writing. I think the fact that I also chose a topic that I am very passionate about also helped in the process of making my own voice heard (Participant 11).

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