AGENCY AS FORM OF DISCURSIVE PRACTICE: THE CASE OF THE CURRICULUM OFFICERS' FORUM AT A UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

8th Annual University Teaching and Learning Higher Education Conference

UKZN

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OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

- Overview of Higher Education in SA
- The need for curriculum change
- The model at CPUT
- Focus of research: HoD, CO
- Discourse Analysis
- Gazes identified
- Findings and Discussion
- Recommendations

OVERVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SA

Changes and discussion documents:

- Proposal for flexible curriculum
- Articulation Draft Document
- Post-School restructuring

HEQSF (2013)

– focus of this study – imperative to bring about curriculum change for alignment

- Revision of existing qualifications
- Developing new qualifications

THE CONTEXT OF UOTS

▶ HEQF (2007) – Category A, B and C Qualifications

▶ Most significant changes impact on UoTs

▶ Traditional universities mostly Category A

▶ UoTs – combination of A, B and C qualifications

▶ Impact of convenor technikon system

CURRICULUM APPROACH AT CPUT

▶ Curriculum Officer Forum (COs) - Purpose

▶ Focus – Curriculum – National Imperative

▶ Scaffolded approach to capacity building

CURRICULUM OFFICER FORUM

ACADEMICS IN DEPARTMENTS

FACULTY TEACHING & LEARNING COMMITTEES

FOCUS OF RESEARCH

- The role of the COs in their departments in terms of curriculum facilitation

- The relationship between the CO and HoD(s) in curriculum revision of the Category B Diplomas

- The perceived understanding of curriculum revision and how it played itself out in a particular department

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

▶ Professional Academic Development as a field of research and practice

▶ Cultivating Agency and capacity for Curriculum Development

▶ Legitimation practices – using gazes to account for the underlying generative mechanisms(Karl Maton, 2014)

METHODOLOGY

▶ Interviews / Documents

▶ Two levels of analysis – Level 1: `soft eyes' analysing data without imposing theoretical tools – letting data speak for itself

▶ Level 2: Internal language of description (ILD) - External language of description – allowing theory to relate to empirical data

EMERGING DISCOURSE

▶ Departure from CO Forum principles and guidelines for curriculum development

▶ Individualistic control of the process / limited capacity building for staff

▶ Dependency of the department on the CO as the `more knowledgeable other'

▶ Lack of interrogate of knowledge forms Technicist Approach to curriculum revision

▶ Departmental Academic leadership – transient – 3 HoDs in 3 years

▶ Faculty Academic leadership

TRANSLATION DEVICE

	Translation device				
	Interactional relations		Subjective relations		
Data	Indicators	Examples of quotes from the data	Indicators	Examples of quotes	Code
Interviews	Theme 1: Individual ownership of the curriculum revision process Using the cultural capital for personal positional powe, makes this Weaker IR. If she used her knowledge to build capacity in the dept it would have been Stronger IR. When CO left for sabbatical the department seemed lost in translation – no knowledgeable other to lead.	L: I was instrumental to the Category B Qualification; Counter the collective agency; strengthened individual's position as more knowledgeable other to position herself; acquiring capital for positional power. Individualisation led to instrumental technicist approach. Dept had to follow her guidance rather than capacity and development.	Reliance on Individual driver of process	K:Yes, all the things that we received from Lisa from the Curriculum Forum, the HEQF, SF, Sub Framework documents to understand the levels; S: `we had a massive problem … CO had to leave … negatively affected the process'. Based on their subjective view of the process which could be associated with former convenor technikon approach. The acceptance of the leadership in curriculum of the individual was accepted without question. Being a CO, she positioned herself in the dept and was seen as the more knowledgeable other.	IR – Sub R + SOCIAL GAZE

TRANSLATION DEVICE

Theme 3: Confusing harmonization with recurriculation.	L: when we merged, we went through a harmonisation process … So when we merged we had to re-curriculate in course harmonization … the same subject names. The same subject code, the same outcome and in point, the same assessment and that standard. So this re-curriculation that we're doing with you in the Category B Document is not new for us … the thing is we started under the umbrella of harmonization. Conflating harmonization with re-curriculation. Lack of understanding of what re-curriculation implies.	Understanding recurriculation, as simple about harmonising subject names and credits.	L: The problem that we experienced from the staff members and they felt that why are we doing this again? We just completed a harmonisation process, now we're going to something of re-curriculation. So, some of the staff felt a little bit hostile. S: Benchmarking … we look at what is happening in other universities … so I acquired some information which also assisted the process. Benchmarking was about finding out about what other institutions offer, not to interrogate why they offer what they do. Curriculum research is based on benchmarking at this level.	IR – Sub R- (Trained gaze)

DISCUSSION – TRANSLATION DEVICE

Prominent Gazes

▶ Trained Gaze

▶ Social Gaze

Discussion

▶ Lack of knowledge and depth of what curriculum development entails

▶ Superficial changes in curriculum revision

▶ Dependence on the CO (who is meant to be trained) to drive the process

▶ The role of Fundani CHED to provide prescriptions

▶ Empowerment and developing agentic professional identity and developing a cultivated gaze

DISCUSSION CONTINUED

▶ CO as agent of change, and who is viewed as the `more knowledgeable other' (mis) interprets capacity building of CO Forum which impacts on curriculum revision in the department.

▶ Inability to engage with positional power regarding authoritarian decisions – internal (faculty) and external (professional body & key industry/employment partners)

CONCLUSION

- Curriculum development and/or revision is a complex process – emerging field of theory and practice (with reference to the national context)
- Academic training and development does not equate with theory and practice for curriculum development
- Capacity building initiatives are imperative

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT …

▶ Structural and cultural conventions are enduring

▶ Capacity building initiatives could be misinterpreted or misconstrued when applied in practice with negative consequences for qualifications

▶ Evaluation and support needs to happen at a departmental level

▶ Capacity building for curriculum is imperative

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT ...

- Conduct a scoping exercise on how COs are selected and their ability to engage with curriculum development and the ability to scaffold this capacity building to their respective departments;

- Collaboration with other institutions on curriculum development as an emerging field of practice.

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