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## Academic workload, performance appraisal and staff development: issues of quantification, criteria, perception and affect

### Summary

There is graving concern over the intrusion of managerialism into academe. The debate often centres on the concept of quality management and involves problematic assumptions about the notions of workload, performance and development. This article problematises these assumptions, with reference to the role of perception and affect in the quantification of workload, the production of performance criteria, and the construction of development programmes. It argues that these activities need to be part of an organic process arising out of specific circumstances. There are real conceptual difficulties involved and any failure to attend to the role of perception and affect will seriously undermine education.

### Akademiese werkslading, prestasie-evaluering en personeelontwikkeling: kwessies van kwantifisering, kriteria en die rol van persepsie en affek

Daar is 'n stygende kommer oor die inbreuk wat bestuurswese op die akademie maak. Die debat sentreer gereeld om die nosie van kwaliteitbestuur en betrek problematiese aannames aangaande die begrippe werkslading, prestasie en ontwikkeling. Hierdie artikel problematiseer dié aannames met verwysing na die rol van persepsies en invloed betreffende die kwantifisering van werkslading, die produksie van prestasiekriteria en die daarstelling van ontwikkelingsprogramme. Daar word geargumenteer dat hierdie aktiwiteite 'n organiese proses behoort te wees wat voortspuit uit spesifieke omstandighede. Werklike konseptuele probleme is hierby betrokke en die onvermoë om aandag te skenk aan die rol van persepsie en invloed kan onderwys ernstig ondermyn.

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In problematising the quantification of academic workload, I focus on perceptions, affect, values and meaning. This is closely connected to performance appraisal and staff development. At the risk of stating the obvious, performance is appraised in relation to a workload, and it is the perceived effectiveness of that performance that may lead to a response such as the establishment of development programmes. Now, it is notoriously difficult to define and circumscribe the work of an academic. For example, what does “we covered that” mean? Workload is well-researched in terms of variables such as status, level, teaching style, class size and so on, but the affective aspects are under-researched. I shall illustrate this by briefly referring to an attempt by my department to distribute workload in an environment of low trust, institutional transition and political volatility with an inheritance of discrimination. The difficulties made it clear that we were woefully unprepared to proceed with appraisal, attribution of success or failure, and development. For example, the questions that arose included: What is the value difference between responsibility and the number of hours a task requires? What should be the relationship between one’s level in the hierarchy and remuneration, and between workload, task type and remuneration? For what, in fact, is an academic remunerated?

When we engage in staff development and appraisal we are dealing with living, breathing, feeling and thinking individuals. It seems worthwhile to state the obvious because the discourse on staff development and appraisal abounds with concern about procedure and quantification, but obscures the importance of perception and affect. I shall argue that systematic procedures cannot ensure fair performance appraisals; they are only a necessary enabling condition. The same may be said of transparency and democracy. I shall argue that, in the final analysis, fair appraisals are a matter of interpersonal trust. In education, where the work can entail high levels of vulnerability and intimacy, effective appraisal and development must attend to individual sensibility and organisational climate. The notion of “effective education” needs to be defended against a managerialist “human resource management” discourse and embedded in notions of what it means to be a human being.

First, the notion of academic workload will be examined, followed by an analysis of performance appraisal and staff development. I make reference to an attempt to quantify workload, and then consider the issues of equity, equality, fairness and redress. Finally, I contrast an ethic of caring with one of justice, and claim that an ethic of caring is especially suited to an educational institution.

## 1. Academic workload

Most analyses of academic workload address the triad of teaching, research and administration, although service often features as a strong fourth criterion. This serves to produce further sets of questions related to what teaching consists of and how it is to be quantified, if indeed it can be; how one assesses the workload involved in research, and how one assesses the time requirements of various administrative tasks.

Various sources categorise workload in different ways. For example, Shelton & Skaggs (1996) list: reading students' drafts of research papers, preparing new course materials, attending faculty development workshops, and participating in campus and community intellectual events as well as any other requirements such as serving on disciplinary committees. Another classification contains five types of instruction: class, laboratory, tutorial, independent and programme-based (SUNY 1985). The academic activities of college faculty at eight campuses of Chile's Universidad Técnica del Estado are grouped into seven categories: direct teaching, indirect teaching, research, community service, faculty development, academic administration and other activities (Karadima 1986). At the Universidad de Santiago de Chile the main activities performed by academic departments are instruction, research, creative work, community service, faculty development and academic administrative tasks (Karadima 1983). There is not much indication in the literature of how one can take into account repeated sections of a course, numbers of students and team teaching. As far as disciplinary differences are concerned, one study in the United States has examined the extent to which instructional contact and student credit hours relate to a number of variables at four institutions. It revealed that the variance was not significantly due to the type of institution, or salary, or rank or level of student taught, but that the primary variable was the subject area and faculty

(Kojaku & Zrebiec 1983). A Norwegian study also showed significant differences between disciplines in terms of the time spent in teaching and preparation (Smeby 1996). Another representative example divides the instructional workload into research, public service, advice to students, and other activities related to instructing. In all of these cases, although a sense of consistency may emerge in terms of a classification scheme, little is said about value and meaningfulness.

The problem of attending to value and meaningfulness becomes even more striking when we consider the evaluation of research. This is a substantial field in its own right with a considerable literature (see Smith & Brown 1995) and, for the purposes of this discussion, which focuses more on teaching, the following issues only will be noted: the division of reports to produce research findings as several publications rather than one substantial piece of research; closed shop publishing, where a journal becomes little more than a newsletter for a closed circle of academics; and the difference between citation and publication. Do we reward quality or the ability to “play the game”? And, as in the case of teaching, how do we account for disciplinary differences in research?

And what of community service? Does preaching on Sundays count as community service for a biologist as much as for a theologian? Does visiting schools to talk to pupils count as community service when one is studying education? And when does community service become committee work in the university community? Does work on a departmental committee count less than work on a faculty committee which in turn counts less than work on a university committee? Is voluntary service on a committee more laudable than obligatory service? And what if the convenor of a committee is given credit for being the convenor, even when most people think he or she has performed inadequately? In the context of African universities, and perhaps in Third World universities, the relationship between the university and the local population has a particular impact. Being a relatively well-paid academic in the midst of a poor rural community might give the notion of community service a special slant. One may also raise questions about what constitutes the university's community: is it the disciplinary community or “academic tribe” (Becher

1989), is it the national educational community, or is it the local “indigenous” community?

Which is the most worthy of reward among these various activities? A United States study (Fairweather 1993) analysed data on over 4,000 full-time faculty members in four-year colleges and universities for the relative importance of teaching, research, administration and service in determining basic salary. Results showed the dominance of research regardless of institution type, professed mission or discipline. Teaching activities were seldom rewarded. How do we bring what we often profess — that teaching is just as important, sometimes more important than research — into congruence with what is in fact rewarded?

The issue of workload may be elaborated as follows. I have mentioned the question of what “we covered that” or “we dealt with that” actually means. Furthermore, how does one weight equitably the difference between the lecturer who merely reads a textbook and the lecturer who writes a textbook, writes up lectures based on the book, and invests in her ability to perform well as a lecturer? What should guide us as to what can be covered? Some questions here are particularly pertinent in South Africa, where staff and students often come from different backgrounds. Is it what the lecturer can say/read in a given number of hours? Is it what most other universities cover? Should the guide be what the lecturer feels comfortable with, or is it what most students can understand, express and learn to do in a certain period? I have in my personal experience sometimes been astounded at the fantastic demands of lecturers who will prescribe reading for students entering a field of study and using a second language — demands which exceed what they themselves would be capable of!

Two general points may be made at this stage. Although there is a considerable amount of research on analysing academic workload, many questions remain quite intractable. This, I think, is partly because much of the analysis is quantitative. For example, a report on Israeli universities indicates that faculty members are generally happy with their teaching loads of 7,49 hours per week, but not with their salaries (Gottlieb & Yakir 1994). But of what use are such findings? What does the teaching load include and exclude, and are

those academics being paid only to teach? Such analyses are merely preliminary; perhaps necessary, but certainly not sufficient steps for establishing fairness or equity. Establishing an objective kind of equity may be an impossible task because, ultimately, even the quantification of work is a matter of perception.

At this stage I also wish to make the point that presenting a series of questions is not only a rhetorical device. Rather, the issue is precisely that there are such questions for which there can be no objective, widely-applicable answers. We do not know the answers until we enter a specific situation. And that is the point — there is no guide-book or set of regulations to be consulted. The work to be done is work that, by its very nature, can never be finished, for it entails groups and communities constantly debating, creating, developing, changing, and refining an organic set of perceptions and values specific to their time and place in order to establish meaningful fairness. The attempt to regulate equity may simply lead to impossible regulations. An example of this at my own university was an edict from the vice-chancellor that people be at their stations from 8.00 am until 4.30 pm. It was impossible to police, let alone enforce, and, if enforced, would have seriously impaired academic productivity. It was, predictably and thankfully, ignored.

### 3. Disempowering performance appraisals

The first thing to be noted about performance appraisals is that they exist: there is no alternative. All employees are constantly being appraised by everyone with whom they come into contact and even by those with whom they have no contact. This appraisal may consist of nothing but rumours, ignorant opinions, hearsay evidence, misinformation, prejudice, and even outright character assassination, or of friends shielding one another in order to build up their empires and inflate their egos. Yet such appraisals are real and have force. It is perceptions that hold sway in organisations, not truth. The choice is not whether a department has performance appraisal or not, or whether

an individual is subject to appraisal or not, it is only about what kind of appraisals there will be.

The ambiguity in the sub-heading is intentional. Performance appraisals are generally feared and with good reason. Bad appraisals have destroyed lives. Fear disempowers people. The way to disempower appraisals is to put them in the hands of those whom they are intended to serve. When they are badly designed and in the hands of the subject's enemy, character assassination, prejudice and career sabotage are simply given a scientific veneer. Successful performance appraisals will be those that have been disempowered by the subjects' having had a hand in their design and a say in their application and effect.

I have made the point that appraisal relies on there being something to appraise. A complication which I have not yet addressed arises from the fact that academics do not work in isolation, and a member of a department will inevitably be appraised relative to her or his peers. How, then, is workload to be distributed in a department where people espouse principles of egalitarianism, transparency and democracy, but hold very different ideas of how expectations, status, reward and workload relate to one another? The amount of work expected relative to the capacity of the worker is a major factor in appraising performance. It is the perception of reasonable expectations, of capacity, and of reward, that will mould the performance of individuals. Taking this into account clarifies, I hope, the complexities involved in constructing an objective and generic appraisal process.

The difficulties emerge at the level of definition. The terms evaluation, development, assessment and appraisal are used in widely differing ways. They have different connotations and at times quite different meanings and are used in relation to different entities. Some may speak of course evaluation, staff evaluation, staff appraisal, staff assessment and/or course assessment. The purpose of the exercise may differ: it could be for research or for decisions on promotion. In the latter case, one usually speaks of summative evaluations. For development purposes, one would usually speak of formative evaluation or appraisal. The type of process may differ. One could use surveys, interviews, or continuous evaluation throughout the year combined with year-end evaluation. One has to consider what sources to use, such as students and/or peers. Student evaluations may be useful, but

need to be used with caution and can at best give only a partial picture. How many lecturers are evaluated by informed critical colleagues? Finally, how will the results be dealt with? Will they be confidential or public, anonymous or not, or will these considerations be a matter of degree? I am not here concerned with the relative merits of definitions or procedures. My point is that the issues are sufficiently complex, and the general assumptions sufficiently diverse, that the only firm conclusion warranted is that ongoing discussion is essential. Perception and the affective element are the determining factors in assessing effectiveness, rather than quantification and regulation.

It is important to accept that some form of performance appraisal is inevitable. We constantly evaluate our colleagues on an informal basis. The choice is not whether or not to have performance appraisal, but whether such a performance appraisal will be a systematic process designed to provide development or simply the current outcome of rumours, jealousies, character assassination, favouritism and so on. Personnel systems in industry generally have short lives, and are often a source of dissatisfaction because they tend to become monitoring systems, instead of focusing on the essential purpose of developing staff.

Another way of approaching appraisal is to ask whom it benefits. Genova *et al* (1976: 3) point out that in large systematic appraisal systems in education, there are three major constituencies — students, faculty and administrators. In their research, they discovered that each sees others as the principal beneficiaries of the process. Students say faculty benefit the most, faculty say administrators benefit the most, and administrators say that faculty benefit the most. Performance appraisal and staff development are at least interlinked, and it would seem that the more encompassing, standardised and supposedly objective the performance appraisal system becomes, the less useful it is likely to be for staff development. Even within a single group or constituency, it is unlikely that a standardised format can provide for the varied individual needs that exist. Appraisal and development, if meaningful, must centre on an individual with particular needs in specific circumstances and at a certain stage of his or her career. Systems, form and quantification may be useful tools, but unless they are generated with due attention to a specific climate and



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sensibility, they may be worse than useless, or even damaging. I hope to clarify this below, by considering a specific departmental workload analysis.

#### 4. Staff development

There are various definitions of staff development. It may involve one or more of the following: improving qualifications, improving the ability to do the job, promotion, improving personal capacities (such as time management, writing proposals, learning a computer programme, managing and co-operating with other people) and so on. In tertiary education, where subject expertise is often the basis for appointment, but where appointees are required to do something else, teach for instance, the issue of staff development is particularly important. One could argue that having being appointed as an academic, one's job is to develop one's knowledge of one's field, and communicate that knowledge through lectures. If the students learn, they learn, if they don't, they don't — that is their responsibility, not the lecturer's. It is more generally accepted, however, that being an academic entails teaching in some form or other. It would be difficult to deny this in South Africa, or in any country where staff generally belong to a privileged group, schooling has been of poor quality, and the need for teaching, even at a tertiary level, is evident.

There are considerations particular to the practice of education that should mould a staff development programme. In many countries new national curricula require staff to inform themselves and become familiar with new content. Higher education is not unaffected by this and staff often have to upgrade their skills and knowledge in fields that are new to them. West (1989: 12-3) offers the following principles of staff development:

- staff must perceive themselves as owning the programme
- it must be right for all staff
- it must be supported by the organisation's leaders
- it needs to be rooted in the organisation's culture
- it should be based on an assessment of need.

He also makes the point that the process should be repeatedly and formatively evaluated.

West's principles identify elements with which I am concerned: perception and culture, as well as need, which is also a matter of perception. I also wish to press the point that the subjects of such programmes are living, feeling and breathing individuals, especially in the context of the changing demands of the South African educational system. It must be noted that even successful innovation leads people to experience ambiguity, confusion, frustration, anger and exhaustion. The acquisition of new skills is often an uneven and disjointed process.

Perception is largely a product of culture. In a country like South Africa, where there is no single culture, and organisations are driven by different basic assumptions, the recognition of need and the perception of ownership become fraught. The politics at play in the wider social context adduce problems over and above the ordinary human fraughtness of dealing with organisational change. We are, once again, in the realm of affect. Affect is, ironically enough, getting the attention it deserves in the business sector, where, as a steady stream of popular reports in newspapers and journals indicate, there is growing concern about the financial cost of hours lost due to depression and depression-related illnesses. Why is the cost of stress and depression among tertiary educators failing to receive similar attention? Gavrielle-Gold (1995: 48) argues, from a psychoanalytic perspective, that it is imperative that we

learn how we can bring our emotions to work with us and incorporate our feelings in our work and in our professional interactions.

I will now give a brief account of how a department in which I was working attempted an equitable distribution of workload, and outline some of the problems encountered.

## 5. A departmental workload analysis

We were concerned with distributing teaching workload, and first tried to establish what contributed to that workload. We took teaching as a focus, although this is not the full workload of an academic. When considering teaching we tried to include all the activities that

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the teaching of a course would entail. Thus, the preparation and the administration of a course were taken into account. This approach excludes many administrative tasks, such as departmental meetings, ordering books, liaising with the library and publishers, and, of course, it excludes research, community service, committee work and collegial activities such as reading drafts and so on. The latter were excluded because they were considered voluntary activities. This could be considered questionable, but was the reality.

The following factors were thus identified to take into account when assessing the workload of a course:

- number of students
- number of lectures
- preparation time for lectures (ratio)
- number of tests, setting and marking of tests
- number of examinations, setting and marking of examinations
- administration: minutes per student
- consultation: minutes per student
- level of the course, affecting consultation time and administration.

These factors were then established for all the courses that the department offered. Below is an example from the first-year course, which had 400 students:

Tasks	Hours
100 contact periods	75
Given a preparation ratio of 1.5 hours : 1 hour	113
Setting four tests at two hours each	8
Marking four tests at five minutes per script	34
Setting one three-hour exam	8
Marking one exam at fifteen minutes per script	100
Setting supplementary examination	8
Marking supplementary examination (a quarter of the examination candidates)	25
Administration at ten minutes per student	67
Consultation on one hour per day	130
Total	568

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To this we added the workload associated with the tutorials given as part of the course:

Preparation of programme	40
Tutor training	80
Administration meetings of two hours per week	40
Organising/co-ordinating lists/supervising	60

This analysis was applied to all courses, up to and including Honours. What remained was the general administration of the department, such as co-ordination of the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (one hour per week), meetings that required the attendance of a departmental member, usually the head of department (56 hours per week), and general departmental administration such as correspondence, fielding outside queries, faculty business, dealings with the dean, office work, student queries, and so on (15 hours per week). Where a course was offered in three or four modules (sometimes taught by different lecturers) we simply divided the year-load by the appropriate figure. Administration done by the head of department was considered as departmental work, since, if the head of department did not do it, somebody else would have to.

What is interesting about these figures is that we generally feel ourselves to be, and are widely considered to be, an under-resourced, hard-working department, but the resultant figure was about 760 hours of work each (for five members) per year, if the work was divided evenly. (In my opinion, our estimates of the time required were generous). This raises the problem of justifying a salary for a full-time employee on the assumption that the employee works an eight-hour day for a good part of the year, when we could only account for just over four months' work. What were we doing the rest of the time?

In subsequent discussions various opinions were expressed about the validity of the exercise. Questions were asked about the accuracy of the figures, the fairness of the weighting, and so on. This was despite the fact that every member of the department had contributed to the discussion in which we had arrived at the figures. It soon became clear that arguing about the figures was merely the presenting problem; the real problem was a feeling of unhappiness, related to perceptions of lack of fairness and equity in terms of compensation, rank, redress and so on. In other words, the regulatory, quantitative

approach was vitiated by affect. For example, one member of the department felt that he should not have the same workload as another, because he was being paid less. This fact alone, he felt, unrelated to criteria such as qualification and experience, justified his opinion.

It was also apparent that assessing the hours to be allocated to a task involved sensitive and deeply personal concerns. As mentioned above, performance needs to be assessed relative to the work required and the capacity of the worker. A junior staff member needs more time to prepare a lecture, and may, due to age, identify more with students and willingly spend more time on student consultation. Black students may expect more of a black lecturer than they do of a white lecturer. A particular issue in South Africa is that, if the academic is being remunerated for experience, how does one compensate, in the face of the need for redress, for experience gained in a past context of unjust privilege? What balance can be struck between social conditions and personal effort? While it may be reasonable to expect senior staff to spend time mentoring junior staff, when this is linked to ethnic identity, profound issues about personal identity and recognition arise.

Assumptions about issues such as these underpin performance appraisals and staff development programmes. As indicated above, it was the recognition of these difficulties that revealed how woefully unprepared we were to establish fair and equitable procedures. Obviously we could not easily take into account the choices and talents of individuals, and even less attribute weighting to individuals. Even an attempt to do so in good faith and gain some kind of consensus could be an intrusive, personal and potentially politically volatile process. Often, in a desire to achieve objectivity, which is in turn assumed to ensure fairness, we confuse the objectivity of the process with the objectivity of the results. Systems and quantification may be useful tools, but climate and sensibility are major influences that are too often ignored. It is with this experience in mind that I present the following preliminary lines of thought.

## 6. Fear and love in development and appraisal

Much of what Egan (1988) argues in asserting the role of imagination in the teaching of children applies to all teaching. The idea that educating a person is not a utilitarian activity but one that requires attention to soul, to meaning, has been investigated by many researchers from a variety of backgrounds, such as Neville's *Educating psyche* (1989) and bell hooks' *Teaching to transgress* (1994). The mind/body split that has pervaded western thought for so long has come to be questioned. Gavrielle-Gold (1995: 22) points out that recent findings in the field of neurobiology demonstrate that the mind and the intelligence exist in every cell of the body:

We know today that the cells of the human body communicate with each other through the emotions. When emotions are ignored or not experienced, the body begins to dysfunction. The latest neurobiochemical findings confirm what psychoanalysts have known for the past 50 years through our subjective explorations of the psyche: *The mind exists in the body. The mind is the body. The body is the mind. Mind and body are one. It is the emotions that make it all work* [emphasis original].

Another source providing an impetus for questioning the managerial approach to individual development, and one particularly pertinent to South Africa, is an increasing interest in African philosophy. The Ghanaian philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu (1980, 1995, 1996), in various of his writings points out that African philosophy cuts across the natural/supernatural opposition in western philosophy, and that African conceptions of personality do not express a dualism of body and spirit. Furthermore, norms with respect to communality and moral responsibility are integrated into the very definition of a person.

In terms of university education, it has been noted that the university carries embedded within it the liabilities as well as the advantages of the western *ethos*. Ajayi *et al* (1996: 3), in the context of the African university, quote Ashby (1966: 147-8), who points out that the university is "essentially a mechanism for the inheritance of the western style of civilisation". They also raise the issue of the extent to which institutional patterns, pedagogical techniques and the basic structure of knowledge in our universities are of western origin (Chideya *et al* 1982: 47). Many scholars have pointed out that the very rationality that we employ in our universities is of western origin.

This ontological problem does not pertain only to western-style universities in Africa, but would be relevant to such universities in Asia and Latin America, and indeed to all universities seeking to serve the interests of non-western (or indigenous, or native, or traditional) communities.

Predictably, the questioning of the mind/body split is prevalent in feminist writing; women scholars have for some time asserted the value of what are traditionally perceived as female values (the “soft skills”) for the common good. A scholar who has dealt directly with this is Carol Gilligan (1982) who distinguishes an ethic of justice from an ethic of care. Gilligan developed her idea of two moral orientations, “care” and “justice”, in reaction to Kohlberg’s (1981) theory of moral development. Kohlberg’s theory, for which he claimed universality, was based on a 20-year study of 84 white boys. According to his theory, moral development begins with a focus on “avoiding punishment and an unquestioning deference to power”, and then progresses through stages where relationships are subordinated to rules and rules to universal principles of justice. Gilligan conducted her research by listening to women speak of their own moral decisions, and from that research she deduced the moral orientation of care. The contrast between the two orientations is reflected in contrasting perceptions of the self, relationships, and morality, and in turn related to gender predominance, as indicated in the following table:

	Ethic of justice	Ethic of care
Self	separate, autonomous	connected
Relationships	contractual, reciprocity	interdependence, connectedness
Gender predominance	more male	more female
Moral perceptions	competing rights, rules and rights, formal and abstract	conflicting responsibilities, contextual narratives

(Source: Watkinson 1995: 110)

When the ethic of justice alone is applied in an organisation, there is a loss of the humane element, a loss of value, humanity and passion. The logic of justice is the logic of bureaucracy, in which decisions will be made impartially and impersonally, with practically

no regard for the unique circumstances of a living individual. It is a patriarchal business and our business theories of organisation and leadership are derived from the stereotype of maleness. The analytical, the rational and the instrumental are valued, and nurturing and empathetic support are undervalued. How then can we have bureaucratic performance appraisals which are individually developmental? Watkinson points out that the concept of the maleness of leadership and structure, assumed as a given within the educational system and other bureaucracies, was derived from studies of the military, corporations and other institutions that had or have little, if anything, to do with children or women. "The military connection to educational administration theory is especially troubling", says Watkinson (1995: 112), and she goes on to quote Carol Shakeshaft who, in *Women in educational administration* (1989), devotes a chapter to "Androcentric bias in education administration and research" and refers to work concerned with the action of combat groups, in other words, males at war. Shakeshaft (1989: 161) provides other evidence of how many concepts and theories current in textbooks on educational administration were developed from observation of the behaviour of air force bomber commanders and navy crew members, creating a theory of leadership developed from activities such as

radar bomb scores, the percentage of company net income over three years, stock controls, the percentage of basketball games won, creativity ratings and time [taken] to hit targets.

In brief, management theory was often developed in environments where women and/or children were absent. There is, in other words, a conceptual and theoretical bias in much of the research on which management and educational practices are based.

In contexts of inequality, whether based on gender or race, where efforts are made to redress such inequality, the problem of understanding the nature of the inequality arises. I have already alluded to the South African problem of establishing fairness in the face of historical disadvantage. Watkinson (1995: 116) raises this issue in the context of gender. She refers to a letter to Ann Landers complaining about the lack of consideration given to pregnant women on buses and then cites another reader's response:



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This is for Sally in Toronto who figured she is entitled to a seat on the bus because she is seven months pregnant: Get real lady, this is the 90s. You women have been screaming about equal rights, so now you've got 'em. Live with your equal rights and stop beefing.

Watkinson points out how this writer's notion of equality is an abstract one: equating equality with identical treatment regardless of the context of the woman's situation. Obviously the discomfort of a heavily pregnant woman would not be equal to the discomfort of another man or woman; the pregnant woman would suffer more. As Watkinson says, the writer was clearly not the wise man who said that there is no greater inequality than the equal treatment of the unequal. Systems that strive to be purely impartial, impersonal and based on justice are damaging, because they cannot take specifics into account. The writer addressing Sally in Toronto would obviously not appreciate the distinction made above between an objective process (assumed to be fair) and a truly fair situation. The failure to make such distinctions is especially damaging in an educational environment.

Perhaps, in this light, it is not surprising that in the university, and under the influence of the market, research has come to dominate the performance measures of educators and has come to mean more than teaching. In previous research on perceptions about teaching and research at University of the North, I identified a broad picture of the ideal researcher, especially in contrast to the teacher (Ruth 1997). All the respondents in the study were male. The good researcher — according to a list of descriptions from various respondents — has determination, commitment and confidence; is a good planner, and is receptive and secure. A good teacher is self-confident and secure as well, but is also loving, dedicated, interested in learning, sensitive, caring, committed, well-prepared, treats students as human beings, and has credibility as a researcher! Besides echoing the gender stereotyping identified by Rowland (1995), this seems to imply that the role of a teacher is far more demanding than that of the researcher — which is incongruent with the perception that places a higher value on research. This is another example of the fact that the situation is not one of congruence, but of dominance, and dominance by an ethos that is patriarchal and educationally damaging.

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These observations seem to point to the importance, especially in education, of the roles played by affect and values. Education is an intimate process, a matter of joy and despair, love and loathing. It is the passion of education that lends it its political force and value. The author bell hooks, referred to above, is described as an “insurgent black intellectual”. In her book *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom* she describes how in her school, prior to desegregation and bussing, where all the teachers were black women:

we learned early that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white colonization [...] school was a place where I could reinvent myself (hooks 1994: 2-3).

Then, with racial integration:

gone was the messianic zeal to transform our minds and beings [...] Knowledge was suddenly about information only. It had no relation to how one lived, behaved [...] obedience, and not a zealous will to learn, was what was expected of us (hooks 1994: 2-3).

She goes on to speak of the lack of excitement in higher education and how its introduction is transgressive:

education as the practice of freedom [...] comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin (hooks 1994: 13).

What are the implications for establishing the educator’s workload, for developing performance appraisal systems, and for providing staff development? Lisa Delpit (1995: 142), another black American educator, gives two examples that show how the management system of a school failed to take into account different local mores. In one example, a Native American teacher stopped two students from fighting. They asked her if she would tell the principal, as required by the school policy. She bowed her head, saying, “I’d be ashamed to”. The boys were greatly embarrassed and refrained from fighting for the rest of the year. In this case, Delpit explains, rather than acting as a dispassionate arbiter, and calling upon the power

rooted in her role as a teacher, the teacher called upon her personal relationship with the students as a means of changing their behaviour. The principal described her failure to report the boys as “a major breach of professional conduct”. The fact that the boys’ behaviour had changed did not seem to matter.

In another example, a Native American teacher proctoring a student in detention who was expected to sit silently for one hour, instead discussed the accomplishments of the student’s great-grandfather whom the teacher had known as a great chief when she was young. She stressed what a great and powerful leader he was. She did not specifically mention the student’s misbehaviour, but the message was implicit: the descendant of such a great man also possessed leadership qualities. For the rest of the year the student needed only a look from the teacher to stifle any negative tendency. As in the previous case, the principal saw it differently; passing by the detention classroom, he saw the student smiling and chastised the teacher for talking to the student and failing to reprimand him. If administrators cannot interpret behaviour adequately, or do so wrongly, asks Delpit, what are the chances of fair and effective performance evaluations?

## 7. Conclusion

I have sought to show how attempts to improve the quality and efficiency of higher education and to achieve greater equality need to be grounded in acute sensitivity to cultural mores and to the perceptions and feelings of individuals in specific circumstances. I hope I have provided some food for thought, some grounds on which to resist the technisation of performance appraisal and staff development, and hence the dehumanisation of the people involved. But the problems run deep, for it would seem that appraisal systems, no matter how apparently democratic and transparent, by virtue of being systems, remain techno-rationalist enterprises that threaten to undermine research and education. The introduction of large-scale performance appraisal systems into higher education is too often a conservative managerialist tool that undermines the spirit of free enquiry which can often be threatening to the socio-political *status quo*. In its most benign form it is seduction and co-option, in its worst it is bureaucratic policing. The argument here is not against systematic pro-

cedures *per se*, but against systematic procedures that do not emerge from and are constantly constrained by and adjusted in the light of specific conditions. We too often let the procedure rule, rather than seeing it as, at best, an enabling tool. The question to ask is: whose interests are served by such workload analyses, performance appraisals and development programmes? The heart of the matter — and this is a considered choice of metaphor — is not a regulatory framework but an ongoing discussion of meaning, hope, fear and desire by a specific community in pursuance of its own interests.

If we pursue the idea of workload, we eventually encounter the concept of what it means to be an educated person. Although we may respond with generalities to this notion, such as: “an educated person is able to question, rather than be caught up in, the basic assumptions of her/his own culture”, when we attempt to implement this understanding in practices such as establishing a workload, we have to recognise cultural embeddedness; to question one’s culture implies that one is a product of a culture. And there is a kind of double embeddedness here, for we are speaking of an academic workload — the educator and the practice of education. The lesson, it seems, is that while it may be possible to produce international standards for the production of steel or tennis shoes, establishing international, or even cross-cultural standards for the process of education is highly problematic. If standards are not culturally specific and sensitive to local mores and values, the notion of what it means to be educated and the associated practices of establishing a workload, staff appraisal and staff development may be insulting to the values and sensibilities of those subjected to them.

While there may be widespread acceptance of the need for academics and society’s intellectual workers to be held accountable, it should be borne in mind that when academics and intellectual workers raise fundamental difficulties relating to the assumptions and concepts involved, they are doing exactly what they are supposed to be doing and fulfilling their function in society.

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