

Conditions constraining the potential of Educational Development to impact on the transformation of teaching and learning

Chrissie Boughey

Rhodes University, South Africa

Corresponding author: c.boughey@ru.ac.za

(Submitted: 16 July 2024; Accepted: 18 November 2024)

Abstract

Changes in higher education systems across the world have led to the identification of practice and research in the field of Educational Development as a means of addressing what are often conceptualised as 'problems'. This paper argues that the field has not always met the expectations imposed upon it because of conditions constraining the agency of practitioners to produce research which will conceptualise problems meaningfully and to identify practice that will address them. In order to do this, the paper draws on, and extends, previous work (Shay, 2012; Boughey, 2022) using a framework based on Bhaskar's (1978) critical realism and Archer's (1995, 1996, 2000) social realism.

Keywords: Educational Development, Social Realism, Critical Realism, Higher Education

Introduction

Across the world, the field of educational development, now often termed "teaching and learning in higher education" in the naming of centres and units devoted to this endeavour, has grown in size as institutions have looked to its practitioners to confront issues related to widened participation. As Trow (1973) points out in his seminal article on the massification of higher education, growth impacts on a wide range of areas including curriculum design and pedagogy as academic teachers confront what are often termed "non-traditional" or "first generation" students. In the context of growth in student populations in most higher education, this has led many universities across the world to draw on practice in the field of Educational Development, and particularly on attempts to professionalise academic teaching, as a means of engaging with change (see, for example, Barrow & Grant, 2012; Geertsema, 2016; Sugrue, et al., 2017).

In spite of a great deal of effort on the part of educational development practitioners, in many respects, problems with respect to educational outcomes remain. Across the world, performance data show that students from marginalised groups experience poorer educational outcomes than others. In South Africa, for example, data in the form of the Council on Higher Education's (CHE's) *VitalStats* series (such as CHE, 2023) show that, regardless of the university at



which they are registered, the field of study or the qualifications for which they are enrolled, black South Africans fare less well than their white peers in terms of throughput and graduation rates. In the United Kingdom (UK), the completion rate for black students was 7.8 percentage points lower than for white students in 2021-2022 while rates for students from the poorest areas of the country were 6.7 points lower than those from the wealthiest (Custer, 2023). In the United States (US), cohort studies show that only 45% of black students and 59% of Hispanic students graduate with a bachelor's degree within six years of enrolment in comparison to 67% of white students.

This paper reflects on what could be considered a failure of the field of educational development to make good on the aspirations of those working in it and of those funding it over the years. It does this by extending, previous work (Shay, 2012; Boughey, 2022). Drawing on the work of Bernstein (2000) and Gamble (2004, 2006), Shay (2012) argued that much of the knowledge produced in the field of educational development in South Africa was “craft knowledge” or “codified practice” rather than the “powerful” knowledge of Bernstein’s (2000) vertical discourse needed to address problems in teaching and learning in higher education. In revisiting Shay’s claims ten years later, Boughey (2022) showed that, in South Africa, although some of the “powerful” knowledge called for by Shay had been produced, this type of research was fairly limited. This paper attempts to move thinking forward by exploring some of the reasons for this. It does this by drawing on a framework of Bhaskar’s (1978) critical realism and Archer’s (1995, 1996, 2000) social realism to identify the conditions that have led to practice that could be argued to have been less impactful than it might have been. The ultimate aim in writing this paper offer some insights that may be considered by those who seek to further the field moving forward.

Theoretical framework

The paper draws broadly on Bhaskar’s (1978) critical realism and Archer’s (1995, 1996, 2000) social realism. For Bhaskar, reality consists of three strata: the Empirical, or the layer of observations and experiences, the Actual, the layer of events, and the Real, which consists of structures and mechanisms in constant interplay with each other and which are not directly observable via the senses. Events at the level of the Actual and experiences and observations at the level of the Empirical emerge from this interplay of mechanisms at the level of the Real which are understood to be tendential rather than strictly causal. Although critical realists acknowledge that all knowledge making can only begin by exploring observations and experiences at the level of the Empirical and events at the level of the Actual, researchers move beyond the contingency of these two layers using retroductive processes to explore the interplay of mechanisms at the level of the Real from which these events, observations and experiences emerge. In common with “critical” social theory, critical realism is concerned with social justice and researchers see an exploration of the structures and mechanisms at the level of the Real as a means of understanding how inequality and exclusion occur.

Following Archer's (1995, 1996, 2000) identification of different categories of agency, practitioners in the field of educational development are understood as 'social actors', individuals possessing both personal powers and properties (PEPs) innate to them and structural powers and properties (SEPs) (Archer, 1995, 1996, 2000) accruing from the positions they hold in the field of Educational Development. They are also understood to have the potential to act as groups of 'corporate agents' who are,

aware of what they want, can articulate it to themselves and others, and have organized in order to get it, can engage in concerted action to re-shape or retain the structural or cultural feature in question (Archer, 1995: 258).

In exercising PEPs and SEPs, practitioners are understood to have been socially and culturally conditioned to act and think in particular ways.

Practitioners exercise their agency by pursuing a project to address a concern (Archer, 2007). In this paper, the concern is understood to revolve around the need to address inequities in higher education and projects to involve attempts to reform curricula, develop teaching and support students' learning in the context of "widened participation". As they pursue these projects, practitioners encounter conditions in the form of structures and mechanisms located at the level of the Real in Bhaskar's (1978) layered ontology. These structures and mechanisms can enable or constrain the emergence of events, located at the level of the Actual, and observations and experiences, located at the level of the Empirical. A simple example of this understanding might be a group of practitioners located in a teaching and learning centre beginning a project intended to contribute to curriculum change. Their agency is, however, constrained by discourses, or sets of ideas understood to operate as mechanisms at the level of the Real, which construct change as unnecessary or impossible. As a result, little or no change in the form of curriculum related events at the level of the Actual emerges and a range of observations at the level of the Real are made. For some, the absence of change is experienced as positive. For others, most notably the practitioners, the continuing status quo is experienced with a sense of disappointment and even failure.

Drawing on the assumption that practitioners in the field of educational development have the power to effect change, the rest of this paper looks at the mechanisms that have constrained them over the years.

Conditions in the field of Educational Development

Knowledge as a structure

Garraway and Bozalek (2019) observe that much of the work presented at teaching and learning conferences is "show and tell". This work generally proceeds from the identification of a problem or phenomenon before moving on to describe an approach intended to address or explore it, which is then evaluated by drawing on the perceptions of students and teachers. The use of

Bhaskar's (1979) construct of a "layered" reality is useful in understanding this form of knowledge making.

As a knowledge form, "show and tell" draws on experiences and observations at the level of the Empirical and events at the level of the Actual but fails to explore deepest layer of reality, the Real. This is in spite of the fact that much of the discourse centring on teaching and learning in the field of educational development identifies the profound changes in student bodies and points to the structural inequities experienced as "non-traditional" students enter the universities and are confronted by unfamiliar learning demands (see, for example, Smit, 2012). Although educational developers do identify structural inequities, their thinking tends to focus on the poor quality of schooling available to the majority of black students or to financial problems that impede their study. Practitioners are thus not conditioned to think about social class or education *per se* as a structure that contributes to inequity because of the discourses and practices that sustain it. As a result of adopting a surface level understanding of reality, and thus not moving below the level of the Empirical, no attempt is made to explore the structures and mechanisms from which the "problems" and phenomena on which "show and tell" studies focus emerge. Rather, commonsense and transient experiences and observations are drawn upon to conceptualise the problem or phenomenon and form a basis from which data can be collected and solutions explored. Only a move to excavate the level of the Real would allow for the identification of the causal mechanisms that lead to the emergence of an observed problem or phenomenon and, thus, provide an adequate diagnosis of the problem in the form of its "reconceptualisation".

The failure to move beyond experiences and observations in much of the research produced in the field of teaching and learning is elaborated upon by Shay (2012) in her exploration of the extent to which "Educational Development" has established itself as a field. Drawing on Clegg (2009), Shay (2012: 313) characterises Educational Development as a "region" (Bernstein, 2000) that looks 'inwards towards disciplines and outwards towards external fields of practice'. In looking outwards towards a field of practice, disciplinary knowledge is "recontextualised" (Bernstein, 2000) to address problems. Shay's exploration of the field of Educational Development leads her to the conclusion that, rather than drawing on the powerful disciplinary knowledge that will allow for the reconceptualisation of problems in teaching and learning, educational development practitioners have tended to be heavily dependent on "craft knowledge", a term which is understood by referring to Bernstein's distinction between "horizontal" and "vertical" discourse, augmented by the work of Gamble (2004, 2009).

Horizontal discourse, where the term "discourse" is understood to involve a way of making sense of the world around us, draws on everyday experiential knowledge to make statements such as "It always rains in summer", which are often context- and time-bound. Vertical discourse, on the other hand, draws on abstract, systematised accounts that can make sense of the world across contexts and time. An example of vertical discourse might be the rain cycle, taught from primary school onwards and elaborated as learners progress to higher levels.

The rain cycle will make sense of rainfall anywhere in the world now and into the future (and therefore regardless of climate change).

Gamble (2004, 2006) builds on Bernstein's work in order to distinguish between what she terms context dependent knowledge (horizontal discourse) and context independent knowledge (vertical discourse) and by claiming that each of these knowledge forms can be 'principled' or 'procedural'. Pure theory would constitute 'principled context independent knowledge' and applied theory 'procedural context independent knowledge'. Context dependent knowledge is then classified into 'procedural knowledge' (or everyday practice) and 'principled procedural knowledge' (or codified practice') (Gamble, 2006: 90).

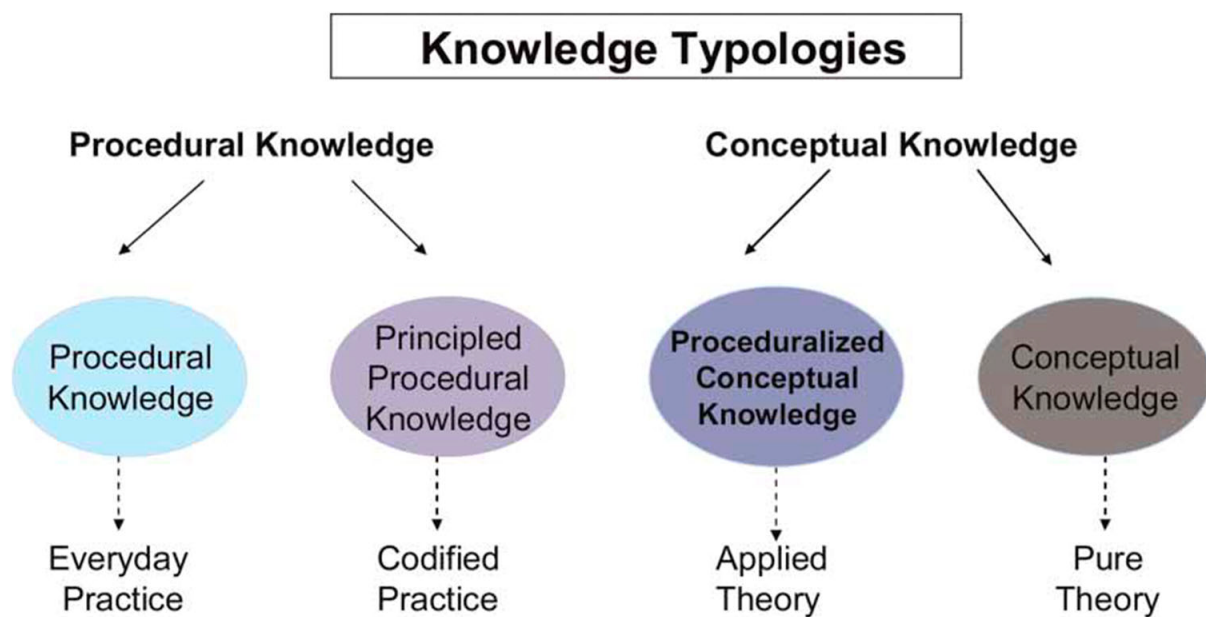


Figure 1: Shay's (2012) 'knowledge typologies' (adapted from Gamble, 2006)

For Shay, much of the knowledge produced in the field of Educational Development belongs to this latter category of "codified practice" and results from the need to solve particular problems. Gamble (2004) draws on the example of a cabinet maker to illustrate this knowledge form. In an apprenticeship, cabinet makers are trained in a set of procedures ("first do this, then do that"). Over time, they extract principles from these procedures which allows them to go on and design pieces of furniture for themselves. This "principled procedural knowledge" is Shay's "codified practice". Shay provides examples of the need to design assessment rubric in order to ensure greater reliability, or consistency, in marking or the need to teach large classes of students from diverse backgrounds as examples which have had responses in the form of codified practice. Importantly, 'craft knowledge' is developed through practice. As Shay points out, it draws on principles that are not explicit and which can only be explained in relation to a particular context,

hence the need for “story telling”. The problem then is that ‘learning is constrained by the non-comparability of contexts: what worked for them does not necessarily work for us’ (Shay, 2012: 321).

Another major problem with codified practice, for Shay, is that it lacks the potential to use theory to ‘reconceptualise problems’ as, ultimately, it relies on experience and commonsense. For problems to be reconceptualised, concepts from the abstract, systematised accounts of Bernstein’s vertical discourse and Gamble’s context independent knowledge are necessary. In the field of educational development, it is also necessary to draw on Bernstein’s (2000) concept of a horizontal knowledge structure involving the use of theory as a lens to look at a particular phenomenon or problem in order to “see” things that might not otherwise be seen or “see” things differently.

In this paper, different knowledge forms are understood as “structures” at Bhaskar’s (1978) level of the Real that serve to regulate access to Bernstein’s (2000) specialised knowledge, or vertical discourse, privileged in the universities. In the context of the global economy, access to specialised knowledge ultimately involves access to the “goods” of the world in the form of better paid employment which also carries more status.

In a paper revisiting Shay’s (2012) work, Boughey (2022) points out that some researchers are able to draw on different theories as lens to explore phenomena or problems related to learning. Shay (2004, 2006) and Jawitz (2007, 2008, 2009), for example, use Bourdieu’s (1977, 1988, 1990) “field theory” to explore assessment showing that, far from being a “neat” process involving only the alignment learning outcomes, assessment criteria and assessment tasks, valid assessment is impacted by identity and other issues. In a similar vein, other South African researchers have drawn on the work of Archer (1995, 1996), amongst other things, to look at the professional development of academics as teachers (Quinn, 2012), the assumption that the provision of a course on teaching will allow new academics to innovate (Behari-Leak, 2017) and student learning (Lockett & Lockett, 2009). Arguably what is missing from these accounts, however, is their assimilation into an overall body of theory that will account for students’ experiences in higher education although, to some extent, Boughey and McKenna’s (2021) work does move towards this by drawing on research to argue for understandings of students as ‘social beings’.

There are, however, a number of problems with the research leading to the production of “powerful” educational development knowledge in South Africa, the first of which relates to its producers who mostly work at historically white universities that sustained their teaching and learning centres when many other universities were closing them down as a result of financial problems facing institutions in the late 1990s (Boughey, 2007). Alternatively, as in the case of all the work drawing on ‘capabilities’ (Sen, 1993, 1999), they work in specialist research entities, in this case the programme falling under South African Research Chair Professor Melanie Walker at the University of the Free State (UFS). Some work drawing on Maton’s (2014) Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) (Winberg, 2012; Winberg, et al., 2016) can similarly be seen to have emanated from

the Work Integrated Research Unit headed by South African Research Chair Professor Chris Winberg at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT).

The failure to sustain work in the field of Educational Development continues to this day given that educational developers are often appointed using soft, grant-based funding on short-term contracts and are employed in support, rather than academic, positions. A survey conducted by Gosling (2009) on behalf of the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA) identified that many practitioners were appointed on short-term, contract positions as contributing to high turnover in the field. A more recent study (Vorster, et al., in press) identified that the majority of staff who responded to a survey were appointed in support positions rather than academic posts. Of even more concern is that the same survey showed that approximately 41% of respondents had been working in the field for fewer than five years, an observation which arguably points to instability and rates of staff turnover.

The tendency for many working in the field to be appointed to tenuous, non-academic positions and the lack of status in institutional hierarchies associated with this provides little motivation for those working in the field to develop their expertise by attaining specialist qualifications at doctoral level and building their own research capacity. The fact that the field has not managed to establish itself (Shay, 2012; Boughey, 2022) as a region (Bernstein, 2000) with a strongly theorised research base compounds the problem. If the field is not recognised as a bona fide field of academic endeavour, the chances of practitioners being awarded academic positions lessens, leading to a chicken and egg situation.

Yet other problems with the nature of knowledge produced in the field can be identified. One is that while, for example, explanations of assessment (Shay 2004, 2006; Jawitz, 2008, 2009) drawing on different theoretical 'languages of description' (Bernstein, 1996:134) may be produced, these tended to stop short at the reconceptualisation of a problem without going on to explore the implications for practice. Shay (2004, 2006) and Jawitz (2008, 2009), for example, identify assessment as socially and culturally implicated given the subjectivities of assessors but this observation has not been taken up in identifying the implications for practice as, by and large, assessment is still constructed as involving the alignment of learning outcomes with assessment criteria and assessment tasks in formal courses intended to professionalise academic teaching. There are some notable exceptions to the observation that, when powerful knowledge is produced, its implications are not explored. Blackie (2022), for example, draws on LCT to build an 'epistemic assessment framework' as a tool to foster students' self-reflection on their learning and academics' self-reflection on their evaluations of students work. A second exception is found in the work of Ellery who has developed a series of 'toolkits' (Ellery, 2002a,b) based on her research using LCT (Ellery, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021). It could also be the case that Blackie's (2022) contribution goes some way to developing the kind of overarching theory, noted as lacking above, by introducing the concept of reflection which would combat the subjectivity identified by, for example, Jawitz (2008). In general, however, it is fair to say that much of the work that draws on theory in in-depth ways does not extend itself to implementation.

From a perspective in the theoretical framework outlined above, educational developers can be seen to be exercising their agency to draw on a knowledge form (codified practice) which does not have the power to reconceptualise problems needed in a transformational context. However, the exercise of their agency is constrained by a range of conditions related to the basis on which they are employed, their inability to draw on discourses constructing reality as stratified and, also, their familiarity with a wide range of theory which is also understood to be discursive in nature. These, however, are not the only conditions constraining the production of “powerful” knowledge in the field.

The focus on staff development

For Leibowitz (2014: 359), Educational Development is ‘about the creation of conditions supportive of teaching and learning’. Although a definition such as this provides enormous scope for different kinds of practice, Sutherland (2018: 261) argues that ‘the vast majority of literature ... casts the main role of [educational] development] as the improvement of teaching with the hopeful aim of subsequently enhancing student learning’. As Behari-Leak (2017) has argued, however, seeing staff development, and more specifically the role of formal courses in teaching and learning in higher education, as a means of enriching student learning privileges the agency of individual academics who are often confronted by enormous structural and constraints at departmental, faculty, and institutional levels when they try to innovate in their practice. In writing about the development of academics as teachers, researchers in the field of educational development, therefore, need to approach claims about the impact of professionalising academic teaching with some caution.

There are other problems with research on the professional development of academics as teachers some of which relate to the status of educational development practitioners themselves. It is very common for practitioners to have very little experience of teaching in the disciplines in which they claim expertise in teaching and, even, of teaching in higher education more generally. In producing research on teaching and learning, educational developers run the risk of their work being received with some scepticism as academics dismiss their work as being divorced from the realities of teaching in contemporary universities of which they have no experience.

When educational developers draw on “codified practice” (Gamble, 2004, 2006) in the courses and workshops they offer, the problem is compounded even further. Not only do educational developers lack the experience of teaching in the disciplines which would give them credibility and, potentially, the means of questioning what they teach, they are also drawing on a knowledge form which does not have the power to reconceptualise problems

The problem of audience

Since the mid 1980s when the need for Educational Development to focus on transforming institutions rather than addressing students’ “deficiencies” (Vilakazi & Tema, 1985; Mehl, 1988), educational developers in South Africa have sought to work alongside lecturers teaching courses

in the programmes for which they are enrolled. This observation raises questions about the audience for whom the knowledge they produce is directed. Educational developers produce knowledge for others working in the field, but they also have an audience in mainstream academics seeking to improve their teaching. This can result in dilemmas. Blackie (2022b: 19), for example, points to the theoretical choices she made in order to address her paper to a readership comprising academic teachers of chemistry, not other teaching and learning researchers, because of her goal of contributing to the improvement of chemistry education. As a result, she chooses to provide only a 'minimum discussion of LCT' and, in addition, drew on Rom Harre's (2012) scientific realism 'as this approach had already been published in this journal' (that is, in *Foundations of Chemistry*, the journal in which her paper was published). In explaining her choices, Blackie identifies another tension in knowledge production in the field of teaching and learning between the desirability of drawing on complex and up-to-date theory communicated in specialist languages and the need to make insights available from research accessible to non-expert audiences.

Yet another decision for educational developers relates to whether to write for a local or an international audience. Writing for a local audience may make it possible to draw on context more widely and, thus, write a piece that is more accessible to readers who are adepts in the disciplines and not in teaching and learning per se. However, publication in international journals carries more weight in any assessment of research capacity. A concern for advancement as a practitioner impacting on the quality of teaching and learning by addressing other practitioners and academics in the mainstream disciplines and, thus, on the academic success of students may clash with a concern for a reputation as a researcher, the ability to access research funding and, ultimately, contribute to the failure to build the field necessary for educational development to be recognised as a valid field of intellectual enquiry in the universities.

A perspective drawing on the theory on which this paper is based would see these dilemmas as discursively constructed since theories themselves can be constructed as discourses. The academic publishing industry would be construed as a structure contributing to the regulation of access to the 'goods' of the world in the form of promotions and ratings. Educational development practitioners exercise their agency by choosing theories to illuminate problems or phenomena and outlets for their work in the form of academic journals. All agents are, however, socially and culturally conditioned and practitioners are likely to have been conditioned by discourses citing inequity in teaching and learning. Their choices may therefore be swayed to being what might be termed 'less strategic' in terms of pursuing a research career and producing powerful knowledge.

Competing discourses

Maton (2014) constructs intellectual fields as "cosmologies" or systems of ideas and beliefs and argues that cosmologies can be axiologically or epistemologically "charged". In axiologically charged fields, the movement is towards values whilst, in epistemologically charged fields, it is towards using the explanatory power of knowledge. Both "charges" are always present, but one

will dominate. Historically, the field of Educational Development in South Africa was always axiologically charged given that much of its growth has been fuelled by changes in student bodies and practitioners worked to achieve equity in educational outcomes. As Lockett (2024) points out, in South Africa certainly, much of the practice in the field has been assimilationist as practitioners sought to ensure that black working-class students were equipped with the knowledge and skills that would allow them to succeed in an unchanged university. Arguably this has also been the case elsewhere in the world (see, for example, Wingate, 2007).

From the mid-1990s onwards, however, conditions in the field of Teaching and Learning have shifted to encompass a concern for efficiency (Boughey, 2007). The introduction of the suite of management practices known as 'New Public Management' (NPM) to higher education' (Hood, 1992; Christensen & Leagreid, 2002; Olssen & Peter, 2005) with the aim of making it more efficient implicated those involved in supporting and developing teaching and learning since they were now often constructed as contributing to goals in strategic plans.

Quality assurance and quality enhancement, as part of NPM, have also impacted on the field of educational development not only in South Africa (Quinn, 2006; Boughey, 2007) but in the United Kingdom (Gosling & D'Andrea, 2000). Gosling (2001), for example, points to the role played by UK based practitioners in preparing for subject reviews which required every academic department in universities across the country being assessed for "teaching quality". Gosling (2001: 82) also points to what he terms a 'dilemma' for those working in the teaching and learning field 'who prefer to be associated with 'development' rather than 'assurance'.

The so-called "efficiency agenda" exposed teaching and learning practitioners to an entirely new set of discourses related to neoliberalism, globalisation and New Public Management (Hood, 1991). Privileging market logic, these discourses subscribe to the construction of knowledge as a commodity to be bought and sold and, thus, to the conceptualisation of education as a private good. In addition, they reduce the role of higher education to that of providing knowledge workers for the global economy. Significantly, "efficiency" discourses also promote the idea that higher education, and teaching and learning as one of its core functions, should draw on the idea that efforts and outputs can be metrified often in the form of targets in strategic plans. In a piece published in *Times Higher Education* (THE), Custer (2023) sums this situation up by noting that

You can't move in higher education today without bumping into a student success strategy. Straddling the boundaries of student services and academic affairs, these blueprints lay out institutions' intentions to support students' academic progress and to help them build skills for jobs after graduation while also ensuring they feel that they belong at the institution.

These strategies are typically driven by those working in the field of educational development reporting to social actors in the form of individuals appointed to senior positions with the mandate to 'manage' teaching and learning often in the vice-chancellorate.

The impact of these discourses on the field of teaching and learning has been profound. Seeing the purpose of higher education as focusing on the production of knowledge workers for the global economy has brought employability to the fore in programme design and the market logic of neoliberalism, privileging the idea that education can be bought and sold as a private good, has seen many institutions constructing “teaching excellence” as part of their “brand”. In their roles as contributors to institutional “efficiency”, teaching and learning practitioners are involved in programme and course design and review and their work can be understood as part of what it means to ‘build a brand’ (see, for example, Tangalakis, et al., 2024).

However, for the field of teaching and learning, arguably the most important element of these “efficiency” discourses is related to the construction of education as a meritocracy (Sobuwa & McKenna, 2019). If higher education is understood primarily as providing access to the ‘goods’ of the world by providing the credentials that will lead to high status and well remunerated employment, then access and success have to be constructed as potentially open to all who have the innate ability to succeed. In addition, the forms of knowledge and ways of knowing privileged in the university also have to be understood as neutral. As a result, students are constructed as “decontextualised learners” (Boughey & McKenna, 2017, 2021) rather than as individuals conditioned by the contexts into which they were born as they go about learning. As individuals, they arrive in the universities with varying levels of exposure to the vertical discourses (Bernstein, 2000) that constitute disciplinary ways of describing the world, thanks to disparities in the schooling system and in their homes of origin. For many, horizontal discourses (Bernstein, 2000) will be more familiar than the abstract, theorised, systematised forms of knowing the world privileged by the university. The language resources students are able to draw on will also be diverse in that not all will enjoy easy command of the forms of language used to describe the abstractions and processes that characterise systematised abstract accounts. For those for whom abstract, theorised, systematised ways of describing the world are familiar, drawing on these will be part of their daily lives. For others, the need to engage with vertical discourses is constructed as “study” and links between the theories and abstractions on the pages of textbooks and the world of experience will be tenuous, with the result that the two worlds, the everyday and the world of formal education, will be kept separate. Boughey and McKenna (2017, 2021) see acknowledging differences between groups and individual students described above as understanding students as “social beings”. Sadly, this is a minority position given the dominance of the efficiency discourses explored above (Case, et al., 2018).

It is possible to argue that efficiency is necessary for equity, that the more graduates an institution or a higher system produces, the more social mobility and, therefore, equity, will result (see, for example, Scott, et al., 2007). While this is true, the nature of efficiency discourses mean that they will condition teaching and learning practitioners to draw on discourses privileging methodological individualism, or the idea that a proper explanation for a phenomenon or pattern can be derived from individual motivation and behaviour. As a result, these discourses condition practitioners to think and act in ways that do not acknowledge the way education functions to privilege some social groups and constrain others, thus, contributing to reproduction of the status

quo. To return to the claim made earlier in this section that much of the knowledge used to explain teaching and learning and students' success, or lack of it, draws on observations and "commonsense" located at the level of reality, termed by Bhaskar (1979), the Empirical, they will also militate against the exploration of the deeper layers of reality in order to identify structures contributing to inequity. Some more experienced practitioners and researchers are able to hold equity and efficiency discourses in tension. Others, new to the field, are more likely not to be able to do this and produce knowledge which while acknowledging the need for more equity at the same time draw on learning theories privileging students' agency to succeed in context structured by profound inequities related to forms of knowledge and ways of knowing.

For those working in the field, the fact that teaching and learning as a region looks inwards to the theoretical fields of the social science disciplines and outwards to a field of practice (Bernstein, 2000) results in what might be termed "identity conflicts". Researchers need to do research and, importantly, publish in order to attain or maintain academic status and earn respect within an institution. At the same time, they need to perform a support function usually reporting to a "manager" responsible for the strategic direction of teaching and learning at institutional level often appointed at Deputy Vice Chancellor Level. In many respects, practitioners have a foot in "two camps". Their failure to produce knowledge with the power to reconceptualise problems and which will allow them to "see" teaching and learning differently not only hinders their development as researchers but also does little to contribute to the "transformation" they so ardently seek.

Turning to the theoretical framework informing this paper, it is once again possible to see educational developers constrained in the exercise of their agency by contrasting and competing discourses. This then results in work with less potential to reconceptualise problems and impact on the transformation project.

Conclusion

In terms of the theoretical framework informing it, the argument made in this paper is that practitioners in the field of Educational Development have not been able to exercise their agency as social actors and groups of corporate agents to effect "transformation" in teaching and learning in higher education evidenced in the form of enhanced success for marginalised students (which would be conceptualised as a series of events involving passes and failures in assessment tasks at Bhaskar's level of the Real and positive experiences at the level of the Empirical) because they have been constrained by an array of mechanisms at the level of the Real. The most significant of these mechanisms is the forms of knowledge on which they predominantly draw. They are then constrained in producing more powerful knowledge using theory to reconceptualise problems by more mechanisms including the structure of their employment, the location of the entities in which they are located in institutional structures. They are also constrained as knowledge producers by the need to engage with the competing discourses of equity and efficiency and, also, by the audiences with which they seek to engage.


Possibly the most significant of these constraints relates to the employment conditions experienced by Educational Development practitioners, with many appointed to support positions on contract. Given the need for enhanced capacity to produce the powerful knowledge that will reconceptualise problems, employment conditions which will lead to the recruitment and retention of practitioners who will build a career in the field are imperative.

A second condition constraining the use of "powerful" knowledge to inform practice relates to the separation of the research function and practice in some universities. Where research is conducted in a department or entity dedicated to this purpose while practice is located in a teaching and learning centre, attempts to forge links between the two entities could be expected to bear fruit in terms of improved practice. In places where research and practice are located in the same entity, such as the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) at the University of Cape Town and the Centre for Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL) at Rhodes University, care must be taken to ensure that research is indeed used to enhance practice and that any attempt to delink the two functions by locating them in different entities is resisted.

Finally, more attention needs to be given to developing the research capacity of practitioners working in the field. The Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of South Africa (HELTASA) does valuable work in this regard though arguably sufficient attention is not paid to supporting the production of the "powerful" knowledge needed to transform teaching and learning rather than what Shay (2012) terms 'codified practice' or 'craft knowledge'.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the arguably unrealised potential of the field of educational development to contribute to the transformation of teaching and learning not only in South Africa but also across the world. The hope is that the argument presented here will do this.

Author Biography

Chrissie Boughey has worked in the field of Educational Development in South Africa for more than thirty years. At Rhodes University, she was Director of the Centre for Higher Education Research Teaching and Learning before becoming Dean, Teaching and Learning and Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic. She has supervised extensively at doctoral level and now serves as a Coordinating Editor for *Higher Education* and as an Associate Editor of the *South African Journal of Science*. She is a Professor Emerita of Rhodes University. 

References

- Archer, M. 1995. *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, M. 1996. *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, M. 2000. *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, M. 2007. *Making Our Way through the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Barrow, M., & Grant, B. 2011. The 'truth' of academic development: How did it get to be about 'teaching and learning'? *Higher Education Research & Development*, 31(4):465–477.
- Behari-Leak, K. 2017. New academics, new higher education contexts: A critical perspective on professional development. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 22(5): 485–500.
- Bernstein, B. 1996. *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity: Theory, Research and Critique*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Bernstein, B. 2000. *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity: Theory, Research and Critique*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bhaskar, R. 1978. *A Realist Theory of Science*. London: Routledge.
- Boughey, C. 2007. Educational development in South Africa: From social reproduction to capitalist expansion. *Higher Education Policy*, 18: 5-18.
- Boughey, C. 2012. The significance of structure, culture and agency in supporting and developing student learning at South African universities. In Dhunpath, R. & Vithal, R. (eds.). *Alternative access to university: Underprepared student or underprepared institutions*. Cape Town: Pearson, 62-88.
- Boughey, C. 2022. Not there yet: Knowledge building in educational development ten years on. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 27(8): 992-1004.
- Boughey, C. & McKenna, S. 2017. Analysing an audit cycle: A social realist account. *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(6): 963-975.
- Boughey, C. & McKenna, S. 2021. *Understanding Higher education: An Alternative Perspective*. Cape Town: African Minds.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1988. *Homo Academicus*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press.
- Case, J., Marshall, D., McKenna, S. & Mogashana, D. 2018. *Going to University*. Cape Town: African Minds.
- Christensen, T. & Leagreid, P. 2002. New public management: Puzzles of democracy and the influence of citizens. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 10(2): 267-295.
- Clegg, S. 2009. Forms of knowing and academic development practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 34(4): 403-416.
- Council on Higher Education (CHE). 2023. *VitalStats: Public and Private Higher Education Data 2021*. Pretoria: CHE.
- Custer, S. 2023. Is student success academia's failure? *Times Higher Education (THE)*, June 22 2023. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/depth/student-success-academias-failure> (Accessed: 30 November 2024).
- Ellery, K. 2017. Conceptualising knowledge for access in the sciences: An academic development perspective. *Higher Education*, 74(50): 915-931.
- Ellery, K. 2018. Legitimation of knowers for access in science. *Journal of Education*, 71(1): 25-38.
- Ellery, K. 2019. Congruence in knowledge and knower Codes: The challenge of enabling learner autonomy in a science foundation course. *Alternation*, 26(2): 213-239.

- Ellery, K. 2021. Widening access in science: Developing both knowledge and knowers. In Maton, K., Martin, J. & Doran, Y. (eds.). *Teaching Science: Knowledge, Language, Pedagogy*. London: Routledge, 185-204.
- Ellery, K. 2022a. *Learning at University*. Makhanda: Rhodes University.
- Ellery, K. 2022b. *Becoming a Scientist*. Makhanda: Rhodes University.
- Garraway, J. & Bozalek, V. 2019. Theoretical frameworks and the Extended Curriculum Programme. *Alternation*, 26(2): 8-35.
- Gamble, J. 2004. Retrieving the general from the particular: The structure of craft knowledge. In Muller, J., Davies, B. & Morais, A. (eds.). *Reading Bernstein: Researching Bernstein*. Routledge/Falmer: London, 189-203.
- Gamble, J. 2009. The relation between knowledge and practice in curriculum and assessment. Concept paper commissioned by Umalusi (October). Unpublished.
- Geertsema, J. 2016. Academic development, SoTL and educational research. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 21(2): 122-134.
- Gosling, D. 2001. Educational development units in the UK – what are they doing five years on? *International Journal for Academic Development*, 6(1): 74-90.
- Gosling, D. & D'Andrea, V. 2000. *Quality Development in Higher Education*. Bielefeld: International Consortium for Education Development in Higher Education.
- Harre, R. 2012. Approaches to realism. *Studia Philosophica Estonica*, 5(2): 23-35.
- Hood, C. 1991. A public management for all seasons? *Public Administration*, 69(1): 3-19.
- Jawitz, J. 2008. Learning to assess in the academic workplace: Case study in the natural sciences'. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 22(5): 1006-1018.
- Jawitz, J. 2009. Learning in the academic workplace: The 'harmonization of the collective and the individual habitus'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 34(6): 601-614.
- Luckett, K. 2024. Racial discourses and colonial education policy: The discursive construction of education development at a historically white South African university. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14740222241282951>.
- Luckett, K. & Luckett, T. 2009. The development of agency in first generation learners in higher education: A Social Realist analysis. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 14(5): 469-481.
- Maton, K. 2014. *Knowledge and Knowers*. London: Routledge.
- Mehl, M. 1988. Academic support: Developmental giant or academic pauper? *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 2(1): 17-20.
- Olssen, M. & Peters, B. 2005. Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: From the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of Higher Education Policy*, 12(3): 313-345.
- Quinn, L. 2006. *A social realist account of the emergence of a formal academic staff development programme at a South African university*. Unpublished PhD diss. Rhodes University, South Africa.
- Quinn, L. 2012. Understanding resistance: An analysis of discourses in academic staff development. *Studies in Higher Education*, 37(1): 69-83.

- Scott, I., Yeld, N. & Hendry, J. 2007. *A case for improving teaching and learning*. Higher Education Monitor, 6. Pretoria: CHE.
- Sen, A. 1993. Capability and well-being. In Nussbaum, M. & Sen, A. (eds.). *The Quality of Life*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 30-53.
- Sen, A. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. New York: Knopf.
- Shay, S. 2004. The assessment of complex performance: A socially situated interpretive act'. *Harvard Educational Review*, 74(3): 307-329.
- Shay, S. 2006. The assessment of complex tasks: A double reading. *Studies in Higher Education*. 30(6): 663-679.
- Shay, S. 2012. Educational development as a field: are we there yet? *Higher Education Research & Development*, 31(3): 311-323.
- Smit, R. 2012. Towards a clearer understanding of student disadvantage in higher education: problematising deficit thinking. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 31(3): 369-380.
- Sobuwa, S. & McKenna, S. 2019. The obstinate notion that higher education is a meritocracy. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning (CriSTaL)*, 7(2): 13-27.
- Sutherland, K. 2018. Holistic academic development: Is it time to think more broadly about the academic development project?. *International Journal of Academic Development*, 23(4): 261-273.
- Sugrue, C., Englund, T., Solbrenke, T.D & Fosslund, T. 2017. Trends in the practices of academic developers: trajectories of higher education? *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(12): 2336-2353.
- Tangalakis, K., Hoang, C., Knight, E., Hurley, P., Jackson, J. & Hildebrandt, M. 2024. Differentiation through innovation in the contemporary higher education environment: The case of the Victoria University Block Model®. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*. 61(1): 1-15.
- Trow, M. 1973. Problems in the transition from elite to mass education. Carnegie Commission on higher education: Berkeley, Ca.
- Vorster, J., Cupido, X., Naidoo, K., Chitinand, K. Wolff, K. & Van Breda, L. in press. *Mapping the nature and scope of Academic Development work across higher education institutions in South Africa*. The National Academic Development Landscape Project Report (NADL). NADL: Rhodes University, Makhanda.
- Vilakazi, H. & Tema, B. 1985. White universities and the black revolution. *ASPECTS: Journal of the Academic Support Programmes at the University of Cape Town, the University of Natal, Rhodes University and the University of the Witwatersrand*, 6: 18-40.
- Wingate, U. 2007. A framework for transition: Supporting 'Learning to Learn' in higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 61(3): 391-405.