



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

*Working together towards Excellence in Teaching, Learning
& Research*



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Teaching Practice, Research and Teaching & Learning Indaba

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1. Introduction

In November 2016, the School of Education held three Indabas: Teaching Practice (7th), Research (8th) and Teaching and Learning (18th & 19th). The purpose of these Indabas was to discuss the teaching & learning challenges the School of Education is encountering and to develop strategies to turn this around. The Indabas offered staff an opportunity to engage with colleagues on issues such as policy, teaching, learning, research, teaching practice, assessment and practice, student learning, technology, supervision, staff support, social media, politics, assessment, and university climate amongst others.

This Executive Summary provides some of the highlights of the discussions that were held at the Indabas. The Summary begins with the highlights of the Teaching Practice Indaba, which was held over one day. It then proceeds to offer the highlights of the Research (held over one day) and the Teaching and Learning (held over two days) Indabas. The attendance at the Teaching Practice and Teaching and Learning Indabas was low (about 30 staff attended), and slightly higher at the Research Indaba. The low attendance could have been as a result of student protest action which forced the university to extend the academic programme to beyond 30 October 2016. Many academic staff were still conducting lectures in the first two weeks of November 2016.

2. Teaching Practice Indaba

The discussion at the Teaching Practice Indaba was held in themes as follows:

2.1. Assessment

The main discussion point around assessment was the question of how staff apply a generic set of criteria to all phases of teaching, levels of study (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and PGCE) and subjects. Teaching files were also discussed and staff were of the view that in addition to first year students, all second, third and fourth year students should also have their teaching files assessed as they serve as portfolios of evidence.

2.2. Context of TP

The main concern raised by staff was whether students could teach in different schooling contexts. Staff agreed that the weaknesses of students should not be the focus of the assessment, but that the focus should be on the development of the students. In discussing the timing of the teaching practice session (July/August), staff expressed the view that they often find themselves rushing from one school to another.

2.3. What can make TP more effective?

This was the third theme discussed at the Indaba. Staff were of the view that the paperwork (summative and formative assessment forms) is too cumbersome and suggested that the forms be re-designed. The issue of students often not knowing the subject knowledge was discussed and staff felt that micro teaching should be reintroduced. Once again, the issue of the timing of the teaching practice session (July/August) was raised as staff were of the view that students engage in examination marking/reviewing (from the school's 2nd term) and do not do as much teaching as is needed. Another reason to rethink the timing of teaching practice is that many students have not yet done method modules by July/August as these are often taught in the second semester after teaching practice.

2.4. What makes you happy about TP?

Staff were unanimous in the view that the teaching practice office was well run and the office staff are very responsive. Staff also spoke positively about TP 120 as this affords students a broader perspective of what happens in other schools.

3. Research Indaba

3.1. Introduction

The Research Indaba was conducted in three parallel sessions as follows:

- Group 1: PhD Cohort Supervision Research Weekend
(facilitated by Dr A Pillay, Prof N Amin, Prof S Maistry & Prof A Sheik)
Master's in Education Support
(facilitated by Dr V Mudaly and team)
- Group 2: Being a supervisor workshop
(facilitated by Prof K Pithouse-Morgan and team)
PhD Student, Staff and Supervisor Scholarship Seminar Series
(facilitated by Dr A James and team)
- Group 3: Journal article publication workshop
(facilitated by Prof S Bansilal and team)
Technical skills training workshops: Managing research and supervision through information technology
(facilitated by Dr C Chibaya and team)

Thereafter, four plenary sessions were held.

- Research proposal reviewing/defending process *(facilitated by Prof D Bhana).*

- M Ed/PhD examination process (*facilitated by Prof V Chikoko*).
- Others (student feedback and reflection of DACOSER) (*facilitated by Prof M Samuel.*)
- Closure (*facilitated by Prof Morojele and Prof Msibi*).

The aims of the Research Indaba were to:

- provide support to both postgraduate students and supervisors and to generate capacities in **designing, managing, and reporting on educational research studies** (including proposal development, field work engagements and dissertation/ thesis report writing);
- promote spaces within the **academic cultural ethos** of the institution which values and promotes research as a scholarly enterprise;
- generate technical and conceptual tools for **promoting and supervising postgraduate studies**;
- profile the **existing scholarship within the research community** drawing especially from local academics within the school;
- draw on expertise of more experienced supervisors/researchers in terms of **academic writing and publication** of research projects and journal articles.

3.2. Master's in Education support

The purpose of these support sessions is to provide a forum to monitor and track work in progress of M Ed students. There were five sessions held in 2016. Support was offered to students in the proposal development phase and to those in the post proposal development phase. During the discussion at the Indaba, the facilitators made an appeal for more academic staff to join the programme so as to allow for students to be divided into smaller, more manageable groups.

3.3. PhD cohort supervision weekend

The purpose of these cohort sessions is to develop shared supervisory development amongst supervisors; to generate inter-disciplinary scholarship; to generate critical readership audience of PhD work in progress as well as to serve as a forum for collegial academic exchange of scholarship. The group at the Indaba expressed their concern that **few staff participated as cohort** supervisors and that the cohort facilitators offered their expertise without any gain. Some reasons given by the participating team members for limited participation from staff follow.

- Cohort supervision is voluntary and there are no workload hours allocated to staff participating in the cohort.
- Staff have commitments during weekends resulting in fewer members being available to support the cohort.
- Criticism from supervisors who do not want their students to participate.
- There are some supervisors who are critical of cohort supervisors' feedback to their students.

The group also discussed the following myths of cohort groups.

- Cohorts feedback sometimes undermines that of supervisors.
- Students attend sessions as they have weak supervisors.
- Feedback confuses students as different opinions are expressed and these are sometimes contrary to the advice of supervisors.
- Students are emotionally destabilised with 'unkind' comments.

Out of this discussion arose the issue of how the cohort supervisors can provide feedback to students in a manner that is constructive and has academic integrity and critique without students feeling exposed to 'epistemic violence'. A question raised was whether or not PG students are ready for accepting intellectual debates and criticism.

This discussion session concluded with suggestions for sustaining effective cohorts. Some of these suggestions are as follows.

- Arrange times that are suitable to both students and staff.
- Motivate more professoriate and novice supervisors to participate.
- Add the number of hours spent at the workshops to the workloads of staff who participate (72 hours = 12 hours X 6 weekends).

3.4. Being a supervisor workshops

The purpose of this supervision session is to support novice supervisors as they build expertise in supervision. All research supervisors are both novice and expert in some sense. This workshop series was facilitated by a group of 'novice and expert' supervisors from diverse specialisations, brought together by our shared belief that to be effective supervisors

we need to be lifelong learners. The workshops were based on findings from international research that suggests that successful supervision of research requires supervisors to ‘walk our talk’ and model personal and professional learning in our own research and pedagogy. In this workshop series, we engaged in participatory, creative, and self-reflexive activities to explore what becoming a supervisor might entail and to engage with lived experiences of supervision, with the aim of developing a supportive community of supervisors. The group made the following recommendations for 2017.

- Time management is an important area that the School can turn its attention to in supporting academics.
- Two more half day sessions should be held in February and March 2017 to engage with the support of academics in these two areas.

3.5. PhD Student, Staff and Supervisor Scholarship Seminar Series

The purpose of this seminar series is to generate a regular seminar series of UKZN School of Education senior staff to present recent conference papers, recent articles published, disseminate information about their (funded) research project and to outline their book publication profiles. One seminar on the 1st September 2017 was hosted. This seminar was entitled: Publishing a book (Booksellers perspective – Mr. Cedric Sissing; Politics of Publishing – Prof Michael Samuel). Each presentation was approximately 20 minutes with good questions and answers during the discussion session. An exhibition of books published by staff was also on display. The discussion at the Indaba highlighted the importance for having these seminars but concern was raised regarding the timing, siting (Edgewood/Pietermaritzburg), topics and the importance of these for both staff and students.

The group made the following suggestions as to how to improve the seminar series:

- It should include ALL staff.
- A School Research report should be developed and this will serve as the database which will inform the planning for the seminars.
- Reporting of research could be from clusters/disciplines/projects.
- A variety of **formats** such as seminar series, workshops, project reports and colloquiums should be introduced.
- There should be 6 “seminars” a year.

3.6. Journal article publication workshop

The purpose of the journal article publication workshops is to deal with reworking of draft articles for (re) submission to journals as well as dealing with fine-tuning an article before submission. In the brainstorming session held at the Indaba, possible reasons for the low levels of interest were presented:

- Perhaps the criteria that it was only open to people currently doing a PhD and who had published less than three articles was limiting.
- The timing could have been a problem. July-Dec was a very busy semester, and there were many research activities during this time. These included masters support, doctoral support and other workshops. The Friday-Saturday timetabling could also have been a problem.

After a robust round of discussions, the following suggestions emerged:

- Instead of weekends, have sessions during the week. A suggestion was sessions on a Wednesday or Thursday afternoon from 4-6pm.
- Two sessions per month, every second week, starting in February 2017.
- Sessions should consist of input by a facilitator as well as progress reports by participants.
- There should be sufficient mentors to provide motivation and assistance. A decision needs to be taken as to whether or not mentors time will be added to their workload hours.
- Mini-conference to be held in March/ April, where participants will present papers of their work

3.7. Technical skills training workshops: Managing research and supervision through information technology

The purpose of the technical skills workshops is to develop technical operational skills in undertaking postgraduate research and supervision. This programme requires new coordinators because the previous coordinators are no longer available to offer support to students.

3.8. Other issues that emerged from the Indaba

It was recommended that both electronic and face-to-face reviews of proposals should be used by the School of Education because they have equal strengths and weaknesses (contextually). The review panel should consist of at least a senior academic member, a member from the student's Discipline, and an external member (outside the Discipline).

It was also recommended that all examiners results should hold equal weight when coordinating reports are compiled. Report coordinators should thus take the average mark as the final mark if there are two marks indicated in the reports.

4. Teaching and Learning Indaba

4.1. Introduction

The Teaching and Learning Indaba held over two days covered the following themes:

- University policies (plagiarism, assessment, student feedback on teaching quality)
- Physical resources/large classes
- Human resources (refers to Human resource issues in our School – staffing, workload, assessment, etc.)
- Staff-Student Interaction/Other.

One hour was allocated to discussion for each theme before forty-five-minute report back sessions. These sessions were facilitated by different academic staff.

4.2. University policies

The following university policies were discussed:

- Plagiarism policy.
- Assessment policy.
- Policy on student feedback on teaching quality.

4.2.1. Plagiarism policy

In the report back session, staff highlighted the following challenges with this policy:

- The need for clarification/elaboration of what constitutes **minor** and major offences.
- The difficulty in the implementation of the policy due to large classes.
- Resubmission of plagiarised assignments increases the marking workload.
- Staff need to be aware of **software programmes** that permit “Spinning an assignment”.

As a way forward, the following intervention strategies were suggested:

- Group feedback around plagiarism is not permitted; feedback has to be one-on-one.
- Students should receive electronic feedback on plagiarism.
- The teaching of academic literacy surrounding reading/writing /academic assignments in HE (*generic* or *embedded* interventions) needs to be overt.
- Need to consider having less formative assessments.

4.2.2. Assessment policy

The following concerns were raised by staff:

- The increase in student numbers (massification) influences the number of additional tutors required. Those appointed as contract staff do not always have the desired levels of competence, despite assessment training.
- There seems to be a mismatch between the credit points of a module, the notional hours (contact time and self-study) and the number of assessments – we seem to be over assessing.
- There is repetition of competences across programmes and across levels.
- The staff who designed the module templates are often not teaching or assessing those modules.
- Questions such as whether the policy is being implemented consistently and how staff select cases to be sent to external examiners (10% with a spread?) were posed.

The following intervention strategies were discussed:

- The appointment of more permanent staff may not necessarily reduce the need for contract staff.
- With the increasing number of students, the Clusters could possibly consider team marking or designated section marking.
- There is a need to share competences and assessment across levels according to the template especially across methods modules.
- There should be coherence and communication across disciplines and within disciplines.
- Clusters should report on assessment and moderation practices.

4.2.3. Policy on student feedback on teaching quality

Staff were unanimous in their call for clarification of online and manual module evaluation. The manual module evaluation requires strict adherence to procedures of administering (to be done by a peer, placed in a sealed envelope and sent to QPA). However, QPA is reluctant to engage with the manual module evaluation. Staff were informed through the plenary discussion that the online system permits isolating which staff member is being evaluated where team teaching is involved. It is also possible to ask that postgraduate students evaluate supervision – staff need to send a list of supervised students to QPA.

Staff raised concerns around the poor response rate from students and whether students take this exercise seriously. A suggestion was that perhaps students do not take the module evaluation seriously because they are not given feedback on their modules in the same academic year.

The following questions were discussed by participants:

- What is being done with the STs evaluations?
- Where are they being discussed?
- How is this informing future practices?
- Is this just an *exercise in compliance*?

Positive feedback about staff members should be shared to reinforce best practices (at clusters/school levels). There should be spaces for ongoing dialogue/ interaction with students throughout the course/module to gauge the level of “what is working/not working?”

4.3. Physical Resources/ large classes

4.3.1. Overcrowding of venue/laboratories

As a result of the large student numbers, lecture rooms and laboratories are inadequate. There is insufficient furniture in most venues and staff end up spending a lot of time physically setting up classrooms. The large number of students per module creates challenges for staff to meet assessment feedback deadlines. There is therefore a need for trained markers to be employed.

4.3.2. Creative pedagogical strategies

In view of the large number of students and overcrowding of lecture venues, staff discussed some creative ways through which modules could be effectively taught and assessed. At present, it appears the Moodle learning site is being used as a reservoir rather than a tool for learning. There is need to create systematic scaffolded learning (Morrow; Vygotsky; Socrates; Boal)

SESSION	FORMAT
Lecture	Focus on content delivery; Handout: grid to take notes; the <u>lecture front-led classroom</u> ; teacher-led; <i>conveying of information</i> : historical record Take home task: Interview: teacher union vs. teacher professional association: Readings
Workshop	Focus on UKZN REACH campaign: student-driven ; interview the teacher: Question-answer format: Socratic dialogue; reading exercise (newspaper articles); <i>Co-responsibility for learning</i> ; Setting ground rules for participation; <u>managing large classes</u> Take home task: inspirational teacher Readings
Role play	“The BBC interview”: speaking in role; <u>creating new audiences</u> ; Drama: [Augusto Boal]
The learning site: readings for each section; course structure and handout; Power Point presentations → interactive material	Pedagogy is directed not towards entertainment (fun): towards organising systematic learning and teaching Scaffolded directions towards assignments (Vygotsky): what is a professional teacher? Readings
Permutations and combinations	PURPOSE → FORM OF TEACHING BEYOND teacher-centred pedagogy → Learner-centred pedagogy: → active co-responsible LEARNING CENTRED PEDAGOGY

4.3.3. Attendance

Staff noted that attendance is very poor, particularly on Fridays. It is therefore crucial for staff to come up with creative ways of attracting students to lectures. As a starting point, it is

important that each day, after a lecture, all names of students who were absent be struck off so that students do not sign when they return to a subsequent lecture. Staff should prepare short quick exercises for completion in class as well as award credits for self-study and learning outside of lectures. Take-home tasks should be included as part of the module. The pedagogy must be inviting to attend, rather than reading “old material”. Perhaps there is a need to abandon the course pack and make the classroom a space for engagement/questioning and challenging students rather than a space in which content is simply delivered by the lecturers.

4.3.4. Classroom management

While it may be tempting to do away with registers, the handbook requirement is that students attend 80% of lectures. This is something that requires further discussion. With the increasing number of students in our classes, it is important that we conduct staff development to manage larger classrooms.

4.4. Human Resources

4.4.1. Staffing and workloads

There was an expressed concern that Senior lecturing staff are taking on the “University service” agendas such as academic leaders, cluster leaders, coordinators and that there is a reluctance of Associate Professors/Professors to take up leadership roles. The latter are more engaged in research productivity activities (supervision/research articles/ books/ chapters). *University Service, Community Engagement, Teaching & Learning and Research* (four pillars of “academics work”) is differently weighted for different levels of staffing at Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor and Professor levels. One needs to understand and explore the reasons why there is a reluctance of senior staff (AP, P) to take on leadership positions. Some possibilities include:

- AP and P have served this role previously.
- The equity profile of senior leadership and management needs to be changed.
- The lack of institutional support to undertake the management leadership (e.g. HR challenges in managing the resourcing and budgeting).
- Lack of communication response from HR (located on Howard/Westville campuses) generates a lack of incentives to become cluster leaders).

Some other human resource related issues raised in the discussion were that:

- an internal School policy outlining the workload formula for: module /discipline/ programme/site/TP co-ordination should be developed by the School Management team and implemented uniformly across the school. The school has the latitude to design such a management tool (non-remunerated);
- there is a need to understand more clearly the **distribution of workloads** policy as a **management tool** to assist planning of academics' use of time, not a slavish mechanistic compliance tool;

4.4.2. Enrolment planning

A concern was raised that **enrolment planning** does not dovetail with human and physical resources planning. It appears that some modules are over-subscribed which becomes a **registration** problem. There are efforts being developed for *Orientation 2017* to pay more attention to phase enrolment and the need for students to make informed choices for their curriculum construction. It was suggested that the quality of the venues is impeding the delivery of quality pedagogy. Issues such as dirty classes, insufficient furniture, disorderly venues and the marked white boards impact negatively on delivery of lectures.

4.4.3. Administrative Staff

Staff expressed concern that the Administrative support staff are *disconnected* from the academic staff as they (Administrative staff) have been relocated to an admin hub. It was also suggested that there is need for the administrative offices to have *staggered office lunch/tea breaks*. It is also of concern that administrative staff are only available to support **4 administrative meetings per year**. This is grossly *inadequate* given the scale of operations of the School. It was also reported that there is a high turn-over of administrators dealing with Applications for PGCE and Honours. The movement of permanent administrative staff to new portfolios results in **continuity challenges** for management and those administering the programmes. It was noted that there is need to circulate a document clarifying the duties of ALL administrators, their (new) office venues and working hours to all staff members.

4.5. Staff-student interactions

4.5.1. Student-staff relations

Staff spoke at length about absenteeism and late arrivals of our students. It was suggested that staff should make it worthwhile for students to attend classes and we should use multiple, varied styles of teaching. It is also important for lecturers to set the tone by arriving on time for lectures and not cancelling lectures unnecessarily. Our students have a tendency to write assignments and complete other tasks without attending lectures – students need to be made aware that writing assignments is not participation in the module. It was suggested that a task team be appointed to develop a booklet (BEING A UNIVERSITY STUDENT) on HOW to learn, read diagrams, take notes in lectures, interact with Moodle, prepare for an assignment and participate in the classroom.

There was discussion around students who have developed the habit of voicing issues with **SRC** to gain leverage before dealing with cluster leaders and management. Quite often students mis-represent the issues to the SRC. The procedures and management systems need to be made clear to students and the SRC.

4.5.2. Negative behaviours amongst staff and students

While most the undergraduate students are appreciative and participative in pedagogy, there are some students who display negative behaviour. Many of these students spend large amounts of time in the sunken lounges, corridors and courtyards instead of being in the library.

4.5.3. Staff-student relations: Postgraduate issues

Some of the postgraduate students (Honours and M Ed) are from outlying areas (such as Empangeni) and therefore not able to make the 16h00 start of lectures. It was suggested that we should consider offering block sessions for those from outlying areas. It was also suggested that there is a need to consider a **bridging course** for those who are not sufficiently prepared in the discipline, research methodology and academic writing. There are students who completed Honours at other institutions and apply to do M Ed studies at UKZN and such students' proficiencies need to be monitored.

4.5.4. Staff issues contributing to the quality of relations

Several issues around staff contributing to quality of relations were raised. It was emphasized that staff should not encourage students to complain about fellow staff, but should alert students to the necessary protocols. The availability of staff was also discussed – staff need to stick to consultation times displayed. On the issue of e-mails, it was emphasized that it is important for staff to respond to e-mails even when off campus. Staff were also reminded that it is not necessary to copy a range of staff members in on e-mails, but to deal with the person concerned.

5. The future process arising from the Indabas

Participants were clear in their call for an Executive summary of the Indabas to be sent to all attendees, staff and School Management Committee and that a procedure is put in place to take matters forward.

6. Acknowledgement

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