

Quality imperatives versus funding: A case of *filial cannibalism* in South African Higher Education?

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Filial cannibalism involves the killing and eating of one's young. This presentation will give attendees an overview of the former binary higher education system in South Africa; the differentiated funding; the cooperative education foundations of current Universities of Technology and Comprehensive Institutions and the existing quality imperatives pertaining to work integrated learning. A comparison will be made with regard to the specific quality imperatives of, among others, the Higher Education Quality Authority and international best practices pertaining to work integrated learning. These include: stakeholder-inclusivity regarding curriculum design and development; the obligation to place students where work-integrated learning is part of the curriculum; effective management and coordination; provision of adequate infrastructure; learning agreements clarifying the outcomes and the roles and responsibilities of the institution, students, mentors and employers; mentoring of students; effective communication; regular and systematic monitoring of progress of students; and academic as well as workplace based assessment. The staffing and resource-intensive implications with regard to the stated imperatives will be elaborated. The realities of discretionary grants which are potentially available for *workplace experience* of students studying towards scarce skills programmes will be addressed.

The metaphor of ‘parental care, no care/total abandonment, and filial cannibalism’ will serve as vehicle to question the logic about non-funding by the Department of Higher Education and Training (as parent) of work-integrated learning parts of curriculum of certain higher education programmes (the younger programmes in the South African landscape).

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Glossary of terms

Academic freedom — sovereignty of academics about the curriculum of qualifications and the educational process

Binary-system — consisting of two adjacent sets of institutions offering higher education

Comprehensive Institutions — higher education institutions that emerged in the South African context as result of combining universities (previously offering formative and professional qualifications) and former technikons (vocational programmes)

Cooperative education — a form of education in which the educational institution and the occupational field co-operate in order to provide a joint educational programme, which experience in the workplace as part of the curriculum

Council on Higher Education (CHE) — an independent statutory body in South Africa responsible for advising the Minister of Higher Education and Training on all higher education policy issues, and for quality assurance in higher education

Critical skills — generic work skills and particular occupational skills

Department of Education (DoE) — former South African government department responsible for basic, primary, secondary, further and higher education

Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET) — current South African government department focussed on all aspects of post-school education and training

Experiential learning — learning acquired through experience in contrast to study of theory

Filial cannibalism — adult of species killing and eating their offspring

Universities of Technology — higher education institutions of which the programmes are mostly career-focussed in nature, in contrast to formative

Higher Education Quality Authority (HEQC) — a permanent committee of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) that has executive responsibility for quality promotion; audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions; and accreditation of programmes

Metaphor — reveals striking and surprising similarities and indicates correspondences of dissimilar phenomena

National Qualifications Framework (NQF) — a framework of registered qualifications and standards, agreed to by education and training stakeholders throughout a country

National Skills Authority (NSA) — advise the relevant Minister on the national skills development policy and relevant skills development strategy

National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) — a strategy that outlines the strategic objectives and success indicators for skills development for a given timeframe

Work-integrated learning (WIL) — learning acquired through real-life work experiences

Workplace experience — terminology used in the NSDS and by SETAs to indicate learning through experience in the workplace

Scarce skills — represent occupations in which a scarcity of qualified and experienced people currently exists or is anticipated in future

Sectoral Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) — it is a body that represent an economic sector in South Africa; the members and stakeholders include employers, learners, providers, trade unions, government departments and bargaining councils from such an economic sector

Technikons — former higher education institutions that existed adjacent to universities

Filial cannibalism contextualised

Cannibalism involves “one individual of a species consuming all or part of another individual of the same species” (Wikipedia). Cannibalism is not restricted to carnivorous species and contrary to former beliefs not the result of extreme food shortages. In addition to *filial cannibalism* (a form of *infanticide*) other forms include: *sexual* (a female organism kills and consumes the male before, during, or after copulation); *size-structured* (large individuals consume the smaller of the same species); and *intrauterine* (less-developed embryos are consumed by larger or stronger ones as a source of nutrients). *Filial cannibalism* often occurs where adult males attack and consume infants when assimilating females. In addition, there appear to be two main reasons as to why adult animals may eat the young—even parents their own immediate offspring—namely for energy or to control the density. The energy and nutritional gains from consuming offspring are reinvested into future reproduction. While whole-clutch filial cannibalism is normally investment in future reproduction; partial-clutch filial cannibalism can be viewed as investment in survival. Similarly density-dependent consumption of some eggs in nests or weaklings improves the survivorship of the remaining eggs and increases their net reproductive success (Bonsall & Klug, 2011; Lindström, 2000;

Payne, Smith & Campbell, 2002). However, this paper is not about cannibalism, evolution or biology.

Instead, *filial cannibalism* serves as metaphor to draw attention to the apparent disparity involved with regard to specific quality imperatives advocated on the one hand; versus the funding approach by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET) in South Africa.

Filial cannibalism as metaphor

A metaphor reveals possible similarities—“the better the metaphor, the more striking and surprising the correspondence”—it indicates correspondences of dissimilar phenomena (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000: 89). Gaddefors (2007: 173) makes mention of “insights from metaphor[s]” and “how metaphors take part in the construction of the environment”, which is the purpose of the use of *filial cannibalism* metaphor in this paper. More specifically, the metaphor serves to question embedded assumptions and influence predominant perceptions (Inns 2002: 308); as well as constructivist-evaluation method (Starr-Glass, 2005).

Mating and nest preparation in a changing landscape

The higher and further education landscape in South Africa underwent major changes during the past two decades. It is not feasible, in the scope of this paper, to give a comprehensive overview; not even to do justice in giving a concise summary. Hall, Symes and Luescher (2004: X) remark that the restructuring of higher education in South Africa “is essentially *sui generis* [of its own kind/class, unique or particular to itself]: it is a politically-driven process that aims in the first instance to achieve the fitness of purpose of all institutions”.

For the purposes of this paper I would like to momentarily focus on the early 2000s scenario. State funded higher education consisted of a binary-system of universities and technikons, underpinned by a schooling system. Adjacent to the final two years of schooling and essentially the lower three levels of higher education existed colleges (further vocational education institutions). Universities enjoyed academic freedom—each with its own statutes—and technikons existed as a national system. Curriculums were agreed nationally between participating technikons that offered a particular programme and formally published by the

Department of Education as *Report 151*. Technikons emerged in the middle 1970s from the former colleges for advanced technical education. Technikon leadership formally adopted *cooperative education* as representative educational philosophy—meaning curriculum design and offering of programmes in conjunction with the relevant vocational fraternity. A large percentage of programmes included one or more work-integrated/experiential learning components as part of the compulsory curriculum. However, this practise has by no means been unique to technikon education—many university programmes are known for including application of theory and learning from practice in the curriculum, for example, basic and clinical health sciences; veterinary science; social work; architecture; quantity surveying; construction management (South Africa, 2004); teacher education; and agriculture.

The state funded higher education landscape of 2011 includes 23 public higher education institutions, comprising 11 universities, six comprehensive universities and six universities of technology. Technikons were either merged with universities to form *comprehensives* or converted to universities of technology (some merged and then converted).

The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF); DoHET and the Higher Education Quality Authority (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) imperatives regarding cooperative education programmes may be summarised by the following bullet points:

- Inclusivity of stakeholders regarding curriculum design and development, taking into consideration national and regional needs (Nkomo, 2000).
- An obligation to place students where work-integrated learning is part of the curriculum of the qualification (South Africa, 2007).
- Effective management and coordination, with responsibilities and lines of accountability clearly allocated (South Africa, 2004a+b).
- Adequate infrastructure provided (South Africa, 2004a+b).
- Learning contracts or agreements, clarifying the objectives and outcomes of the learning process, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the institution, students, mentors and employers involved (South Africa, 2004a+b).
- Mentoring that enables the student to recognise strengths and weaknesses; to develop existing and new abilities; and to gain knowledge of work practices (South Africa, 2004a+b).

- Regular and effective communication between the various parties involved (South Africa, 2004a+b).
- Regular and systematic recording and monitoring of progress of the student's learning experience (South Africa, 2004a+b).
- Academic as well as workplace based assessment (South Africa, 2004a+b).

This section concisely conveys the space of work-integrated learning, as element of cooperative education, within South African higher education and concludes with the stated imperatives. The next section gives some perspective of international practices.

Global profile of the *specie*

Cooper, Orrell and Bowden (2010: 3) state that the “situation today is vastly different from ... a decade ago. Governments and universities are now deeply interested in the scope and quality of work-integrated learning programmes, which have become a vital higher education enterprise.” They continue by indicating that technological changes altered the demand for and resulted in continuous development of particular knowledge levels and skills. Global competition among providers of education resulted in work-integrated learning becoming an important aspect of the branding of institutions. Furthermore, work-integrated learning is regarded as an important strategy in the provision of well-rounded graduates for the knowledge economy.

Globally (for example Accreditation Council for Cooperative Education; Awonuga, 2010; Cooper, Orrell & Bowden, 2010; National Commission for Cooperative Education) the following qualities of workplace learning programmes are supported:

- Intentional engagement of host organisations in the programmes of universities.
- All aspects of programmes are integral parts of the institutional endeavour and enjoy the sponsorship of university leadership.
- A core set of philosophical, educational, legal and ethical values underpin work-integrated learning programmes.
- The curriculums of programmes are thoroughly integrated with regard to work and workplace learning and academic outcomes.

- A core feature of leaning is practice, without diminishing the importance of theory and research evidence.
- Multiple stakeholders are recognised and their involvement validated.
- The design of programmes strives to achieve and ensure mutual benefit and reciprocity for all stakeholders.
- Assessment is integral, the ultimate responsibility of the university, but cognisant of multiple stakeholders.
- Authentic partnerships enhance programmes.
- Work-integrated learning is visibly pivotal to university strategy, policy, planning and infrastructure.

From the limited information shared above it appears as if work-integrated learning has internationally become pivotal and a key element of competition and branding. The opposite appears to be true of the South African context?

A brief overview of the state funding of work-integrated, or rather experiential learning is presented in the next section.

Selective distribution of nutrition to offspring

In August 2003 a technical team had been formed to undertake an investigation into the state funding of work-integrated learning in South African higher education institutions (South Africa, 2004c). The team comprised representatives from the then South African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA), the then Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP) and the then Department of Education (DoE). The report of the technical team pointed out that a misconception existed that the DoE did not fund experiential learning at technikons. The report indicated that although the full time equivalent (FTE) had not been used for subsidy purposes, various formula made provision funding of experiential learning at technikons. The scope of funding received was based on a comprehensive survey done in 1991 to determine the actual costs involved. It has been found that the costs that should ideally be spent on experiential learning are about triple the actual provided for. The formula coefficients were therefore increased in 1993 (South Africa, 2004c: §32).

In accordance to the South African higher education management information system (HEMIS) policy, the credit value of the experiential learning part/s of a programme should be reflected separately (South Africa, 2004c: §16). The report (South Africa, 2004c: §39) emphasised that an underlying funding principle, gazetted of 9 December 2003 (Vol. 462, No 25824), is that government does not fund costs, instead it aims at paying for the delivery of teaching and research-related services. It is therefore critical that institutions monitor costs and decide how best to manage academic activities within the available funds. Subsequently to the report, the DoE decided to base its funding in future only on the academic credits of programmes that include one or more work-integrated learning components. This non-funding is maintained in 2011 by DoHET.

Kim (2009a) defines parental care as those investments by the parent in an individual offspring to increase the specific offspring's chance of surviving. Kim (2009b) suggests that parental investment (PI) should be distributed selectively among offspring in order to enhance the reproductive success. Compared to the global profile of programmes that include work-integrated learning, described earlier, it would not be unwarranted to observe that DoHET is selectively withholding investment in former technikon programmes. There are more complexities involved in the funding situation, which is presented in the next section.

Parental conflict-or-favouritism concerning offspring

Daniels (2007) observes that different South African Government departments hold opposing views about skills shortages and a vacuum exists about official government position on tying the concept of “skills shortages” to productivity. Complex and frequently overlapping architectures exist that undermines effective administration of skills development, is said.

The legacies of Apartheid, geo-political and economic isolation present major challenges to the new democratic government of South Africa. In response, the Skills Development Act and the Skills Development Levies Act were, among others, respectively passed in 1998 and 1999 (Squire, 2011). This statutory context charged the Minister of Labour to prepare a National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) in consultation of the National Skills Authority (NSA) established in April 1999. The NSA comprised representatives from organised business, labour, government and other bodies that reflected community and provider interests (Squire, 2011). In March 2000 Sectoral Education and Training Authorities

(SETAs) were established. A one percent (1%) of payroll levy was further introduced to fund the NSDS. Squire (2011) summarises NSDS I to III as follow:

- In NSDS I (2001 to 2005) emphasis was placed on equality; lifelong learning in the workplace and demand driven learning based on the needs of employees.
- The emphasis of NSDS II (2005 to 2010) was again placed on equity, quality training and skills development in the workplace. Furthermore the need for the promotion of employability was identified, as well as to assist designated groups to gain knowledge and workplace experience in order to gain critical skills. Quality of the provision was further identified as a problem area needing improvement.
- With NSDS III the emphasis swings towards institutional learning linked to occupationally directed programmes. Workplace skills programmes and worker-initiated training initiatives are encouraged.

Skills include both qualifications and experience. Daniels (2007: 2) points out the differentiation between the phrases *scarce skills* and *critical skills* that underpin the understanding of skills shortages. The first is defined by DoE and the SETAs as occupations in which there is “a scarcity of qualified and experienced people, currently or anticipated in the future”. *Critical skills* in turn refer to specific skills within an occupation. Two categories of *critical skills* are distinguished in the SA context: “(1) generic skills, including problem solving and learning to learn; language, literacy or numeracy skills; and working in teams for example; (2) particular occupational skills required for performance within” a specific occupation.

SETAs may make discretionary grants available for the funding of *workplace experience*, which is aimed at unemployed students of defined *scarce* and/or *critical skills* identified by the SETA concerned that have passed the prerequisite subjects/modules in order to do the work-integrated learning part of such qualification. The grants are paid to employers, through a specified application process. The supported *workplace experience* must be aligned to the NSDS targets, the relevant SETA’s priorities and sector specific needs in order to qualify for discretionary grants. The discretionary grants also apply to students who still need to complete work-integrated learning modules in order to obtain their qualification and who then needs workplace exposure in order to improve their employment opportunities. Although the management of SETAs has since been relocated within DoHET, the procedures

to obtain discretionary grants are tedious. Grants furthermore do not necessary extend to the funding required by higher education institutions to manage and monitor the work-integrated learning of programmes.

Conclusion

It appears as if *filial cannibalism* exists in that the ‘adult’ (DoHET) do not provide ‘siblings’ (programmes that contain work-integrated learning) with the necessary ‘nutrition’ (funding) to thrive and contribute to the future of the ‘specie’ (the *scarce skills* of the country). The question remains to what end?

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