



Creating thriving academic teaching and learning environments



Andy Buffler

Department of Physics, UCT
Andy.Buffler@uct.ac.za



André du Plessis

Faculty of Education, NMMU
Andre.DuPlessis@nmmu.ac.za



Thozama Mandindi

T&L Development Unit, WSU
TMandindi@wsu.ac.za

How can programmes of professional development be designed in ways which build positive environments in departments?

We have to acknowledge that different needs exist research-wise and ICT-wise.

We realise that actions of professional development need to be informed by data and research.

We are told that we must establish environments that enable personal growth and enablement, but there is presently so much stress in the system.

We need to establish learning spaces that enable personal growth and enablement.

I found that my colleagues listened to me when I argued for curriculum reform on the basis of results from my research.

Three themes for design

Building a community of practice

Professional development is more effective when there is a strong academic vision in place which is shared and owned by staff. Personal growth relies on the individual investing in the common goals of the group, and trusting colleagues to recognise the value in a community of professional practice.

Dealing with leadership and change

All change is essentially local, and relies on the buy-in from colleagues. Implementation of new ideas is likely to be more effective within a leadership structure which values collegiality and professionalism, and recognises that the primary resource of an institution to be the team of academic staff.

Creating positive interplay between teaching and research

The advancement of teaching and learning relies on the advancement of a culture of research, as these form the core business of higher education. Neither can advance at the expense of the other. Development in teaching and learning should be research-led, and research programmes need to value the key role that teaching and learning plays in their advancement.

I am pleased that my university is trying to develop me as a researcher in ways that recognise my own potential.

I have concerns that there is a growing culture of managerialism at my university and I am worried about the scope I may have to grow as an academic.

We have to promote collegiality and opportunities for mentoring and coaching.

We need to acknowledge that different philosophies and beliefs exist.

We have come to learn that needs and wants are different when dealing with my colleagues. There is no 'one-size fits-all' solution.

I find that talking about my own role as a professional academic is actually quite difficult to do.