Is a Ph.D dangerous? An institutional take on what guides professional development policy in teacher education

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• MIE 1973-2014?
  – Teacher education, Curriculum Development, Research
  – Governance and Financing

• Institutional realism: what should guide professional development?
  • individual aspirations v/s institutional “solvency”.


The study

• Case Study of MIE, its professional development policy for staff, who are recruited primarily as teacher educators.

• To analyse the forces which have impacted on institutional choice between a research led professional development programme (doctoral studies) and one which is more practice led.

• The tensions inherent in reconciling this choice with institutional mandate.
Methodology

• Institutional ethnography
  – textually mediated discourses to understand what guides the processes and practices in relation to professional development of teacher educators.
sources of data

- Staff development policies
- Director’s Report to Council
- Budgets
- MoUs on the doctoral programmes
- Doctoral programme handbooks
- List of approved doctoral titles of candidates
- Reports on the conditions of service and salary structure of staff
- Government of Mauritius Acts
- Strategic documents of the Ministry of Tertiary Education
- MIE Strategic Plan 2007-2015
- MIE Self Assessment Report 2007 and 2013
- Tertiary Education Commission Quality Audit Report for MIE
Ruling relation 1: Regulatory agents

• Public institutions serving the state mandate
• External Audit: Surveillance for public higher education - % of Ph Ds- Research & Pub
• Multiple expectations:
  – higher education regulatory body in terms of the high standards of research;
  – Funding agency- Government
  – Stakeholders whose varying needs and interest we serve
Ruling relation 2: Economic status of Teacher Educators @ MIE

• **Staff profile:** From experienced practitioners to more highly qualified young graduates

• **Attraction for teacher educators?**

• **Formal Staff development:**
  – 1999: Induction courses- MA Education, In-house
  – investment for a period of four years on **doctoral studies.**
Ruling Relation 3: International Partnerships

University of Brighton
University of Kwazulu Natal

• **Partners:** Extension of their campus to affirm their “international” agenda
• However: hidden costs for MIE
• Priorities **may conflict**
Staff Development as enactment of the Institutional Research Agenda?

- **MIE Act**: MIE key instrument to push forward the agenda of *educational research* & *educational change* in line with the developmental targets of the country.
  
  - Institutes of Education set up in the *Eastern African* as an extension of the Ministries/Departments of education which were concerned with *provision of academic technical advisory services* (Alladin, 1988)
Tensions

• **Doctoral studies**- largely *scholarly* rather than practical.
  – *Independence of view* nurtured by doctoral studies may be confronted with the *censure of state agents*
Practical concerns

• **Workload**: Adoption of doctoral programmes as a major institutional avenue for professional growth has foregrounded the necessity to devise and implement a concurrent policy for management of workload.

• Ever growing portfolio for which a workload corollary is hard to agree upon.

• The question of **fairness** to both those **who are** pursuing doctoral studies and those **who are not**
Tensions

Institutional existence:

– serving the agenda of the state v/s MIE operating on the same lines as a university with all the attendant implications of scholarship and research, asserting one’s academic identity
Pressure from the “lowlands” of Practice

• The identity of the institute is firmly linked to teacher preparation and education as revealed in its strategic goal of transforming practices at school level.

• Predominance of theories in its programmes (MIE, 2003).

• Policy decision was taken to infuse across programmes a more significant element of school based experience- (Professional Practice Seminars- Contextual Teaching and Learning)
Lessons Learned- What Mauritius has to say to other teacher education faculties & institutions?
Competing demands and priorities.

**Forcefield of Higher Education**

- **Academia**
  - Research based standards of performance
  - Knowledge production as an end in itself
  - Individual driven research projects

- **State**
  - Policy related research
  - Support for reforms

- **Teachers, Schools**
  - Practice related research
  - Curriculum related research
  - Solution seeking research

MIE doctoral programmes?
Professional development?

• Supporting the **transition from teacher to teacher educator** to assist in the development of professional identity (Swennen, Volnam, & Van Essen, 2008)

• Providing **opportunities for research, reflection** and inquiry (Robinson & McMillan, 2006)

• Developing an **institutional culture that links teaching practice to scholarship** and provides space for group interactions (Gallagher, Griffin, Parker, Kitchen, & Figg, 2011)

• Articulating a **knowledge of practice** constructed on awareness of oneself, pedagogy and students (Loughran & Berry, 2005) (John, 2002).
Guiding Principles:
The principle of diversity

- Complexities of the educational landscape necessitates **diversity of perspectives and research practices** to enrich understandings.

- Faculty’s engagement with the terrain of the school- guarantee of sustainability and credibility with practitioners

- Should Doctoral programmes be limited to the methodological orientations of the two partnering universities?
• How faculties of education best serve the interest of its “industry”?

• How can the academics “get their hands dirty” in the lowlands of practice and engage in more policy and practice based research?
• If the main consumers of academic publications are the academics themselves, what is the real impact of all the investment going into teacher education?

• If teachers and other education professionals are to become the primary audience for research outcomes, should research be carried out with them or rather on them?
The principle of equity

**Fairness:** ability to deal with:

- Pressure of *workload*
- Pursuit of *academic excellence*
- Meeting *funding agency’s* and stakeholder’s needs
The Principle of Balance

- need to be research active on the three fronts of academia, policy and practice
- produce innovative practices and research outcomes which stakeholders will find useful and relevant
- skills of inquiry for the world of policy and practice v/s academic agenda
Conclusion

• **Research universities** have held teachers and schools at arm’s length but they may not be able to continue **justifying the huge research funding** that goes their way only on account of their publications and student outcomes.

• Urgent demands for **inquiry based intervention** which would require **teacher educators to articulate a knowledge of practice** constructed **on awareness of self, pedagogy and students** which are not necessarily the attributes of the current doctoral programme.

• **Is PHD dangerous?**