



Performative Injunctions in the Higher Education Body: The Discursive Career of Research Capacity Development in a South African University Faculty of Education

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Abstract

This article discusses Research Capacity Development (RCD), in a Faculty of Education at a South African university. It employs the notions of performativity and performance to argue that specific local sites at universities have complex stories to tell about their responsiveness to research output imperatives. The article emphasizes that there is a formative relationship between the specific RCD discursive text of this Faculty and the performance-based activities of its management and academics. The career of RCD in the Faculty is established in the light of specific activities against the background of a small Faculty environment. The article specifically considers the basis for its relative success in the area of doctoral completion by its academic staff and its diminishing article writing output. It draws the conclusion that efforts to secure a vigorous RCD platform depend on the ability to establish a nurturing institutional environment in which a scholarly culture can be encouraged and protected.

Keywords: Universities, Faculty of Education, Research Capacity Development, performativity, performance

Résumé

Cet article traite du développement de capacités de recherche (RCD) dans la Faculté d'éducation d'une université sud-africaine. Il utilise les notions de performativité et de performance pour affirmer que des lieux spécifiques dans les universités ont des histoires complexes à raconter sur leur réactivité aux impératifs de production de recherche. L'article souligne qu'il existe

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une relation formative entre le discours spécifique de cette faculté sur le développement de capacités de recherche et les activités de performance de son personnel administratif et de ses universitaires. Le processus de développement de capacités de recherche au sein de la faculté est établi à la lumière d'activités spécifiques dans un environnement facultaire restreint. L'article examine en particulier les raisons de son succès relatif dans la complétion en doctorat par son personnel académique et la baisse de sa production d'articles. Il en conclut que la mise en place d'une plateforme dynamique de développement de capacités de recherche dépend de la capacité à créer un environnement institutionnel stimulant dans lequel une culture savante peut être encouragée et protégée.

Mots-clés : Universités, Faculté d'éducation, développement de capacités de recherche, performativité, performance

Introduction

Research secures universities their distinctive place in society. Generating new knowledge remains one of their core purposes despite questions about their public utility (see Cloete, Mouton & Sheppard 2015) and increased research productivity outside universities (Cowen 1996: 247). The National Research Foundation (NRF), South Africa's premier Research Capacity Development (RCD), affirmed the centrality of university-based research in national development (see NRF 2008). The NRF has evolved a supportive systemic approach to leveraging RCD. It regards the country's university system as the motor of scientific or knowledge development. The majority of the NRF's RCD funding is channelled through universities, which, in turn, are expected to do cutting edge research and develop the country's next layer of researchers and knowledge producers. Universities can, therefore, be regarded as the country's primary knowledge and research production incubators.

This article questions the view of universities as relatively functional and uniform institutional environments. It suggests that the variegated institutional adaptations across the country's university sector, in response to the research imperative, are largely unknown. If research and knowledge output is meant to be one of the primary defining priorities of universities, it is by no means certain that the extant RCD platforms of universities are aligned to this priority. A cursory glance at the extant literature shows that research production across South Africa's universities is highly variegated and uneven, mapped onto institutional legacies in interaction with complex contemporary dynamics. Not all universities can be regarded as research-led, nor have all been supported to become research-intensive, and it cannot

be assumed that they have internally homogenous and undifferentiated RCD environments. Universities have differentiated pockets of RCD functionality, with some Faculties, Departments or Units more productive than others. This article advances an understanding of the intersecting and formative institutional dynamics that can account for this variegated RCD landscape.

The focus of the article is on RCD processes in a small Faculty of Education at a South African university. The article is based on reflections on my work as a former Director of Research Development in this Faculty from 2003 to 2009. I present this story as an insider fully cognizant of the limitations imposed by my own subjectivity in its narration (see Reed-Danahay 1997). My intention with this narration is not generalisation. Rather, I present it as a think-piece about the goings-on in one institutional site that could stimulate discussion about, and research into, the make-up of the RCD practices in specific contexts. I proceed by discussing RCD with special reference to the Faculty's academic staff, which encompassed a large part of my management work. Doctoral completion and article publication by academic staff are two markers that I use as a reference for understanding RCD success. In other words, for the purpose of the article, these two referents are used as a backdrop for understanding the complex and contested manner in which RCD is lived by academic staff in this Faculty at a specific moment in time. I offer this analysis as a way of highlighting the discursive environment in which universities have to transact their RCD responsibilities. Remarking on the universities as dynamics systems of contradictory functions, Castells (2001: 211) argues that "because universities are social systems and historically produced institutions, all their functions take place simultaneously within the same structure, although with different emphases. It is not possible to have a pure, or quasi-pure, model of a university". Similarly, RCD in South African universities is constituted in intricate historically defined discursive processes and uneven material circumstances. This article suggests that it is the particular texture of specific institutional processes that determines the way RCD plays out, and the 'lived' dynamics inside institutions that make up RCD orientations and practices.

I proceed in the next section by locating the discussion inside a nascent body of literature on RCD at South African universities, from where I develop the notion of performativity as a heuristic tool for understanding RCD in this Faculty. I then go on to describe the impact of the broader regulatory environment on the Faculty, delineating what I argue is the Faculty's performative contours. This is followed by a discussion of the particular discursive character of the Faculty that enabled a certain type of

academic department, which, I argue set up the Faculty's RCD platform in a particular way, and enabled a certain type of RCD behaviour. Finally, I offer a reading of RCD in the Faculty as 'performance'. I suggest that it was the struggle for over ever-diminishing 'head space' in respect of which RCD was established in this Faculty.

Performativity as Lens to Understand RCD Institutional Discursivity

This article explores the institutional adaptation of universities, specifically as it pertains to the research imperative and RCD in particular. A small body of literature, published mainly in the *South African Journal of Higher Education* (SAJHE), has emerged in recent years around the RCD responsiveness of local universities. A generalised anxiety underpins this literature based on questions about the efficacy of universities' RCD capacity and a decontextualised notion of what is regarded as markers of academic success or achievement (see Bitzer 2006; Dison 2004; Chetty 2003; Ilorah 2006; Lues & Lategan 2006; Ruth 2001). Bitzer (2006), for example, argued that the strong drive towards research at one self identified research-orientated university, valorised by performance incentives that are solely based on research ratings and outputs, will undervalue the status of teaching as a scholarly practice. Bitzer warned about the impact of the obsession with research outputs. Marginalising university teaching is one potential consequence. Another consequence is the discounting of the impact of intricate environmental dynamics on the ability of universities to fulfil their research mandates (see Chetty 2003; Ilorah 2006; Lues & Lategan 2006; Ruth 2001).

A crude focus on outputs deflects from attention to RCD as process. The SAJHE literature cited above describe the chequered history of research and knowledge production in the former technikons (now universities of technology) and black universities. Universities of technology, were founded as technology-teaching institutions (see Chetty 2003; Lues & Lategan 2006), while the research capacity at black universities had to overcome an uneven legacy (Ruth 2001), which is a consequence of the apartheid government's neglect of encouraging and funding research at these institutions. Formerly white universities are not uniformly productive despite their financial and infrastructural advantage (Cloete, Maassen, Fehnel, Moja, Gibbon & Perold 2006). What emerges from the literature are highly uneven RCD platforms across the country's university landscape. The normative ideal as espoused in authoritative policy documents (see NRF 2008; 2009) about the importance of the role of universities in producing research, is seemingly not aligned with the challenges that the uneven RCD landscape

presents. The missing dimension in this story, as presented in the extant literature, and arguably in policy quarters and among many universities, is an appreciation of RCD in relation to the extant institutional dynamics at universities. There is a paucity of research on the iterative and formative processes that constitute RCD at universities.

One exception is Balfour and Lenta's (2009: 8-20) portrayal of RCD in a unit in a merged Faculty of Education at the University of Kwazulu Natal (UKZN). They discuss the unit's concerted RCD approach particularly in support of those staff members who joined it from a College of Education without a research profile. The article highlights the various RCD procedures and mechanisms that were employed, and the consequent outcomes, especially for the acquisition of higher degrees and published work by staff in the unit. Building on this work, I set out to provide an analysis of constitutive RCD discourses and processes in another Faculty of Education. I favour the notion of 'performativity' as an analytical lens which allows me to interrogate the relationship between the changing regulative basis of universities and their institutional adaptations. According to Ball (2003: 16), performativity refers to behaviour that are subjected to a mode of regulation that functions inside institutions through the use of judgements, incentive, surveillance, control, rewards and sanctions. Such a mode of regulation determines what type of behaviour is generally operable in institutions and performativity refers to the discursive parameters in respect of which individuals or groups are able to construct their institutional behaviour and practices. I employ 'performativity' to enable me to perform an analysis RCD in this Faculty as the iterative outcome of the Faculty's functional or operational context on the one hand, and the agential processes of staff on the other.

Performativity brings together a focus on underlying structural and regulative processes that affect institutions such as universities, how people inside them are positioned by these processes, and the reflexive responses enacted by academic staff. The conceptual origins of performativity lie in Lyotard's famous work, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984), in which he persuasively argued that the commodification of knowledge is a key characteristic of the postmodern condition, which involves what he calls a "thorough exteriorization of knowledge" (4). As Lyotard explained, "the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the post-industrial age" (3). Knowledge and knowledge relations, he argued, including relations among university staff, are 'desocialised' (7), where professional relations based on trust are replaced by a new commercialised professionalism (8). Consistent with the commodified form, this type of professionalism is driven by the desire

to increase competitiveness and profitability. In line with this reasoning, Cowen (1996) suggested that universities have undergone major reform pressures which have altered their knowledge configurations and internal modes of self organisation. He argued that university reform has centred on questions of systemic efficiency and relevance, both of which are governed by a regime of measurement and debates about the usefulness of research to the national economy.

While the urgency of governments to tie their university systems more tightly to a changing global economy has provided the major impetus for performative injunctions in universities, a key consideration of this article is to understand the adaptive behaviour of academics in their work contexts. I argue that a performativity lens captures the circumscribed positioning of subjects on the one hand, and the ability of these subjects to establish reflexive counter-positionings on the other. I suggest that it is out of the dialectic between *performative positioning* and *counter positioning as performance* that RCD in university environment can be understood.

With regard to performative positioning I draw on Ball (2001: 210) who argues convincingly that,

Performativity is a technology, a culture, a mode of regulation, or even a system of 'terror' ... that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change. The performances of – individual, subjects or organisations – serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection.

Ball describes this new regulative mode as defined by a flow of spectacle-like performativities. He suggests that “it is not the possible certainty of being seen that is the issue, as in the panopticon. Instead, it is the uncertainty and instability of being judged in different ways, by different means, through different agents” (e.g. the appraisal meeting, the peer reviewed article, the quality audit)” (2001: 211). This involves enacting performances through the flow of changing demands, expectations and indicators that make us continually accountable and constantly recorded. University RCD practices are, therefore, based on the principle of uncertainty and inevitability, which lays the basis for what Ball (2001: 211) calls “ontological insecurity”, posing questions such as; are we doing enough? are we doing the right thing? how will we measure up? The resultant performative environment is saturated by unstable expectations and contradictory purposes. People have a sense of feeling permanently visible as they veer between their commitment to the search for an institutional culture aligned to newly defined objectives, while being set up for internal competitive behaviour which is elicited by a language of publication outputs, rankings and ratings.

It is clear that performative positioning in the university environment is set up by institutional interaction with the contemporary regulatory environment. In other words, university settings have to be understood in light of the impact of broader dynamics. Performativity captures the impact of these dynamics on university organisation cultures, which is the focus of the next section. However, I suggest that performativity must also be understood in light of subjective counter positionings that occur inside university settings. Contrary to Ball, who is surprisingly silent on agency, I draw on Kohli's (1999) notion of performance to understand reflexive processes in light of performative imperatives. I look at how subjective processes co-constitute RCD institutional processes.

An analysis of performativity has to capture the constitutive or dialectical relationship between regulative or performative impact and the agential processes inside settings. Turning to such an analytic, I draw on Gole who proffered the view that the "public sphere is not simply a preestablished arena: it is constituted and negotiated through performance" (2002: 183). The notion of performance, a complement to performativity, is offered in order to provide an agency-oriented account of RCD discursivity in the Faculty under consideration. Performance draws on Butler's (1990: 40) construction of performativity in reference to acts of repetition that are socially validated and discursively established in everyday practices. Performance-based reflexivity refers to a situation where human beings "reflect back on themselves, their relations with others ... and those socio-cultural components which make up their public selves" (Gole 2002: 181). Their social practices are based on acute readings of the discursive delimitations in their environment. I suggest that these type of readings and generative practices in the Faculty co-constitute its RDP environment.

Institutional discursivity is, thus, not pre-established by performative processes that originate in the external environment. Internal contestation and agency, captured by the lens of performance, play an equally important role. Kohli's (1999) work on performance in educational institutions provides valuable theoretical insight into the formation of educational subjectivity. Kohli offers what she terms a nonreifying analysis of bodily performance that stresses the constitutive powers of repeated processes of interpellation. These interpellations are brought about in a matrix of relations. She offers the example of "how a girl is girded, (that is) brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender" (320-322). Key to this interpellation process is what is called iterability, which is "regularized and constrained repetition of norms ... rituals reiterated under and through constraints" (321). Kohli points out that places like schools and universities

are sites for identity formation “through repeated acts of norming” (321). These norm-attributing acts are performed by actors, and eventually create a particular type of institutional text. The final point is the suggestion that interpellation and iterability take place in human acts of ‘normalising’ through inclusive and exclusive power relations that determine what can and cannot be said and done in specific environments (324), what Ball (1994) calls the ‘discourse that speaks us’. Human agency processes, their daily performances, are never neutral or benign. They have consequences for the type of environments that get established and what is possible and allowable in them. In sum, applying the lenses of performativity and performance enables me to present an analysis of the complex constitutive processes out of which the travails of RCD in this Faculty environment have been established. Key to the analysis is an understanding of the complex intersections among the external regulatory dynamics and the agential RCD processes inside the Faculty.

Shifting Regulation and Performativity in the Faculty of Education

Dison (2004) presented the view that RCD has only recently emerged in South Africa as a term in reference to those learning and developmental activities that facilitate the academic immersion of staff members into university environments. This specific Faculty’s RCD performative text was impacted by the regulative winds that buffeted South African universities in the late 1990s. During this decade and earlier, junior staff members without PhDs were appointed, in my opinion, in the Faculty because of their potential academic expertise and commitment to a broadly democratic educational politics. They entered a lively, contested and sometimes fractious intellectual terrain which was the result of various epistemic communities, some associated with older conservative politics and others with liberal and radical approaches, that established themselves in the Faculty. Various contending academic discourses animated the Faculty’s intellectual culture. Ritual-like enactments of the Faculty’s RCD iterability took place in the Faculty’s various intellectual fora, including places like its Faculty Board, executive meetings which every staff member could attend, and its higher degrees and research committees. The weekly staff seminar constituted its main performative stage on which academics presented draft conference papers and articles. These papers were copied and circulated before the seminar and Faculty members came armed with questions and critical comments. Seminar presentations were vigorously discussed.

Although academic conversations in the Faculty were robust and at times derogatory, they remained fairly cohesive and inclusive. What kept the conversational tone in the Faculty relatively productive was the general

commitment to transformative possibility in and through education. The Faculty's RCD script was normalised in the 1990s through repeated interpellations of this transformative commitment in its intellectual fora. Its RCD culture remained cohesive during most of the 1990s despite the university living through a challenging combination of large student numbers, financial problems, unstable administrative systems and constant interruptions by protesting students (Anderson 2002). Staff members were inducted into a vigorous and contesting academic climate, which turned on democratic political imperatives, whether in the form of the recuperating vision of those academics who practiced rational philosophy, the radical pedagogical commitments of the Action Research Masters programme in school improvement, or the application of a political economy critique by another loose academic grouping. I suggest that the Faculty's deliberative culture was the consequence of a scholarly tone that was informed by intellectual commitments to democratic politics. This was informed by what I label a 'politician' analytic, in reference to scholarship that aimed at addressing political problems, especially in the form of policy critique and transformation-oriented educational analyses. While there were deep scholarly disagreements over appropriate transformation routes, the commitment to a politician analytical posture remained hegemonic. This posture maintained an attenuated presence during the post 2000 era, with attenuated consequences for RCD in the Faculty.

The research learning culture of the Faculty during most of the 1990s can be described as having occurred on the basis of a combination of 'learning by emulation' and 'voice-facilitation'. In the Faculty's 'flat' hierarchy, young black and female academics felt encouraged and unconstrained to express themselves freely and experiment with new ideas, which were reciprocated by a critical and supportive conversational Faculty tone. Exposure to the discoursing of senior academics was crucial to those younger academics who participated in this developmental culture. Practising academic-becoming through emulation, rehearsal and 'voicing' on a supportive performative stage was, therefore, crucial to the junior staff's scholarly immersion. In the language of Lave and Wenger, it could be argued that the RCD stage on which scholarly becoming was practised was akin to a rich and supportive form of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (quoted in Dison 2004: 90), in terms of which staff members could become part of a critical scholarly culture. A context conducive to academic immersion was, therefore, a key dimension of the Faculty's academic culture.

Departmentally supported academic initiatives played an important role in inducting young academics into scholarly routes, providing academic

support for postgraduate study and article writing. The outcomes of these Faculty RCD processes were varied. Many of the young academics went on to attain their doctorates and publish important articles. Some moved on to other academic or governmental environments. Others either struggled to finish their studies or left academia entirely. The university's struggle for resources and a precarious systemic environment negatively impacted the Faculty's research culture. It is, however, undeniable, that its institutional culture as it pertained to RCD was cohesive and relatively free from performative requirements that crudely emphasised research outputs. The Faculty's success in producing good academics and a steady, if not voluminous, stream of research articles can be attributed to the existence of a nurturing and supportive scholarly environment in which academics could rehearse their scholarly becoming, while, in my view, its shortcomings in RCD were the result of academics having to work in an unstable and challenging university environment caused by a reduction in state funding.

By the end of the 1990s this university was caught at the pernicious end of financial cutbacks, the non-arrival of much anticipated state redress money, and the departure of many of its traditional students for other universities (see Anderson 2002; Koen 2007). The dramatic drop in student numbers led directly to academic retrenchments in 1998. The impact of neo-liberal regulation, from the global scale and shepherded by state policy, began to cut deep into the university and Faculty from the late 1990s (see Fataar 2003). The regulatory impact was received and re-organised by the Faculty's existing institutional culture.

In response to the National Commission on Higher Education's (NCHE 1996) call for, and the university's subsequent clamour to organise its academic offerings on the basis of programmes, the Faculty launched a fully fledged reorganising of its one-year Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE, then known as the Higher Diploma in Education) along interdisciplinary lines, substantially reorganising its courses and producing expository texts for this purpose. This initiative was driven by rigorous pedagogical engagement and conversation that characterised Faculty work during the 1990s. This culture of collegial engagement, together with the desire for relevance in the newly configuring higher educational environment, provided a fertile launching pad for the redesign of the Faculty, which occurred during 1998 and 1999. The Faculty moved from a departmental design to one that resembled a 'Faculty without walls', a kind of School of Education organised around teaching and research divisions. Doing away with departments would later come to haunt the Faculty when, after 2000, fragmentation increasingly began to characterise its professional context.

The prior existing robust collegial and intellectual culture started to morph from around 2000 into a culture of academic atomism. This was hastened by the departure from the Faculty of around ten academics for greener pastures (see Small, Smith, Williams, & Fataar 2009). Its RCD platform was confronted with the challenge of facilitating the academic immersion of a number of black members of staff without PhDs, the majority of them female. Most were appointed in the early years of the new decade on the basis of a combination of a commitment to diversifying the Faculty's staff and other academic and teaching expertise considerations.

The big event that signposted the end of the Faculty's rich contrarian era of the 1990s was the retrenchment of some of our academic colleagues. Having lived in somewhat of a 'splendid isolation', misreading the policy mood and the winds of fiscal reduction, the university was abruptly forced to cut back on staff to address its bankrupt status. Neo-liberal regulation began to bite deep into our Faculty. The turn of the century heralded the triumph of instrumental rationality in the national education policy environment, which was associated with a markedly narrowing reform orientation. Outcomes Basis Education, quality audits, labour market responsiveness, and the straightjacket of the National Qualifications Framework, came to settle powerfully on the discursive terrain. The closure of Colleges of Education and the downscaling of governmental commitment to teacher education signalled a swing around in the functional priorities of Education Faculties, whether through their incorporation and mergers with former Colleges, the reorganisation of their staff, or rapid fluctuations in student numbers. This Faculty experienced a sharp drop in teacher education students.

From about 2000 onwards it entered into a period of what Small *et al.* (2009: 561-562) called 'bits and pieces' survivalism. In-service teacher upgrading and re-skilling courses were offered partly to compensate for the drop in student numbers on the pre-service courses. The Faculty started to take on a number of these in-service courses, which caused most of the younger academics to have to teach in often unconventional arrangements and timeslots. This situation had a marked impact on the RCD environment of the Faculty in the post-2000 period. The Faculty's research output dwindled significantly, although it exercised great commitment and accomplishment in respect to postgraduate theses output. Those academics who continued to publish were settled senior scholars who were able to withstand the worst consequences of the Faculty's survival mode. Its adaptive agency was mapped onto the performative expectations associated with the shifted institutional regulatory context, setting the stage for a challenging RCD environment.

The Faculty's Performative RCD Text in Light of a Residual Politicist Department

This section focuses on the Faculty's underpinning intellectual environment during the post-2000 period. It presents a consideration of the Faculty's discursive character, which is an outflow of the re-arranging impact of performative dynamics that emanated from the regulatory environment. I present the view that the discursive text provided the interactive and formative backdrop for understanding associated RCD practices in the period. These practices are discussed in the next section. This section provides a consideration of the way this Faculty's discourses positioned and delimited its RCD practices and outcomes. I privilege Ball's view about the norm-attributing role of discourses when he argued that, "discourses are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1994: 21). Ball explained that "we are the subjectivities, the voices, the knowledge, the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows" (22). Hence, discourse is here a referent for the complex ways institutional contexts, and the people in them, are positioned and the practices that are operable and allowable in these contexts. The Faculty's discursivity enables a particular set of expressions of RCD, what can be done in its pursuit, how and by whom. Not suggesting determinism, the Faculty's RCD discursive text constituted the formative backdrop for its performative practices.

With regard to its discursive text, I suggest that the Faculty's politicist academic posture continued to play a formative role, now fundamentally re-arranged in light of changing contingent dynamics. The tight coupling between its scholarly culture and transformation commitments was dislodged. The high moral grounding that informed its scholarly culture began to recede in light of the complexity that accompanied democratic transformation. The state's swing around to a neoliberal policy platform and acceptance of a narrow performative orientation impacted heavily on the Faculty's intellectual stances. Whereas during the 1990s its transformation commitments issued into a productive scholarly culture, the politicist posture in the post-2000 period atrophied into a fragmented and diffused scholarly environment. The staging ground for this type of posture remained the weekly staff seminar but its performance also took place in Faculty-based workshops and symposia, and its systemic spaces. A theorising day organised by the Research Directorate in 2003, for example, displayed an intensive grappling with appropriate theoretical approaches for the new period. Participants grappled with the appropriate intellectual stances that the Faculty ought to take towards educational transformation in the face of a failing state and the rapid closure of policy spaces. It lamented

the increasingly technicist approach to policy-making. Discussion at the theorising day represented the type of discoursing that coursed its way through the post-2000 period. Debate veered from considerations about descriptive languages and appropriate theories to inform reconstruction on the one hand, to fundamental critiques of the neoliberal state on the other. A call was made for the Faculty's scholarship to move beyond the university's earlier political attachment to transformation. Scholarship had to, more rigorously, embrace the complexity and messiness associated with educational reform.

The search for appropriate intellectual stances took on a staccato and uneven form in the absence of a concerted and galvanising scholarly culture. I argue that the Faculty's performative text conformed to what I label a 'residual politicist comportment', which informed its RCD activities. This refers to an ongoing search for political relevance which now found expression in an atomistic Faculty environment. Its residual existence, diffused inside the Faculty, although not always explicit, found divergent expression. This was facilitated by the collapsed departmental boundaries in the faculty's new school-like systemic environment. In contra-distinction to Becher and Trowler's (see 1989) view that departments provide academics with tribe-like identities wherein academics practice their research identities, the new seamless Faculty structure neglected to provide its young and newly appointed academics with a socialising academic home. Academic clustering in some areas emerged to mitigate the atomising consequences of a Faculty without departments.

A residual politicist department nonetheless continued to play an important role in setting the scholarly tone. The Faculty's academic discoursing continued to genuflect to political commitment. Analytical ties to a statist focus on transformation remained a key thread. The difference now was that in an atrophied political environment the discoursing resulted in a number of divergent expressions in the Faculty. A shift to analytical commitment untrammelled by 'politicism' remained a challenge. Attempts by some to establish their scholarship on the basis of sophisticated analytical approaches were often stymied by intermittent staging of politicist critiques. Efforts at analytical approaches by some Faculty members and seminar presentations by guests, for example, were filtered through a language of radical critique. It seemed that analyses that deflected from a critique of the neoliberal state and the negative effects of globalisation were treated with suspicion. Scholarly debate was subjected to the veracity of political critique, which stymied the emergence of a commitment to scholarly analysis. This politicist critique was performed by a relatively small number of influential academic members in

the Faculty's more generic fora such as the seminar spaces, workshops and periodic symposia. It, nonetheless, had a negative impact on the Faculty's scholarly discursivity. One consequence of this residual politicism was the halting commitment to sophisticated analyses and theoretical application in light of the country's newer educational complexities.

Doing away with departments had its most pernicious impact on academics in the areas related to Educational Foundations. Many of those academics who departed during and after the late 1990s worked in these areas. Those who remained had expertise in Sociology, History and Philosophy of Education, Comparative Education, Management and Leadership, Curriculum Studies and Higher Education. The difficulty associated with organising academics with disparate disciplinary interests into a cluster and the lack of a cohesive epistemological focus mitigated the emergence of academic cohesion in this area. Consequently, these academics mostly continued to pursue their research in isolation without collegial support.

This section argued that the Faculty's generic discursive text was informed by a residual politicist department which stymied the development of a scholarly culture across the Faculty. It prevented the emergence of novel theoretical approaches and incisive knowledge questions responsive to newer educational complexities. The intellectual culture struggled to immerse young academics into a substantial and cohesive scholarly environment. Instead, many academics had to contend with an atomised and pressurised work environment. Academic clustering provided different groups of academics a socialisational context in the absence of cohesive departments. Scholarly work occurred in some of these clusters, but cluster efforts were impacted by the negative effects associated with an atomistic environment. The next section features a discussion of the impact of the Faculty's residual discursivity and its atomistic environment on specific RCD activities during the post-2000 period.

The Career of RCD Performance and the Struggle for 'Head Space'

The previous section discussed the discursive text of the Faculty against which specific RCD activities took place. In this section I consider specific RCD behaviour in the Faculty in light of its discursive text. I view this behaviour through the lens of performance, which enables me to provide an agency-oriented account of specific developmental activity, of how the Faculty's RCD platform was co-constituted by the iterative performances of its staff members. I view these performances by way of a consideration of concerted attempts, led by the RCD Directorate, in two developmental

areas. First was the effort to facilitate the completion of doctoral theses by staff members and the second area is the facilitation of article writing and publishing. I argue that it is the constant struggle over 'head space' that trumped the Faculty's RCD activities. Head space refers to the existence of a rich and focused intellectual environment necessary for sustained academic work. These two areas highlight the outcome of the Faculty's concerted RCD endeavours in light of the discursive text of the new context.

I consider RCD as performance through a conceptual optic advanced by Collins (see 2000: 19-53) who theorises about the formative dynamics of academic communities. He argued that such communities were constituted by interaction ritual chains (IRC) which positioned academics in their intellectual context. IRCs are regarded as micro events that happen ubiquitously in daily academic contexts. According to Collins, they are made up of "formal rituals which bind members in a moral community, and which create symbols that act as lenses through which members view the world, and as codes by which they communicate" (22). These chains are defined by two elements, namely *emotional energy* which refers to the interactive relational processes inside the ritual chains which imbue participants with the energy to focus on their academic immersion, and *cultural capital* which is the academic 'know how' of the specific community (24). The quality of these two elements determines successful academic immersion. Both have to be present. The presence of each in an IRC will more likely lead to a qualitatively enhanced academic environment with positive consequences for RCD activity, while conversely low levels of emotional energy and cultural capital would impact such activity negatively.

With regard to doctoral completion, this Faculty appointed a number of academics without PhDs in lecturer positions. Its commitment to employment equity meant that most of these appointees were black and/or female. Many of them were of a relatively mature age. They came to the Faculty with firm professional identities that were generated in their previous work contexts. The literature (see Heath 2002; Wright & Cochrane 2000) shows that those people who come to academia later in life experience challenges in adapting to the rudiments of a scholarly environment. The developmental conversations and interactions that I had with many of them over the years in my capacity as Research Director, highlighted the difficulty of their transition into academia. They had difficulty in taking on the appropriate deportment, finding their scholarly voice in the context of high-sounding academic discoursing, and generally finding their feet in a new professional environment. Adapting to a different cultural context initially proved difficult. The women appointees spoke about the challenges

associated with becoming an academic while having to negotiate their domestic spaces as primary caregivers of their families. They could not always depend on quality time at home to dedicate to their academic work.

Moreover, doctoral study by academics who teach in the Faculty had to be transacted in a complicated work terrain. Each of these academics had large teaching loads. They taught in the Faculty's pre-service and in-service programmes. They were involved in multi-site teaching, had enormous marking loads, were expected to supervise Masters theses, serve on programme committees and do post-graduate teaching. Most of them coordinated teaching courses. They experienced high levels of stress associated with administering and teaching their courses. Progress in their doctoral studies, therefore, had to contend with high teaching and administration workloads which ate away at their ability to pay sustained attention to their studies. This is one of main reasons why time-to-degree for many academic staff members exceeded the expected four years.

The Faculty remained committed to doctoral completion of its academic staff. It provided concerted support and academic infrastructure. It insisted that they register for their PhDs early on in their academic careers. Its RCD performances lay in its active and deliberate cultivation of space to have academics work towards completion. Activities organised by the Research Division, faculty clusters, and doctoral support groups, played a crucial role in establishing head space for concentrated work on their PhDs. The Faculty organised month-long writing sabbaticals at Ohio University, a partner university in the USA, where staff members could work with concentration on their PhDs. Attempts were made to organise workloads in such a manner that space could be opened for productive head space. The timing of sabbaticals went a long way to facilitate doctoral completion. Academics were encouraged to take sabbaticals of up to a year when they were ready to do their research and writing up of at least a first draft of the thesis. Sabbaticals were discouraged if the Faculty's research committee felt that the time would not be spent optimally on thesis production. Firm and collegial thesis supervision played a crucial role. As Research Director, I tried to play a supportive mentoring role. I consulted with staff members throughout the process about their needs and requirements. I served as a sounding board for some about the ideas they were pursuing in their doctoral work. It was my job to alert them to funding that was available for their research, bursaries, and developmental opportunities in areas such as literature reviews, methodological application, and data capturing and coding. The university's Postgraduate Enrolment and Throughput project played a productive role in presenting short courses on aspects of their PhD work.

The real story of success, though, is in the manner in which these academics responded to the institutional imperative to acquire their PhDs. This performative requirement placed them under considerable strain. They understood that their academic worth was tied to PhD success. They often spoke about their feelings of academic inadequacy. Their performances in response to the imperative were not uncomplicated nor without pain. Their stories speak of great sacrifice, of having to give up on sleep and family time, and of having to find space in their busy working days to concentrate on academic work. Sabbaticals and short periods without teaching proved to be key. They experienced many domestic, personal and professional challenges which impacted their ability to remain focused during these periods. The Faculty managed to remain supportive despite workload, budgetary and systemic constraints. These staff members were able, on the basis of intense commitment and marshalling of personal resources, to retain commitment to their doctoral work. This resulted in a high completion rate of doctoral study among academics appointed in the post-2000 period. This Faculty's PhD rate among academic staff stood at 70 per cent in 2009, then considerably higher than the average rate in other comparable Faculties in the country.

Doctoral completion by academic staff resembles a case of RCD as performance. The Faculty and the affected staff members were able to establish environmental conditions that facilitated thesis completion, in spite of the Faculty's atomistic work conditions. These academics were able to enact a series of performances that mitigated the Faculty's conditions. I would suggest that their performances and agency-inspired behaviour, were successfully accomplished on the basis of a combination of their personal commitments and the Faculty's RCD behaviour which provided active support and space for substantial doctoral work. The emotional energy that was generated succeeded precisely because it enabled these academics to work off the Faculty stage, relatively insulated from its atrophied RCD discursive text. They were allowed to work for specifically protected periods of time in relative isolation under firm supervision by their thesis supervisors. Furthermore, their Research Director protected them from the worst consequences of interference by issues such as workload, energy sapping meetings and administrative obligations. The emotional energy to complete their PhDs was, thus, actively facilitated and performed by the Faculty's management, while the intellectual capital was furnished off stage by supervisors and support groups where these existed. Doctoral completion success was achieved in light of the personal performances of these academics in their tough and complex personal and professional terrains.

The story was entirely different for RCD activity with respect to article writing for accredited journals. The Faculty's performativity in this regard was limited to a low average annual rate in the post-2000 period. The rate veered between 40 per cent and 50 per cent in proportion to full-time academics. Some of these articles were written by academics on the periphery of the Faculty, such as contract staff, postdoctoral students, and academics in university units with some association with the Faculty. The rate of publication by full-time academic staff was low. This was notwithstanding concerted attempts to improve the publications rate. The Faculty provided numerous and ongoing developmental opportunities to improve article publication. Most notable were the university funded writing weekends where academics were invited to participate in active writing processes that were facilitated by expert writing coaches. Staff members were encouraged to submit abstracts or drafts of their papers beforehand with the intention of moving them forward to publication over these weekends. The weekends were intended to role model article writing processes in addition to providing space for active writing augmented by support from senior staff members and writing coaches. A key aim was to build confidence in the art of academic writing and to establish a cohesive faculty wide and productive writing conversation. The intention was to generate the requisite emotional energy in a supportive environment, which Collins (2000) argued was a necessary ingredient for success. Other efforts to generate emotional energy were the short-lived attempts at providing an informal weekly article writing discussion forum, peer mentoring and support, writing workshops, and blocked-time for concerted writing.

Article writing in the Faculty can be said to have occurred in an environment saturated with low emotional capital. The Faculty was unable to provide a sustained environment for academic writing. It struggled with variable success to establish consistent head space in terms of which academics could apply a concerted focus on article production. Those academics in the Faculty who published consistently were networked into academic communities off campus. I suggest that the intellectual capital of the Faculty was stymied by institutional factors such as the teaching and administrative loads of academics. The intermittent systemic challenges faced by a university with resource constraints also negatively impact its scholarly culture.

In my opinion, the Faculty's RCD performances, in its attempt to secure an environment that supports article writing and novel scholarship more generally, came up against institutional constraints. The residual politicist deportment also had a mitigating impact on the emergence of an intellectual

culture throughout the Faculty. It deflected attention from establishing scholarship based on theoretical sophistication. Where sophisticated work did occur it happened off stage in a specific cluster and by academics who were integrated into productive networks outside the university. Whereas the Faculty's performances in doctoral completion by its staff were successful precisely because it managed to isolate emotional energy for access off the Faculty stage, the opposite is true for article writing. It fell victim to what I believe became an atomistic Faculty environment on the one hand, and the Faculty's inability to secure a generic and rigorous scholarly culture necessary for successful publishing of academic work on the other.

Conclusion

Universities are intricate environments. They are not readily available for the enactment of performative injunctions. This article has challenged the assumption that the imperative for research outputs will find an easy reception in these environments. I have presented a view that attempted to expose how a specific site in one university responded to performative imperatives. The discussion of one Faculty, based on my autoethnographic reflections, was meant to show how historical fashioning interacted with contemporary dynamics to construct its performative RCD text. The Faculty was fundamentally re-arranged in light of the regulatory winds that buffeted universities in the late 1990s. I showed how the resulting atomistic environment gave rise to a residual politicist scholarly deportment which positioned the career of RCD in the Faculty during the period. An incisive scholarly culture struggled to emerge.

I went on to employ the notion of performance to describe RCD activity in the Faculty. I showed how human processes interacted with the Faculty's performative text to co-constitute its research development career. I argued that doctoral completion was accomplished on the basis of a set of Faculty performances that moved RCD processes off the Faculty stage, and I showed that the personal agency of individual staff members was decisive in pulling off the completion of their theses. However, performances in the area of article writing succumbed to what I believe was a halting scholarly climate in the Faculty. Atomistic work conditions and the lack of deep scholarly engagement prevented the emergence of a productive scholarly culture.

A discussion of the travails of RCD in this small Faculty is one illustration of how performative dynamics work in a specific university context. I suggest that there is a need for in depth research into RCD practices across a diverse range of university sites. I have provided one example of the intricate dynamics at play when a Faculty is confronted with multiple

policy and institutional challenges. RCD is a constitutive key to flourishing universities. Research into different university contexts would show how difficult it is to substantially protect and develop the soft infrastructure that is crucial for RCD processes. One key requirement is the need to evolve a developmental platform that takes account of the complexities involved in securing the necessary conditions for RCD. As this article shows, another requirement is to enable performance-orientated development processes among academics that can engender an intellectual environment conducive to incisive and responsive scholarship.

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