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The Renaissance of the
University of the Western Cape

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Editors

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Establishing a Critical Space at UWC for Innovative Education and Communication Technologies

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on the establishment of the Centre for Innovative Education and Communication Technologies (CIECT) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) during the period of thinking beyond the norm, inspired by the vision of Rector and Vice-Chancellor Prof Brian O'Connell. The project was led by Dr Juliet Stoltenkamp, Director of CIECT as part of the realignment of the Academic Project of UWC. It reflects on CIECT's contributions within the discourses of the integration of emerging technologies and the improvement of the Teaching and Learning agenda.

It is important that structural roles within higher education (HE) settings are aligned in order to strengthen academic development approaches. The realignment of the academic project, motivated by a holistic approach to the academic enterprise articulated by Prof Brian O'Connell and under the leadership of the DVC Academic, Prof Ramesh Bharuthram, ensured that stakeholders across the institution take joint responsibility for rethinking teaching and learning, curriculum development, research and student support. Consequently, the CIECT team was strategically separated from the Department of Information and Communication Services (ICS) in 2009 and repositioned as an independent structure within the mainstream of the academic project.

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This chapter also focuses on factors that influenced CIECT's Professional Academic Support identity within both constraining and enabling structures, whilst remaining committed to the delivery of a large-scale eLearning agenda. Moreover, the chapter reflects on the importance of leadership and building of good relationships when engaging in the discourse of the implementation and integration of emerging technologies within a complex higher education (HE) setting.

UWC has developed a holistic staff development strategy, which includes an integrated learning plan for academic, professional support and administrative staff. This strategy was initially aligned to the overarching strategic plan of the institution (UWC, IOP: 2010-2014), and remains as such. It strives to maintain and enhance integrated development experiences. Hence, staff development interventions related to emerging technologies apply to all staff – academic, administrative and support.

Given that the University had a single Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic with a portfolio that was responsible for teaching and learning, research and innovation, and community engagement, and a Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Student Development and Support, Prof Lullu Tshiwula, the University Executive Management under the leadership of Prof O'Connell adopted an integrated approach whereby teaching and learning, research and innovation, community engagement, and student development and support could not be separated but seen as integral components of an academic project that focused on holistic student development.

The next section of the chapter focuses on the establishment of the Centre for Innovative Education & Communication Technologies (CIECT), and how important it was for the structure to influence the academic identity of lecturers and professional academic support staff during a time of increasing audits and managerialism, institutional competitiveness and technological developments. This influence was critical within a context of a post-modern HE setting and within a framework of a wide range of institutional commitments.

Influencing academic identity in a complex, changing HE sector

This section provides the historical context of how a management role did not necessarily steer a leader away from continuous grappling with concepts of academic development and identity, but instead demonstrates responsibility as a change agent within both constraining and enabling

environments. Furthermore, this section reflects on the Director's role, specifically to the commitment of a large-scale eLearning agenda, highlighting pressures in changing HE settings and critical, influential change-management strategies.

These strategies unfolded in complex spaces, where lecturers and professional academic support staff have a responsibility toward meeting institutional commitments. At the same time, it was important to create spaces that promote positive relationships and emphasise the importance of collaborating with other institutional structures to bring the discourse of the integration of ICTs into the broader teaching and learning as well as the research agendas.

Fusion of managerial imperatives with academic priorities

The eLearning Unit at UWC was established in 2006 (a structure that later evolved into the Centre for Innovative Education and Communication Technologies (CIECT) under the leadership of Dr Juliet Stoltenkamp). As UWC has remained committed to striving for excellence in teaching, learning and research, the establishment of this support structure was aligned to this mission, with full realisation of the demands of the information economy, and to promote the adoption of innovative technologies to support staff and students by developing skills and an ePedagogy to effectively take advantage of these technologies (Stoltenkamp & Siebrits, 2015).

At the time of the establishment of the eLearning Unit, the Director was situated in the Information and Communications Services (ICS) Department. This department was mainly responsible for the support and maintenance of the IT infrastructure. Being located within ICS represented a constraining environment, especially as the lecturers perceived the CIECT team as 'technical staff'. It was important for the Director at this time to continuously deal with issues related to access, stability of the learning platforms, and the need for dedicated, skilled human capacity to maintain a home-grown platform. However, it was also important under these circumstances to focus on the importance of the adoption and application of blended learning environments and their alignment to learning theories, instead of merely focusing on IT infrastructure. This was critical, as many lecturers were very resistant to online teaching practices for various reasons, including fears and their perceptions at that time reflective of "a changing HE setting in terms of academic appointments and 'work-life' and specifically how external and internal pressures impact faculty work" (Gappa et al., 2010: p. 34).

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The historical context of the Director's role led to the implementation of change management strategies to "fuse managerial imperatives with academic priorities" (Bundy, 1999: p. 11 cited in Webster & Mosoetsa, 2001: p. 19). These strategies included eLearning awareness campaigns and effective marketing, which emphasised theories of learning and how they impact on eLearning, and the application of relevant implementation models, focusing on design, development and ePedagogy (Stoltenkamp et al., 2007: p. 1296).

Establishment of CIECT

The Director continued in the role, situated within ICS Department, during 2005-2009 and took cognisance of the internal resistance aligned to a broader national HE discourse, still focusing on challenges related to deciding which learning management platform was 'the best', bandwidth problems, the lack of resources and other technical aspects. As part of the reimagination of the academic enterprise, the eLearning Unit was moved from the ICS Department to the portfolio of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) Academic in 2009. Interestingly, the Director observed a situation where it seemed that the team was 'respected more', and could claim that the influence was due to a structural change whereby the eLearning Unit was now located within the portfolio of the DVC Academic, described as "the object of structural change" by Boughey (2015).

The decision to relocate the eLearning Unit with a reporting line directly to the DVC Academic created an enabling environment. The Director became more aware of the fact that there is no single approach to deal with changes in complex HE settings and had to "strategise new ways of organising" the unit's academic work within a dynamic environment (Gappa et al., 2010: p. 36). Consequently, a higher level evolved, namely the Centre for Innovative Education & Communication Technologies (CIECT), including niche teams of expertise on:

1. Instructional Design (ID), which focuses on the design, development, integration and implementation of online environments for teaching-and-learning across geographical borders;
2. Digital Academic Literacy (DAL), which focuses on the design, customisation and facilitation of skills-based student training programme for novices, namely Digital Academic Literacy;
3. Materials Development & Digital Media, which focuses on the design and development of learner support material (for online and offline purposes);

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4. Software Development & Application (SDA), which focuses on the maintenance and development on the institutional learning management system, namely iKamva; and
5. Research, which is aligned to critical discourse including ongoing debates around blended and distance learning, and to enquire into and research various topics on integration and application that may be of relevance to UWC.

This Professional Academic Support structure continued to support staff and students with regards to the design and development of online environments, and the effective and interactive use of eTools for teaching and learning purposes. The next section highlights how the CIECT team was supported with regards to the design and facilitation of various programmes, and the inclusion of the Director within a holistic approach to the advancement of Teaching and Learning as a member of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee in 2009.

Ad hoc skills approach vs development of university lecturers

CIECT continued to design, develop and facilitate various workshops for staff and students, which received positive feedback in relation to the affordances of emerging technologies and their applications within their own (staff) practices. Lecturers and students expressed their appreciation and need for CIECT's teaching methodology (hands-on practical workshops), whereby the main and the co-facilitators assist and guide participants for the entire duration of interactive workshops. Quantitative and qualitative feedback affirmed the need for CIECT to continue rather than to reject essential skills-based approaches (Light & Cox, 2000 cited in Quinn, 2012: p. ix). In addition, feedback is indicative of CIECT's contribution, not as an emphasis on a skills approach with a technical focus, but rather as one that focuses on what it means to develop "individuals as university teachers" (Quinn, 2012: p. ix).

Moreover, CIECT's support structure provides pedagogical and skills-based approaches, which corroborates the work of Gilly Salmon (2000), who emphasised the provision of critical first steps of familiarisation and socialisation to eTools and environments, prior to the critical stages of achieving effective online communication and knowledge creation.

CIECT's contributions as part of mainstream teaching and learning

As mentioned above, the Director of CIECT was included as a member of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee in 2009. The Director has reflected on this decision as a strategy that would generate, as Boughey (2015: PPT) states, “a cultural change”, which meant that there was a need to review CIECT’s participation in the broader institutional teaching and learning agenda. This decision enabled the Director to “strategise new ways of organising” CIECT’s contribution to teaching and learning as well as to academic development (Gappa et al., 2010: p. 36). More importantly, this strategic decision discouraged the perception that CIECT’s “academic support initiative tended to sit apart from the mainstream teaching and learning activities of the rest of the institution” (Boughey, n.d.: p. 22).

Upon critical reflection, the Director realised the need to strengthen further contributions, especially in relation to ePedagogy and research, reflective of the infusion of ICT supplemented by theory and application (Boughey, n.d.: p. 28). In addition, reflection in relation to continuous skills training workshops for academics, students and other support units is important, especially during these difficult times in HE whereby staff are “pulled in many directions, due to various demands, including, institutional competitiveness; and increasingly technological developments” (Gappa et al., 2010: p. 34).

Critical reflection by the Director also included rethinking the representation of other role-players within collaborative programmes. It was important that all key role-players were brought into the initial planning phases of a broader programme, including CIECT, highlighting the importance of having various teams strategically aligning their plans, and demonstrating the scholarship of teaching and learning (D’Andrea & Gosling, 2005). More importantly, the University’s strategic decisions guided by the IOP: 2010-2014 further encouraged critical reflection to continuously strive to position CIECT’s valuable staff and student support strategies as not merely entailing ‘*let us help you*’ interventions, but a high level of professional development, whereby the integration of relevant theory and skills becomes evident in the workshops (Quinn, 2012: p. 106).

The following section highlights how CIECT was supported around the importance of engaging in the discourse around research input; and influencing participation and academic identity within the expansive vision of Prof Brian O’Connell of UWC being an engaged university. This

influence was critical within a context of a post-modern HE setting, and the call by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to strengthen and expand research.

Research: Participation, collegiality and identity

The Director's decision to establish a research team on the advice and guidance of the DVC Academic was part of the drive to enhance scholarship and innovation within UWC's academic enterprise. The DVC further emphasised how a managerial role does not conflict with driving research initiatives; and how important it was for CIECT's research to be placed within the discourse of participation in HE, reflecting how practices and deliverables inform research and vice versa. This is in alignment with the Director's vision for CIECT's Research structure to be viewed as an "efficient site of [eResearch] production" (Barnett, 2000: p. 58).

The Director of CIECT continuously strived to position the team's work, not only as training activities, rather as teaching-and-learning interventions in alignment with latest research, quality assurance and review processes. CIECT's research and publications include impact studies related to the institutionalising of eLearning at UWC, change management strategies, training interventions, and effective design of blended learning environments, ePedagogy and digital inclusion.

Consequently, the Director was able to highlight the importance of the creation of a supportive and collaborative research environment. For example, an Instructional Designer (ID) and Research team member are expected to embark on a collaborative research project. Both the Researcher and ID bring the intervention to a level of effective reporting and possible publication. This is aligned to Leibowitz, Ndebele and Winberg (2014), who state that "attention should be paid to intersubjective relations in the group, including issues of belonging as well as building participants' sense of expertise [...] the need to feel valued or acknowledged should [also] be taken into account". There is evidence that these research efforts continue to influence individual team members' identities within this complex, modern university.

The Director (active Research team member), has observed how these collaborative research interventions have influenced the individual team members' identities and have "provided potential for knowledge generation and personal and professional growth" (Leibowitz, Ndebele

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& Winberg, 2014). The CIECT team members are now viewed not merely as training staff, but rather as co-researchers who have published in international journals (Bharuthram & Kies, 2013). In addition, these interventions are aligned to the discourse of 'participation' in a South African higher education context. Furthermore, CIECT's collaborative research contributions are reflective of an initiative that enhances a deep approach to learning for all involved (Leibowitz, Ndebele & Winberg, 2014).

In pursuit of an equal society

"Universities need to become centres of excellence at the cutting edge of technology" (National Development Plan, 2030: p. 40, cited in Stoltenkamp & Siebrits, 2015). CIECT's deliverables and practices inform research and vice versa. This helps to ensure quality assurance and review processes within specific contexts.

Furthermore, CIECT's data retrieved from daily operations, including the design, development and delivery of various projects, are aligned to action research projects, in collaboration with CIECT staff members. Hence, CIECT staff members who have gained valuable experience over the years through train-the-trainer exercises, mentorship and self-directed learning in a dynamic environment, and who have been given the opportunity to be co-authors of research articles and develop themselves, should be expected to give back and transfer skills within a structure created to provide opportunities for unemployed graduates.

This led to the creation of a research internship programme within CIECT's Research structure, which is aligned to the call by the DHET for the expansion of "research, development and innovation capacity for economic growth and social development" (DHET, Strategic Plan, 2014-2015: p. 63). Furthermore, this internship programme would be indicative of one which attempts to give unemployed graduates opportunities, not merely financially, but also to enable them to become more confident whilst addressing learning challenges (Barnett, 2000: pp. 50-51).

Digital inclusion and the larger ecosystem

As part of its broader mandate, as articulated in Prof Brian O'Connell's understanding of an engaged university, CIECT continues to support the development of the UWC community, as well as external communities embedded within the larger ecosystem shaped by government policy.

The CIECT Director designed the Digital Inclusion for eCentre Managers course, which has already been rolled out to 74 eCentres across the Western Cape in both rural and urban areas. In this case, CIECT's course and related research contributes to the Western Cape Co-Lab, a part of the "six (6) established Provincial e-Skills Knowledge Production and Coordination Co-Labs established in association with local universities to coordinate effort across all stakeholder groups within each Province" (DOC, NeSPA, 2012: p. 77).

Such a collaborative project is aligned to a "post-school system that provides quality-learning opportunities to young people, adults who want to change careers or upgrade skills, people who have left school before completing their secondary education and unemployed people who wish to start a career" (National Development Plan, 2030: p. 315, cited in Stoltenkamp & Siebrits, 2015). CIECT's deliverables and practices continuously inform collaboration with internal and external partners.

Research and the advancement of the institution

CIECT's research contributions are aligned to the discourse around the advancement of the institution. Wolpe (1995: p. 280) stated that the institution needed to be "geared to local conditions and local needs, and on the other ... maintain the connection with global scholarship and research necessary for both technology transfer and for South Africa's effective participation in a global economy". Furthermore, CIECT's action research projects, which are related to the UWC community and the surrounding communities, are indicative of, as Vale (2014) emphasises, research that has not given "up all other forms of belonging and [have] become completely cosmopolitan ... [trying] to escape completely from culture".

Striving to become a research-intensive University is not an easy journey (DHET, Differentiation Framework, 2014). Within the framework of UWC's IOP (2010-2014), which was developed to shift UWC into becoming a research-led university, this section depicts a CIECT team which has used its agency to contribute to valuable institutional research. The next section highlights the importance of the CIECT's leadership role in relation to reflective practices and prompting an increasing awareness and understanding of "the structural conditions in which [one] works" (Boughey, 2015: PPT). It demonstrates the concepts of "structure, culture and agency" (Case, 2013: p. 43), and how they provided the Director with an analytical lens to examine the context, especially in relation to daily operations and strategic decisions.

Structures that enable agents to showcase the "culture of a learning organisation"

The Director created sub-structures within the broader CIECT structure, including an online marketing blog environment as a space for reflective practice, engagement, the sharing of ideologies, influencing perceptions and promoting a learning organisation. This initiative enabled CIECT to demonstrate how, within the social structure created by CIECT's blog, to engage with concepts of 'explanatory critique' (Case, 2013: pp. 41-42), through the sharing of good online practices with the UWC and global communities.

The "blog campaign", started in 2009, has become a key structure within the Centre. Within this structure the Director is able to share an ideology (culture) of 'good practices' rather than 'best practices', which may be "misleading or even counterproductive" (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005: p. 17). In addition, within the broader changes of the University's culture, including a demand for more "intrusive processes of quality assurance" (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005: p. 14), the CIECT team composes blogs reflective of the institution's changing 'culture', with respect to embracing advances in ICTs. This includes lecturers' attitudes toward the adoption of innovative teaching-and-learning practices, their application of eTools to enhance practices, their perceptions and attitudes toward emerging innovative technologies and related practices, and the benefits for student development.

The blogs are reflective of the important agents (lecturers and the CIECT team) who change 'cultures' through their practices. At times, even though changes in the culture of a university generate fear, the blogs, as referred to above, are reflective of agency (of lecturers) who have "responded to challenges by modifying their teaching and have seized the opportunity to experiment and innovate" (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005: p. 15). These responses emphasise how the "interrelation of culture with agency cannot be ignored" (Case, 2013: p. 43). The Director has observed how this blog structure and its culture of positive ideas toward enhancing innovative practices have begun to "condition the human agents who enter" (Case, 2013: p. 44). In this case, the agents are the academics and support staff members.

In addition, the blogs are reflective of a CIECT team that assists and supports the academics to create these interactive online environments. Furthermore, this 'blog structure' has influenced the perceptions of

academics. Lecturers across disciplines read these blogs and in turn contact the team to assist them with implementing blended learning environments for their specific contexts, as this space (the blogs) showcases progress in teaching and learning practices. Equally important is the way that examples of improvement are received (in this case by the wider UWC community), as articulated by D'Andrea and Gosling (2005: p. 15).

The blog further showcases innovative teaching and learning practices in relation to the individual (academic's) development and evidence of practices. These efforts by professional support staff and academics, showcased in the blog, are indicative of a 'learning organisation' and reflective of CIECT's blog structure as one which is striving to create a 'knowledge-intensive' culture (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005: p. 19). In addition, the blog serves as a repository of good practices to assist current and incoming staff, as identified by Quinn (2012: p. 78).

The next section highlights how CIECT's role within the University was further strengthened through the alignment of various institutional structures. This alignment enhanced CIECT's interventions with regards to the necessary integration of emerging technologies within UWC's academic project as a contribution to the holistic staff and student development strategies of the institution.

Alignment of structural roles: Inter-faculty intervention

In complex HE settings it is not easy to align different role players, academic and professional support staff, across key institutional projects and programmes. This section highlights how that alignment was strengthened in order to claim, in the words of the Council on Higher Education's (CHE's) Quality Enhancement Project (QEP), that the University is enhancing "student learning with a view to increasing the number of graduates with attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable" (CHE, QEP, 2014: pp. i-ii). An exemplar is presented, focusing on a specific programme, namely Towards the Professionalisation of Teaching and Learning, whereby the DVC Academic encouraged the Director of CIECT to participate in an inter-faculty intervention, which includes aspects of academic support and development.

The programme can be described as an inter-faculty programme in terms of structure, as it has been placed with a central unit, which also coordinates other interventions (in our case at UWC, the Directorate:

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Teaching and Learning) (Pavlich & Orkin, 1993 cited in Boughey, n.d.: p. 12). Lecturers from across faculties (and disciplines) were selected by their Deans to engage in the pilot, consisting of 13 weekly topics, including reflexive practice, technology-enhanced learning, the evaluation of teaching, and quality and standards.

The Director of CIECT was involved in this programme from the start in 2014 in collaboration with a team of lecturers and the Directorate: Teaching and Learning. CIECT's interventions, with regards to the necessary integration of emerging technologies, included a skills-based approach, cognitive substantiation, reflective practices and professional development. CIECT's visibility and representation during the early stages of the programme can be aligned within the context of transformation, which can only be achieved, as Badat (2007) states, in the context of pursuing social equity and the 'extension of ownership'. Moreover, as a leader, the Director was able to show that the CIECT team should not be viewed merely as trainers, but rather as stakeholders who have taken ownership of specific components of an institutional programme.

A Framework representing integration of emerging technologies in a HE context

The concepts that were elaborated in this chapter are summarised through the representation above of a framework, "Integration of emerging technologies in an HE context". The framework was developed by the Director of CIECT (2014) and promotes the infusion of ICTs within a complex higher education environment. The framework depicts how the CIECT structure works within the key areas of teaching and learning, research, community engagement and support, and the development of policy and strategies. These key areas are underpinned by the alignment of activities and implementation strategies (current and future) with the IOP of the University and other national policies. The application of innovative emerging technologies is supported by skills-based approaches, aligned to critical engagement with theory and practice. The Professional Academic Support structure becomes visible and is represented, not only through intensive training and development programmes, but also through evidence-based research and cognitive substantiation.

Ongoing debates and influencing the integration of emerging technologies

This chapter has reflected on how the foundation was laid by the CIECT Director within the inspiring and motivating academic space created by Prof Brian O'Connell for enabling critical engagement, not merely to respond to technological trends, but also to contribute toward a deeper focus in terms of structure, visibility and representation, approaches and the discourse around the enhancement of teaching and learning, research and innovation, as well as social development. CIECT was able to influence the integration of emerging technologies during a time of increasing pressures related to audits, managerialism, institutional competitiveness and technological developments. Furthermore, the Learning Management System (LMS) had developed to an advanced level and enabled CIECT to effectively support an entire campus community during difficult and complex times, such as the #FeesMustFall shutdown of 2015.

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The visionary, holistic approach to advancing UWC's academic project adopted by Prof O'Connell and the DVC Academic Prof Ramesh Bharuthram enabled the Director of CIECT to "carve out a critical space" for innovative education and communication technologies within UWC's core academic and community-oriented projects. The platform was created for their successors to take the institution to higher levels.

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