COLLEGIALITY VERSUS INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

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Abstract: *This conceptual paper is intended to highlight the need for instructional support for teachers and academic lecturers who enter the profession without formal pedagogy training, and discuss how this phenomenon can be addressed via healthy collegial practices and institutional support. The paper also emphasizes the need for those who enter the teaching profession to hold knowledge seeking and knowledge sharing attitudes. The author shares and discusses a number of critical behavioural characteristics observed among academics. From the review of literature on collegial practices and knowledge sharing, this paper encourages academic institutions not only to encourage collegial practices, but turn them into platforms to provide supportive services for professional enhancement. True collegiality must pave way for knowledge seeking and knowledge sharing, especially in the context of improving instructional and pedagogical practices.*

Keywords: collegiality, instructional support, pedagogy

Introduction

In an environment of uncertainty and unpredictability, people, their intellectual capital, and the culture they create are valuable assets in universities. Universities and institutions of higher learning grow and prosper from the knowledge of their faculty (Singer & Hurley, 2005). The quality of education in universities also very much depends on the quality of its academics. Hence, in higher education, collegiality is the cornerstone of professional work (Cipriano, 2011). The nature of relationships among faculty members (i.e., academic community) has a substantive influence on the character and quality of the institution and on student accomplishment (Barth, 2006). As such, this paper focuses on the importance of pedagogical competencies among academics, and explores how academic institutions might make use of collegial strengths to improve instructional practices and increase professional status.

In general, collegiality is often interpreted in context of the more superficial term, congeniality (i.e., a shared set of social behaviours), a criterion for institutional citizenship and work-place harmony (Hatfield, 2006). However, according to Cipriano (2011) collegiality should be evidenced in the manner in which faculty not only interact socially, but show genuine respect for one another, treat colleagues with dignity and civility, value their potential, benefit from the experiences of colleagues, work collaboratively to achieve a common purpose, and assume equitable responsibilities for the good of the discipline and faculty as a whole.

Problem Statement

The paramount concern for many prospective educators is their lack of basic knowledge in teaching, as many enter the profession with almost no formal teacher training (Coburn, 2001). Many lecturers in higher learning institutions take up teaching (i.e., lecturing) positions without any basic pedagogical skills. Many institutions of higher learning do not seem to consider credentials in pedagogy as a criterion in their appointment of academic staff (Rosmawati, Razak, & Mahzan, 2016; Wambui, Ngari, & Waititu, 2016). Instead, many lecturers are often recruited merely on the basis of their

academic credentials or industrial experiences. Such hiring practices may reflect the corporatization of education, high rates of attrition, and flaws in individual organizational settings. Prospective candidates are interviewed by Human Resource personnel with advice and help of Deans or Department Heads who may have been appointed under similar conditions (i.e., without pedagogical training). These academics are assumed to possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to navigate the academic environment.

Lecturers under this recruitment process may be unaware of the importance of pedagogical skills, curriculum, principles of assessment and evaluation, and educational psychology. Furthermore, they may be reluctant to engage in professional development practices unless they are compelled to do so. Unfortunately, possessing a knowledge base or area of expertise does not automatically translate into the ability to impart this knowledge to others effectively. As such, it is important that lecturers develop their knowledge and skills in the dynamics of teaching, learning, and pedagogy in order to stay informed in their profession and to improve student learning. In this way, engaging in professional development and enhancing professional knowledge can be considered to be part of collegiality.

Without access to the pedagogical skills of experienced educators, new members of the profession may be unprepared to face the challenges of the classroom and may be limited in their repertoire of instructional strategies. Without a sound knowledge base in education, pedagogy, and high-quality preparation, educators will either teach as they have been taught, or not teach at all (Freiberg, 2002). It is also probable that they end up ignoring the topic, teaching it shallowly, or promoting misconceptions, with each outcome leaving students inadequately prepared to confront the problems of the world (Stenhouse, 1975).

In the light of these challenges, academic institutions should provide institutional support to empower their academics to enhance collegial practices and prepare them for classroom and other future challenges. Unfortunately, there are lecturers who do not believe in cooperative teaching and who do not discuss ideas for better and effective teaching with their colleagues. Indeed, there appear to be a number of alleged contradictions in the way lecturers view their professional abilities in higher learning institutions. These behaviours and associated implications are discussed below.

a) Some lecturers seem to hold the impression that their job is superior to that of primary or secondary school teachers. Moreover, these educators are trapped in the fallacy that pedagogical knowledge is only relevant for educators at the primary and secondary school levels.

b) Some lecturers tend to hold egocentric feelings that assume that their knowledge base is sufficient. Furthermore, they may believe that they hold mastery or authority in a particular subject area, basing their teaching ability on the number of years spent in their career. These so called time-based experts tend to believe effective teaching is limited to content delivery. As such, they are cut off from the true traits of the teaching trade, ignoring or lacking crucial knowledge associated with general pedagogy, subject-specific pedagogy, student psychology, curriculum, and knowledge of organizational culture (Shulman, 1987, as cited in Arends, 2001). Adhering to content delivery alone does not signify effective teaching, be it teaching at a primary, secondary or tertiary level.

c) Some lecturers experience silence and isolation due to their low self-esteem and poor sense of professional efficacy. They are worried about interacting with their senior colleagues and peers, who they may be perceive as proficient in terms of their teaching abilities, for fear of being perceived as incompetent. In these instances, lecturers may work in isolation, feel shy, or lack the

social and communication skills that permit them to engage in collegial partnerships and collaborative learning. Still, there may be others who hold the misconception that it is inappropriate to discuss work-related issues with colleagues. In either case, these beliefs can hold negative implications for students' academic performance.

d) Some lecturers are self-content and elect to maintain a low profile in their interactions with their colleagues. These lecturers exhibit a modest behaviour; they seldom discuss difficulties encountered in their teaching, care about student needs, or engage in other areas of professional interest.

e) Some lecturers blindly adopt materials such as power-point slides, notes, and assignment tasks that have been prepared by others, usually individuals who have previously taught the subject matter. Lieberman and Miller (1999) refer to this behaviour as "technical tinkering" and indicate that it likely will result in "failure" as such practices "infantilise knowledge sharing and push them into patterns of defensiveness and conservatism" (p. 5).

A discussion about how collegial practices can work to overcome these challenges and provide necessary instructional support for academics is provided in the following section.

Collegiality

Past research has consistently underlined the contribution of strong collegial relationships to school improvement and success. High levels of collegiality among staff members is one of the characteristics found in successful schools. Strong and healthy collegial relationships among the teaching personnel is regarded as an essential component of institutional effectiveness (Arnold, 2014). Thus, collegiality is an important variable that deserves more attention, especially for those who work in higher education (Edwards, 2003). Collegiality is a discretionary behaviour that is not

recognised by the formal reward system of the institution, but that promotes the effective functioning of educational organisations (Johnston, Shimmel, & O'Hara, 2012, p. 9). Creating a productive work climate within the faculty or the institution as a whole requires shared leadership and responsibility and relates to how members of the academic community engage in their share of the common workload (Pearce & Conger, 2003, p. 1).

Despite the lack of one universal definition (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011), the concept of collegiality is a central and critical feature of effective professional development efforts (Harris & Anthony, 2001). True collegial relationships are those in which participants are united by a common purpose and shared identity (Vukelich & Wrenn, 1999, as cited in Shah, 2012). Although collegiality is often associated with being cooperative, pleasant, and ready to assist, a more precise definition of the term could include shared power and authority and cooperative interactions among colleagues (Freedman, 2009).

As Allen (2004, p .1) concludes, "a faculty member who cannot work willingly and effectively with colleagues, may not be able to contribute adequately to the curricular needs or help sustain a productive community of scholars." Sustainability efforts may be hampered when faculty members are divisive, uncompromising, and inflexible. Faculty morale and effectiveness may be compromised when one or more of its members do not share, or assume less responsibility, for achieving a shared purpose. Positive enactment of these elements form the foundation of successful interactions in academic life, or what is otherwise referred to as, collegiality (Cipriano, 2011).

In this respect, knowledge sharing is a trait one exhibits to be an effective member of the faculty and should be treated as a distinct category of performance (Babalhavaeji & Kermani, 2011). The concept of collegiality as part of a psychological contract, allowing members of an academic community to work

in harmony and with full integrity in order to enhance their efficacy via knowledge sharing practices. Focus must be on creating and sustaining a community of learners in which there is one-to-one mentoring as well as school-wide collaboration and conversation versus teaching in isolation (Middleton, 2000, p. 52). Collegiality can be a virtue, a genuine concern of caring and sharing, that has the potential of breaking isolation among educators. It will contribute to a paradigm shift in the knowledge, skill, judgement, or commitment that individuals bring to their work and will enhance the collective capacity of groups in institutions (Little, 1990, p. 509).

Lack of collegiality characterised by incivility in units, fractured community, lack of information sharing and collaboration, and aloofness are some of the most frequently mentioned factors associated with job dissatisfaction among faculty members (Norman, Ambrose, & Huston, 2006, p. 352). Schools or faculties that do not support or promote collegiality among their staff and allow their teaching personnel to work alone in their classrooms are potentially wasting human resources and contributing to disenchantment with the teaching profession (Zaharik, 1987, cited in Shah, 2012). Collegiality does not happen by chance; it needs to be planned and structured, taught and learned, and internalised (Shah, 2012). As such, collegiality is a reflection of educational leadership.

Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing is a social interaction that promotes the adoption of effective practices and sustainability in education. This practice allows individuals to disseminate their knowledge among colleagues, as well as provide and absorb feedback (Davenport & Prusak, 2000). Higher learning institutions, in their aspirations to achieve long-term institutional success and enhanced standards (Howell & Annansingh, 2013) are ensuring that faculty members not only continue to generate new knowledge but seek, disseminate, and share knowledge with others. Higher learning institutions should encourage and promote the desire for knowledge sharing among academics (Breu & Hemingway, 2004). In the knowledge-based era, universities should seek to ensure success and permanence, organizational goals, and performance improvements (Sharma, 2010). Unfortunately, knowledge seeking and sharing practices among academics is a rare phenomenon (Skaik & Othman, 2014) let alone knowledge sharing for professional competencies.

Collegiality and knowledge sharing play a vital role in augmenting professional growth and development, job satisfaction, organizational and professional commitment, as well as institutional quality and student performance. A supportive, collegial environment is one in which colleagues maintain open lines of communication and interaction and where they listen to the concerns and ideas of others. Faculty share their collegial expertise in order to engage in self-improvement and enhance student outcomes. Supportive colleagues do not make inquiries for the purpose of evaluating peers' work; but rather converse with peers out of genuine interest in what they are doing. They take pride and appreciate one another's accomplishments, recognizing the efforts of every member of the team. As such, they do not perceive themselves to be in competition with one another, but seek to work in harmony with a true spirit of collaboration. Good colleagues respect their students, discuss their needs with their fellow colleagues, and assume joint responsibility in problem solving and decision making related to student outcomes. Educators at all institutional levels are encouraged to move away from the traditional norms of isolation and autonomy in favour of collegial and collaborative practices (Barth, 2006; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Jarzabkowski, 2003; Retallick & Butt, 2004).

It is believed that a conducive collegial environment characterized by respect,

dignity and genuine care for one another among faculty members can nurture a culture of knowledge seeking and knowledge sharing in academic institutions (Cipriano, 2011). The social climate, trust among the members, and strong support from management are among the most influential factors that affect knowledge sharing in organizations (Rosendaal, 2009). People are most willing to exchange knowledge with others when there is trust among them (Abrams, Cross, Lesser, & Levin, 2003).

Conclusion

It is essential that university administration promote collegial practices for instructional support. As there is often a gap between intent and delivery (either intentional or unintentional), it is important that educators work collegially with each other when carrying out their academic responsibilities. Academics must come to accept that they are lifelong learners and that the learning process is continuous with no boundaries. In this way, the onus lies on the part of faculty to improve the quality of their teaching.

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