

**Title: Open, Distance and Flexible Learning: a strategy for
continuous professional development of Technical Vocational
Education and Training Educators in Botswana**

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INTRODUCTION

A growing body of expert opinion has been guiding our understanding of the importance of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) through Open and Distance Learning (ODL). ODL presents a solution to modern-day challenges occurring in Technical Vocation Education and Training (TVET) Teacher Education (TE). These challenges emanate from a world driven by technology which has resulted in open access to information. A new cosmology is emerging from a world that was seen as fixed, orderly and measurable to a multiple world view through which the world is seen as complex, fluid and emergent (Doll, 1986:10-16).

Post modernists are subscribing to a new philosophy of progressivism and constructivism in which education is seen through the lens of transformation (Ornstein and Hunkins (2004:188-191). This transformation requires continuous learning, unlearning and relearning. Ornstein & Hunkins (2004) inform us that “in a post- modern world learning assumes openness to process, an eye for the unexpected and readiness to interact with systems as they evolve (p.212).” CPD through ODL therefore becomes a necessity as it enables educators to effectively participate in an environment characterised by change.

ODL Breaking Barriers

ODL breaks traditional barriers and embraces a new cosmology. One in which learning is seen both as a social construct and as cognitive science involving internal transformation. Tennant (2006:76) reports that cognitive structuralism supports “the principle of activity as the source of knowledge and therefore learning is a cognitive process that is enhanced through interaction and activity.”

This pluralistic approach presents opportunities for open access to education. Edwards & Clarke (2002: 154) refer to technology as liberating learning and providing a supply of LLL opportunities. People are becoming co-creators in contrast to passive receivers of knowledge. Wydeman (2012: 10) tells us of the phenomena of ‘knot working’ and metaknowledge, both referring to the value of social networks which promote learning in communities of practice. These developments represent a shift in power relationships inherent in learning (Kennedy, 2005:235). Access to technology and learning platforms enable learners to take responsibility for their learning and professional development, thus shifting the axis of power away from an external party to individual autonomy.

In this regard Giddens (1994) in Hake (1999:81) refers to re-allocation of roles and functions brought about by globalisation: a move from the tradition in which institutions of higher learning are seen as the creators and keepers of knowledge to a system of ODL.

This paper posits that CPD can be best achieved through a transformational model of ODL. The reason for this assumption is based on the fact that ODL addresses barriers that both institutions and adult learners face with regard to CPD:

- large numbers of trainers in need of a qualification in TVET
- outdated concept of education that fails to utilise the wealth of knowledge and experience that exist amongst adult learners
- modernists’ perspective which is patterned after a Tyler model of teaching and learning, as opposed to a view that sees teaching and learning as a process
- content laden curricular which does not encourage experiential learning
- lecture centred as opposed to learner centred techniques
- geographical, time and space restrictions and
- traditional as opposed to flexible assessment methods such as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and portfolio evidence.

Challenges faced by adult learners

Mc Allister (2013: 143) identified critical challenges faced by adult learners such as balancing family and social responsibilities with studies, financial constraints and inappropriate teaching methods. His report is supported by a study conducted at the University of Botswana which highlighted the challenges experienced educators faced when enrolled for the full time Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Master of Education (MEd.) programmes. The informants described lecturers' failure to link adult learners' wealth of experience to new learning. The study also reported that these learners felt that there was too much emphasis on theory "which did not contribute significantly to their learning." They indicated that practical-based learning was more beneficial providing them with real life scenarios more relevant to their work problems (Pansiri et al, 2012:23).

According to research conducted by Tennant (1999a), "universities in an attempt to be more "relevant" to the workplace are exploring ways in which the workplace can be more effectively integrated into the university experience." Tennant (1999b) reports on the growing interest in "working knowledge." He informs us that the workplace is increasingly becoming a learning resource and site of learning. This trend results from the need for learning to be more problem centred than content laden. Traditional learning approaches must therefore respond to a new pluralistic nature of teaching and learning by adopting a hermeneutic approach in which learning is a process (Spector: 1993:19).

Learning as situated

This position is supported by proponents of situated cognition who stress that learning is embedded in the activities and situations in which it occurs (Brown, 1987). This concept values the changes that occur in a learners' understanding as a result of reflection on experience.

This multi-layer approach to learning requires curriculumists, according to Doll (1986:10) to combine closure with openness, performance with development, and creative solutions with processes. Usher (1997:143) describes this approach to professional knowledge as "artful doing". It is a departure from the focus of professional knowledge as "technical rationality," for example, the standards based model which breaks down teaching into discrete tasks and at the same time neglects to value teaching as a complex activity which is situated.

TRANSFORMATIONAL MODEL OF ODL FOR CPD

It is being argued that ODL should progress towards a model of transformation as opposed to a model of transmission. A transformative ODL model is characterised by an effective integration of a range of models and provides an antidote to the restrictive nature of the transmission model. A transformative model of ODL will require a shift from a focus on content to a process, theme based curriculum in which educators' lived experience becomes the basis of the curriculum and the assessment. How can this be implemented? The answer is in a portfolio approach to TVET TE.

From this perspective CPD becomes an activity through which curriculumists are reflective in and on their professional practice, beliefs and values as well as on their technical competence. The model encourages educators to reflect on issues such as:

- their guiding philosophy of their professional practice
- a scholarly reflection of their curriculum development and the principles that inform their approach to academic work
- a critical reflection of their teaching and learning activities and their impact on LLL principles, e.g. learner centred approaches, flexible delivery and open access
- a critical reflection on their cognitive and metacognitive skills

- a critical reflection on the situatedness of their learning, giving consideration to a variety of informal learning opportunities and
- a critical reflection on the impact of different types of CPD models and their associated activities, for example training versus action research.

CPD through ODL has “the capacity to equip teachers individually and collectively to act as shapers, promoters, and well-informed critics of reforms (Little, 1994:1). Paulo Freire (1970) also subscribed to this model advocating that education should be seen through the lens of liberation. For Frère, “Education is the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.” Table 1: is an illustration of a continuum of models, moving from a transactional towards a transformation model of CPD.

Model of CPD	Purpose of Model
The training model The award-bearing model The deficit model The cascade model	Transmission
The standards-based model The coaching/mentoring model The community of practice model	Transitional
The action research model The transformative model	Transformative

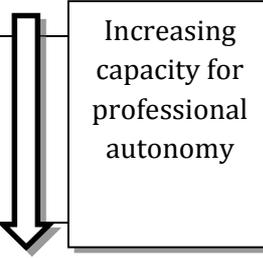


Table 1: Models of CPD and their intended purposes adapted from Kennedy (2005).

Action research model

Kennedy (2005) emphasises that the main focus of action research is practitioners’ development and transformation. Burbank & Kauchack (2003) in Kennedy argue that collaborative action research provides an alternative to the passive role imposed on educators in traditional models of professional development. Action research as a model of CPD is recommended as it enables educators to ask critical questions about their practice and to apply theories, principles and new technologies to improve practice in the classrooms and laboratories.

Transformative model

A transformation model of CPD encompasses both contextual knowledge and knowledge required for real and sustainable educational change. Partnerships between educators, academics and other organisations present a hybrid model of communities of practice. They differ from the conventional communities of practice in that they are involved in enquiry as opposed to merely practice, thereby asserting a much more proactive and conscious approach. This model provides a step in a process toward ODL adopting a portfolio approach to TE. It is the model adopted by Francistown College of Technical Vocational Education (FCTVE) in its Diploma and Certificate programmes in TVET. This model is based on experiential learning and evidence portfolios. The course material includes standards with allocated credit values. The defining feature which enables this programme to be categorised under a transformative model is that it encompasses a detailed evidence guide, which if followed, allows learners to collect evidence in creative ways such as from action research, making a video, participation in webinars, presentations at conferences and at trade shows. The standards approach along with the evidence guide ensures transparency of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for all users without restrictions of a content laden curriculum and without relegating learners to passive learning. Compiling portfolio evidence develops not only learners' teaching competence but also their research skills as well as their intellectual curiosity.

COMPONENTS OF A PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO

The Centre for Learning & Professional Development (CLPD), University of Adelaide, (2006:3) describes a professional portfolio as a living document which allows educators to evaluate their practice, reflect and act on the results, and develop different approaches to curriculum development. It is an essential part of their professional development. It records achievements, allows reflection on professional practice and supports applications for tenure and promotion.

Gray et al (2004:143) inform us that a portfolio is a collection of documents and other appropriate media intended to identify, describe and provide evidence of what one knows and can do, for example recognition of prior learning (RPL)). RPL is an assessment process by which prior learning and current competence acquired from informal and non-formal modes of learning are formally recognized (Boud and Soloman, 2001:50; Van Rooyen, 2003: 76; Gray et al., 2004, 111) in FCTVE Guide to Portfolio Building (2012:3).

The components of a professional teaching portfolio should therefore include scope of work, duties and responsibilities. These elements provide a baseline for identifying training needs accompanied by professional development strategies and activities to address needs.

Portfolios should contain evidence of formal and informal learning. Informal learning could include conference presentations, participation in webinars and focused discussions. However, simply participating in professional development activities does not imply that professional learning has occurred. In this regard portfolio evidence of PD must be augmented by evidence of application of new learning, evaluation of its impact and a plan to improve performance .

CONCLUSION

A transformation model of ODL addresses the challenges of CPD in TE by valuing teachers' lived experience as learning outcomes (LOs). These LOs refer to informal and formal learning and could be presented as evidence of current and prior learning in the form of a portfolio.

A portfolio approach to learning is distinct from content laden curricula with traditional forms of assessment which require more human and physical resources as well as more time. Through a transformational model of ODL not only are larger numbers of educators trained but the quality of their training is enhanced because of the use of an enquiry mode and emphasis on intentional learning. The American Accounting Association (AAA) report (2005) on intentional learning defines the term as a "persistent, continual process to acquire, understand, and use of a variety of strategies to improve one's ability to attain and apply knowledge." Five attributes are identified in the report on intentional learning: questioning, organising, connecting, reflecting and adapting. This post-modernist approach values not only the social environment as the source of learning; it also places a heavy emphasis on the individual (humanist approach). Intentional learners' ability to integrate enables them to connect seemingly disparate situations and refer to a wide range of knowledge and experience to make decisions exemplifying them as LL learners.

This ability to think on your feet; to apply old stocks of knowledge to new situations and to create new knowledge is a key element that TEs require in order to perform effectively in a global world driven by technology and change.

This paper focuses on the shift away from linear, closed models to open models of CPD and ODL. This shift involves developing programmes which are mostly guides through which educators discover their learning philosophies, challenges and learning gaps and are able to plan how to improve their professional competence. The focus is on learning from lived experience and linking experience to new information to form new stocks of knowledge.

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