Towards an integrated professional development agenda: The Case of MUT

by

Severino Machingambi

Mangosuthu University of a Technology

Outline

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Essence of Academic Staff Development

- On-going process of education, training, learning & support activities aimed at helping academics grow within their organisations (Marris, 2010)

- A range of formal & informal activities aimed at contributing towards academics capacities' as scholarly educators (Quinn, 2012)

- Main purpose is to enhance educators awareness of the various tasks they must undertake to contribute to the effective education of their students & the accomplishment of the organisation's objectives (Marriss, 2010)

Rationale for Academic Staff Development

- International, national & Institutional, imperatives
- Changed HE landscapes as a result of massification & increased use of ICT & knowledge explosion
- Overall unsatisfactory performance of the RSA HE system as evidenced by low throughput, unsustainable dropout rates esp @ Ist yr level (CHE, 2013).
- Capacitating academics with pedagogical skills so as to enhance their facilitation & mediation of learning skills in a highly disciplinary driven environment.

The Teaching & Learning Development Centre (TLDC)

- Teaching & Professional Development Unit

- Maths and Science Education Unit

- Academic Literacy & Language Unit

Theoretical Framework

- TLDC driven academic staff devpt initiatives are inspired & entrenched in constructivist principles of T&L.
- Knowledge is constructed rather than being discovered (Quigleys, 2011)
- All knowledge & meaningful reality is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings & their world, & developed & transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty, 2003:6).
- Constructivist lecturers help students actively create knowledge thru discoursing, exploring, assessing, questioning &critical reflection on what they are learning.

Setting the stage for a coherent approach to ASD

Too often institutions invest in a laundry list of actions, one disconnected from another. The result is an uncoordinated patchwork of actions whose sum impact on student retention is less than it could or should be (Trigwell & Posser, 1997).

- Training needs analysis
- Developing a professional devpt framework
- Enrolment of academics for the PGDHE
- Pedagogical training for new & less experienced academics

Training needs analysis

- A mini-study on the identification of training needs across the university done in May 2013

- Informed by the felt needs approach

- The beneficiary have to exercise agency in determining what they need to learn & how.

- Quantitative & qualitative data was elicited thru a specially designed questionnaire which was partly structured & partly open-ended.

Outcome of the training needs analysis

- Feedback obtained from the assessment of training needs was subjected to content & category analysis and the following training areas came to the fore:

(a) Pedagogical training

(b) Curriculum Development

(c) Assessment (Bloom's taxonomy)

(d) Developing study/learner guides

(e) Incorporation of ICT in T & L

(f) Registering for educational qualifications

Professional Development Framework (PDF)

- ***Tinto (2012:116) ''Despite years of effort, institutions have yet to develop a coherent framework to guide their thinking about which actions matter most and how they should be organised & successfully implemented*****"**

- The PDF outlines the nature of prof devpt that will be offered to academics, rationale, guiding principles, goals & strategies for the implementation of such programmes at MUT.

- The Framework sought to make ASD systematic, integrated & closely linked to institutional goals & mission statement.

- This PDF had to be aligned with theoretical perspectives, paradigms &models that underpin ASD in HE.

- The draft PDF was scrutinised & validated through institutional statutory meetings.

Enrolment of academics for the PGDHE

- The RSA HE arena requires lecturers with a good blend of sound pedagogical skills, disciplinary knowledge & an understanding of learners & the broader HE context (Badat, 2010, Boughey, 2010).

- In 2013, 14 academics were enrolled for a two yr PGDHE with Rhodes University & UKZN

- The purpose of the programme is to help academics improve their practice & understand their contexts in more pedagogically informed ways (Quinn, 2007)

- Offered thru blended learning model that involves face-to-face interactive sessions as well as an E-Learning platform as back-up

Pedagogical Training for new academics

- Pedagogical training for new lecturers is critical since most of them are recruited straight from industry with little or no b/ground in T&L

- To equip lecturers with theories of T& L as informed by constructivist learning principles

- Focuses on work-based learning to enable academics to examine, reflect & improve on their conceptions of T&L

- Conceptions influence teaching approaches which in turn affect student learning approaches and learning outcomes (Quigleys, 2011)

- The programme thus helps enhance academics facilitation of learning skills

Pedagogical Training cont:

- Consistent with TLDC approach to ASD, the pedagogical program is structured along constructivist principles of learning.

- Academics learn thru active engagement thru collaboration & critical reflection

- Rolled out in a strategic partnership with CHERTL staff, RU.

Pedagogical Training for new academics cont

- 5 day of intensive interactive engagement with pedagogical literature & related activities

- The programme immerses lecturers in a HE instructional discourse.

- The seminar covers aspects such as teaching strategies, learning styles, assessment & curriculum design principles

- Strategic partnership with CHERTL staff, RU.

Pedagogical training cont

- Academics participating in the prog are required to complete assigned tasks, prescribed readings, reflect on learning experiences as well as assessing how what they learn influence their teaching practices.
- Academics receive an RU certificate upon completion.
- TLDC monitors the process thru reflective reports compiled & submitted by participants
- The programme is set to be offered yearly to new lecturers & any other who might need it.

Conclusion

- The programme holds a lot of promise although it is still too early to make any definite statements about its impact on student learning outcomes.

- While this programme is good, the enormity of the problem of low throughput & unsustainable graduation rates at institutional & national level requires many other eclectic approaches to be considered as well.

END

I THANK YOU