

Evaluation of a tutor training programme through the frame of activity theory

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This paper reports on an evaluation study that was conducted on a tutor training programme (TTP) at a University of Technology in South Africa. The TTP was dichotomized into a centralized and decentralized model with the former being managed by the Academic Development Department (to provide generic training) and the latter by the respective faculties (to provide discipline-specific training). The evaluation was framed by activity theory in order to help focus the study.

A triangulation of methods were adopted and include the following: 1) A qualitative study involving face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with the TTP manager, tutor training coordinators and tutors; 2) A qualitative study pertaining to observation of tutor training programmes and 3) Document analysis of the course materials and other relevant documents.

The results showed that the generic training provided (by both models of the TTP) was effective in preparing tutors to cope with a diverse student population. The training was ineffective in that tutors were not trained, within the context of a discipline-specific TTP, on how to facilitate learning so that they would be able to create more meaningful learning places in tutorials. Specifically, during tutor training, too much emphasis was being placed on how to work in a group (in a generic sense) instead of training tutors to facilitate group work (within the context of their disciplines). Among the recommendations made for improvement of the TTP as a place of learning is that there should be a balance between generic and discipline-specific training when conceptualizing and implementing TTPs.