

A Multi-Island Situation Without the Ocean: Tutors' perceptions about working in isolation from colleagues

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Résumé de l'article

Distance education is generally seen as a very isolating experience for students, but one often forgets that it can be an equally isolating experience for teaching staff, who sometimes must work in isolation from colleagues. This study examines the experiences of nine tutors at one of the 10 biggest universities in the world, University of South Africa's (Unisa) Reading and Writing Centres. The tutors all work at different Regional Offices across South Africa. This study examines both quantitative data (closed-ended questions) and qualitative data (open-ended questions) obtained from questionnaires. This study seeks to determine to what extent administrative support, professional development support, and colleague support influence tutors' feelings of isolation. This paper takes the position that if feelings of isolation are curbed, staff retention will be improved, which in turn means that the university retains valuable experience. Findings show that contact with and collaboration between colleagues significantly decrease feelings of isolation. Other important methods of curbing isolation are regular training and continuous administrative support.

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A Multi-Island Situation Without the Ocean: Tutors' perceptions about working in isolation from colleagues

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Abstract

Distance education is generally seen as a very isolating experience for students, but one often forgets that it can be an equally isolating experience for teaching staff who oftentimes work in isolation from colleagues. This study examines the experiences of nine tutors at the Reading and Writing Centres of one of the 10 biggest universities in the world, *University of South Africa (Unisa)*. The tutors work at different Regional Offices across South Africa. This study examines both quantitative data (closed-ended questions) and qualitative data (open-ended questions) obtained from questionnaires. This study seeks to determine to what extent administrative support, professional development support, and colleague support influence tutors' feelings of isolation. This paper takes the position that if feelings of isolation are curbed, staff retention will be improved, which means that the university can retain valuable experience. Findings show that contact with and collaboration between and among colleagues significantly decrease feelings of isolation. Other important methods of curbing isolation are regular training and continuous administrative support.

Keywords: Distance education; open education; tutor isolation; staff isolation; collaboration; administrative support; professional support; colleague support

Introduction

Distance education is generally seen as an isolating experience for students (Purches, 1993; Rendon, 2001), but one often forgets that it can be an equally isolating experience for teaching staff, who typically have to work in isolation from colleagues. This is the case for many lecturers and tutors who work for the University of South Africa (*Unisa*), which with 215,825 registered students as of 2004 (Pityana, 2004), is one of the 10 largest mega-universities in the world (Daniel, 1996; Potashnik and Capper, *n.d.*). This study examines the experiences of nine tutors working at *Unisa's* Reading and Writing Centres at 10 different regional offices across the country.

This study seeks to determine to what extent colleague support, administrative support, and professional development support, influence tutors' feelings of isolation. This paper takes the position that if feelings of isolation are curbed, staff retention will be improved, which subsequently means that universities will retain valuable experience. Such action prevents a 'reinventing the wheel' phenomenon, wherein experienced and knowledgeable staff members are

continuously replaced by new and inexperienced staff members. Such a phenomenon could potentially cripple an academic department that, ideally, should be inventing new ways of teaching and to generate new knowledge by building on previous experience.

Based on the findings about the main causes of feelings of isolation, suggestions are made about how administrative staff, academic support staff and fellow tutors can establish a more supportive and effective working environment.

Background

In 2004/05, *Unisa* established Reading and Writing Centres at 12 regional offices across South Africa. The aim of these regional offices is to provide administrative and learner support to students across the country. According to Schrum and Ohler (2005) “. . . distance education represents a way of communicating with geographically dispersed individuals and groups” (p. 61). Since only a small percentage of students studying through *Unisa* have access to the Internet and many are scattered across the country, it is necessary to provide regional-level support. Unlike many of *Unisa's* American, European, and Australian open and distance learning counterparts, it is unrealistic for *Unisa's* Reading and Writing Centre to use an online writing lab as its primary source of service delivery. As such, tutors must be appointed across the country. Whilst this arrangement is practical for many students, it means that *Unisa's* Reading and Writing Centre tutors, to a large extent, work in professional isolation from their peers and colleagues.

The number of students served by *Unisa's* regional offices varies. Seven tutors are appointed on a part-time basis, and five are appointed on a full-time basis. Five of the part-time tutors also work part-time at other tertiary institutions. Seven tutors are currently studying for further postgraduate qualifications.

The first *Unisa* Reading and Writing Centre was opened in September 2004. In March 2006, four tutors had been working at the Reading and Writing Centres for longer than 12 months, three had been working at the Reading and Writing Centres for three to six months, and two tutors had been working at the Reading and Writing Centres for less than three months. The tutors are managed by one co-ordinator.

The duties of the Reading and Writing tutors include two undergraduate three-hour English for Academic Purposes (EAP) workshops per week, individual consultations with undergraduate and postgraduate students, facilitating the use of self-study reading programmes, marketing the Reading and Writing Centres to students at the various regional offices, and various administrative duties. Several tutors are also involved in postgraduate workshops and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) projects. All tutors are encouraged to do research at their centres, to present their findings at conferences, and finally publish their findings in accredited journals. The challenge for the Reading and Writing tutors is to stay motivated and successfully accomplish all of the above tasks, whilst working in professional isolation at their regional offices, often not seeing any fellow tutors for six months or more.

Literature Review

Traditionally, communication in distance education has mostly been technology mediated. In the past, this communication consisted mostly of satellite broadcasting and audio-conferencing (Schrum and Ohler, 2005). In the past few decades, online learning has largely replaced these

methods of communication (Schrum and Ohler, 2005; Berge, 2004; Wheeler, 2004; Oravec, 2005). Schrum and Ohler (2005) describe a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) study in 1997 which showed that instructors very rarely visit remote sites. Other means of communication such as “toll-free telephone, email, or other online access models” (Schrum and Ohler, 2005, p. 62) are used much more frequently. For the Reading and Writing Centres at *Unisa*, this was not a feasible option, as many students (especially undergraduate students, which were initially the major target group) do not have Internet access – in fact, many have never worked on a computer before. The Reading and Writing Centres therefore decided, from their inception, to follow this advice of Wheeler (2004, p. 15):

*Instead of students going to university, the successful university of the future will go to the students. The mega-universities have already achieved considerable success in offering cost-effective access to all comers (Daniel, 1996). Many traditional universities have also started this process, investing in computer networks, **developing human infrastructures** to support the process, and creating new materials in preparation [author bolding].*

The Commonwealth of Learning's first Strategic Plan (Lockwood and Latchem, 2004) discusses a similar situation, where the “artificial and counterproductive distinction” between distance and residential education is weakening due to the continuing “global process of educational reform” (p. 160).

Although integrating characteristics of distance and residential institutions and bringing 'human infrastructures' to the students is currently the best answer in the African context, it still can be an isolating experience for those staff members who do not share the same geographical space with their colleagues. “Such situations, where communications are difficult and professional contacts rare, often leave people feeling alone, with a sense of being forgotten” (Weeks, 1994, p. 8). Weeks (1994) also reminds readers that “isolation can be anywhere: in large urban areas even, as well as remote islands in archipelagos” (p. 9).

Various recommendations have been made in the literature regarding curbing isolation in a distance education environment. The three main themes that emerge are the need for skills development, collaboration, and coordination.

Skills Development

The most recurring theme is that of skills development. According to Wheeler (2004): “Without staff development, lecturers may be isolated in their work, and unaware of new methods, technologies, and applications” (p. 15). The Commonwealth of Learning's first Strategic Plan also stresses that training is a “key function,” because a lot of the “personnel in distance education institutions come from other educational and professional sectors and require training to adapt their skills to the contexts of distance education and open learning” (Lockwood and Latchem, 2004, p. 160). It also points out that because of the 'breaking down' of the distinction between distance and residential education, a 'supporting process of skills development' is necessary for both types of educational institutions, so that personnel at both distance and residential universities can learn how to function effectively in this changing environment (Lockwood and Latchem, 2004).

Participants in the Schrum and Ohler (2005) study had a great need for workshops “to assist in all development” when teaching at a distance learning institution. Participants in the Lockwood and

Latchem study “observed that the training events had helped to strengthen regional, national and international understanding, foster groups with shared interests, and encourage collaboration between participants – all of which were highly valued”(Lockwood and Latchem, 2004, p. 171). These researchers therefore suggest that both external and local staff developers should assist in training, and that training must be varied to include face-to-face delivery and online or distance education.

Weeks (1994) lists the following as advantages for face-to-face, centralised courses: “key people can be brought together;” “contact with HQ staff provides a good communication opportunity;” a “wide range of resources [are] available,” there are “good mixed group for interaction and discussion,” participants are “away from distractions of regional office;” there are “opportunities for social activities;” and such training “raises the vision of participants beyond local horizons” (Weeks, 1994, p. 34). Reasons why this should be alternated with some form of regional, online, or distance training include: “regions [are] left without staff;” the “cost of transport and accommodation;” and a “temptation to cover too much to ensure efficient use of funds,” which results in “too much, too thinly spread and easily forgotten” information (Weeks, 1994, p. 34). An interesting aspect that participants in the Lockwood and Latchem (2004) study pointed out, was that case studies and practices used in training are taken from developed countries. Clearly staff from developing countries feel that their situation is not the same as that of developed countries, and therefore it would be unreasonable and possibly counter effective not to adapt training to the situation of the personnel being trained.

Collaboration

According to Berge (2004) “the nature of work is changing, forcing a move from Fordist knowledge acquisition in a hierarchical structure to constructivist, problem-solving learning in flat organizational structures” (p. 2). This introduces another recurring theme, namely collaboration. Institutions and individuals working in isolation need to become more creative and proactive in solving new problems presented by a changing higher education environment.

Wheeler (2004) feels that universities should collaborate “in a distributed manner, networking to share resources and expertise, to exploit the growing part-time flexible learning market” (p. 15). Schrum and Ohler (2005) agree that “increasing collaboration and communication among all stakeholders” is vital (p. 75). In their study, faculty members involved in distance education felt that the administration should help them “to interact with each other for the purpose of sharing insights and skills and to speak with a unified voice to articulate concerns” (p. 75). In a study about school clustering (i.e., schools in the same area that are cooperating for events and activities for the mutual benefit of all schools), Ribchester and Edwards (1998) found that this type of collaboration “can help to counter potential staff isolation, offering, at the very least, an opportunity to discuss problems and 'let off steam' with a wider range of teachers in similar circumstances” (p. 284).

One impediment of collaboration might be costs, as the “movement of pupils and staff is time-consuming and costly, and may lead to frustrations over the availability of shared resources” (Ribchester and Edwards, 1998, p. 286). Using technology (i.e., the Internet) is a more cost effective way of solving some of the problems of higher education (Wheeler, 2004), including staff isolation. Exchanging “learning materials, resources and subject expertise” can be facilitated by technology (Ribchester and Edwards, 1998, p. 290) .

Coordination

Another need that staff working in isolation have is coordination, as Schrum and Ohler (2005) point out. They specifically stress the “administration of distance education in practical, real terms, including planning, training and facilitating.” They recommend that a centralised coordinating mechanism be instituted at the University of Alaska to help with administrative and academic support, such as “course sequencing, program planning, advertising, providing support (pedagogical, developmental, institutional, and technological), and evaluating distance education experiences” (Schrum and Ohler, 2005 p. 78). They point out that seemingly minor details can “confound faculty . . . and staff”, and can be “impediments to effective distance education” (Schrum and Ohler, p. 19). Surely the same will apply to many other distance education institutions.

One ‘seemingly minor detail’ that might impede the effective functioning of an educational institution is what Wheeler (2004) terms “casualization.” According to Wheeler (2004) career uncertainty resulting from fixed-term contract positions is problematic. He points out that many universities in the US and UK appoint new staff members on contracts of three years or less. Already, Wheeler says “there is uncertainty for the future of conventional university education, because many academics are uncertain of their own career futures” (Wheeler, 2004, p. 14). Such uncertainty stemming from job insecurity can be exacerbated in an environment where tutors are isolated from their colleagues. Staff members are the most valuable asset of any university, and for “universities to survive, talented and innovative staff must be retained, and this may only be achieved by the offer of more security, higher rewards, and greater job satisfaction” (Wheeler, 2004, p.14).

Methodology

In view of the trends identified by the literature thus far, this study aimed to determine tutors’ perceptions regarding administrative support, professional development support, and colleague support at an African ODL university, and the influence of such support on possible feelings of isolation experienced by tutors. The purpose of this is to make some suggestions about how administrative personnel and structures, fellow tutors, and co-ordinators, can support tutors to overcome feelings of isolation and to become more inter-connected.

Using questionnaires, tutors were asked about their experiences working at such a large university. Questions are divided into three categories: 1.) administrative support; 2.) professional development support; and 3.) colleague support. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended and open-ended questions. In order to obtain a holistic picture of the situation the tutors find themselves in, this study was designed using quantitative data (by examining closed-ended questions), and qualitative data (by examining open-ended questions). The qualitative data was analysed by means of content analysis: tutor’s responses are thematically categorised and discussed accordingly.

Analysis of Data and Discussion

Colleague support

In this section, tutors were asked several questions regarding the amount of contact that they have with fellow Reading and Writing tutors, and with their co-ordinator. This contact includes personal meetings, telephone calls, and email messages.

Most tutors have little face-to-face contact with fellow tutors (see Appendix A). On a monthly basis, three tutors see none of their fellow tutors, two tutors see one fellow tutor, one tutor sees two fellow tutors, and two tutors see three of their colleagues.

Tutors meet with their co-ordinator on a more regular basis (see Appendix A). The tutors here are divided into two groups: those who meet with the co-ordinator less than five times per year ($n = 4$ tutors), and those who meet with him more than 20 times per year ($n = 4$ tutors). No tutors indicated that they meet with the co-ordinator between six and 20 times per year; this finding may be explained by the difference in distance that tutors live from the Central Unit in Johannesburg, South Africa, where the co-ordinator works.

Most tutors seem to keep more telephone and email contact with each other and with their co-ordinator. All tutors have at least some telephone contact with fellow tutors and with their co-ordinator each month, while some tutors make a big effort to stay in telephone contact with colleagues – three tutors call their colleagues more than 10 times per month, and four tutors call their co-ordinator more than nine times per month (see Appendix B).

Tutors reported receiving at least six to 10 emails from fellow tutors each month, and most tutors indicated that they make the effort to email their colleagues at least as many times (only one tutor emails colleagues only 1 to 2 times per month). The same is true for emailing the co-ordinator (see Appendix C).

The quantitative data show that tutors have more contact with their co-ordinator than with fellow tutors. As revealed in the qualitative data, none comment on their contact with their co-ordinator (perhaps because they see their co-ordinator's support as sufficient), but all commented on the level of interaction with fellow tutors.

Six tutors commented that keeping contact with colleagues curbs feelings of isolation. One tutor stated that “collaborative instructional design and teaching and learning, the use of telephones and emails to bounce an idea to a colleague and the support through materials and ideas through discussions” curb isolation. Other comments include that “being friends with colleagues (both local and regional), having a sympathetic ear,” “regular meetings,” “more contact,” and “taking responsibility for making contact” contribute to curbing isolation. This corresponds to Ribchester and Edwards' (1998) findings that collaboration has the advantage that staff members in similar situations can act as sounding boards for each other's problems.

Conversely, it is a lack of contact with colleagues that increases feelings of isolation for many tutors. Five tutors commented that factors such as “physical distance from each other and also less interaction with tutors,” “not making your presence felt,” “colleagues not communicating with you,” a lack of time to “share reading centre experiences with colleagues,” and irregular face-to-face meetings increase feelings of isolation.

When giving advice to fellow tutors who might feel isolated at their centres, eight tutors stressed how important contact with fellow tutors is. Most tutors feel that it should be the impetus of tutors to “initiate communication” and “network with other tutors.” One tutor comments that “you could email them and make time to meet,” while another says that one should “liase with other tutors and find out what they are doing.” It seems safe to infer that those participants who suggest that tutors initiate more face-to-face contact with colleagues, more than likely live close to these colleagues. For many tutors, however, self-initiated face-to-face interaction tends to be difficult. The following suggestion might be more useful for such tutors: “get in touch via email or phone” (which, according to Wheeler is a cost effective way of collaborating); share frustrations or good ideas; don't be anxious that your ideas or material are not good enough – just put it out there for discussion.” One tutor advised that “the co-ordinators should make available opportunities for team work.” Schrum and Ohler (2005) also found that faculty had a need for administration to help them to collaborate and interact with other faculty members.

Administrative support

Tutors were asked questions regarding the amount of support they receive in terms of administration, marketing, and resources. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all; 5 = very much), four tutors reported that they received under average support regarding general administration and logistical arrangements from their regional centres, and only two indicated that they received above average support for such administration. Five tutors reported that their regional offices provided them with under average support with marketing their centres, and only one felt they received above average support for marketing the Centre. Five tutors reported that they did not have all of the basic resources they needed to run an effective Reading and Writing Centre, and two indicated that they did have enough resources to accomplish their tasks (see Appendix D).

As one participant said, “Not having enough support from your regional office . . . feeling as though you run into brick walls with regards to booking venues, obtaining vital resources, etc.,” can potentially enhance feelings of isolation significantly. One tutor noted that a lack of support from the regional office “makes you question your place in the *Unisa* setting as the importance of a Reading and Writing Centre is many times overlooked.” Another tutor noted “frustration at poor organisational systems – e.g., not getting paid, not having any of the resources I requested . . . despite persistent phone calls, emails, etc.”

One tutor noted that “too many administrative duties make it difficult to find time to do research.” This implies tutors do not receive a lot of administrative support from their regional office. Whilst it is often expected of tutors to undertake research, the amount of administrative duties that they must handle makes it difficult for them to find time for research.

One participant noted that he puts in a lot of effort into marketing the centre, but that the response from students is disappointing. This results in great frustration, especially if there is no one to help with such an endeavour. Another tutor noted that a lack of positive response from students (in a distance education setting) result in lack of motivation and that this would probably be much less problematic at a residential university.

Problems associated with insufficient resources are cited by two tutors, which they say increases the sense of isolation they feel at their regional offices. In terms of motivation, one tutor reported that sometimes the lack of resources – i.e., not having “an Internet facility available at all times, or a printer” – are all factors that can negatively influence tutor motivation. Other resources that

are mentioned as lacking include learning materials, a computer, and computer programmes. Put simply, insufficient resources might compel some tutors to seek 'greener pastures.'

Professional support

In the professional support section, tutors were questioned on the amount of contact that they have with colleagues working at other universities and how much further training (either self-initiated or provided by their department) they participate in. They were also asked how they perceive their own experience and ability compared to that of fellow Reading and Writing tutors and colleagues from other universities.

Four of the nine tutors reported having fairly regular contact (both personal and professional) with colleagues working in the same field at other universities; whereas five reported seldom, if ever, having contact with their *Unisa* tutor colleagues (see Appendix E).

Five of the nine tutors reported their department fully supports their professional development; one reported that the department does not support professional development on any level. All tutors indicated that they do take some level of responsibility for their own professional development, with seven reporting taking above average responsibility for their own professional development (see Appendix F).

Several tutors noted that staying “stimulated and on top of things,” staying challenged and always having “something new to do, learn or get involved in” keeps them motivated and feeling less isolated from their colleagues. This finding is supported by Lockwood and Latchem (2004), who found that training events strengthen group ties and encourage ongoing collaboration. Some tutors advised they are intrinsically motivated when it comes to doing research, and still want to undertake research in spite of administrative duties taking up much of their time. One tutor noted “there is not much documented on [Reading and Writing Centre] scholarship in South Africa and it is important to conduct research that will inform policy and feed into future research. It also helps to let people know what we are doing and to share experiences with colleagues in the field.” This finding supports this study's quantitative research results, which indicates most tutors take a lot of responsibility for their own professional development.

A few tutors indicated the need for more formally arranged meetings and opportunities for team work between tutors, such as staff training sessions held “at least once a semester.” Tutors also reported that liaising with colleagues at other institutions is important. Over half of the tutors indicated that their department supports them sufficiently on a professional level, but nonetheless some report there is still room for improvement.

In terms of 'experience' and 'ability,' four of the nine tutors in this study reported that they have more experience and/ or ability than their fellow Reading and Writing Centre tutors. None reported having less or much more experience and/or ability, while two indicated that they do not know how they compare with their fellow tutors (see Appendix G). When asked how they would compare their experience and ability to that of colleagues working at other universities, only two indicated that they are more experienced and able; three reported that they have the same, less, or much less experience; and three indicated that they do not know how their experience and ability compares to that of colleagues working at other universities. The fact that two tutors indicated that they do not know how their abilities and experience compare with that of their fellow tutors, suggests they might not have enough formal contact with each other.

As mentioned earlier, one factor that might influence tutors' motivation is 'casualisation.' One tutor indicated his frustration at working only part-time and would much prefer working at the Reading and Writing Centres on a full-time basis. Even so, tutors appointed on a full-time basis are not appointed permanently, but rather on fixed-term contract positions. Casualisation might be advantageous to universities on a short-term basis (mainly financial), but in the long term this practice could seriously erode staff morale and result in universities losing valuable, hard-to-replace experience.

Two tutors advised that attending conferences, reading papers, doing research, and publishing are all good methods to curb feelings of isolation. The quantitative research shows that one third of the tutors do not know how their experience and ability compare with that of colleagues working at other universities (see Appendix G). As such, following the above mentioned advice might help these tutors to feel more secure about their abilities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Weeks (1994) asks: "How many have to sink before we realise that such losses in people cannot go on . . . ?" (p. 8). Wheeler (2004) concurs by stating that universities will only be able to survive and thrive, if they (amongst other things) aim for greater collaboration and invest more in people. From the review of the literature review and results from this study clearly supports these statements.

According to the data, collaboration is most significant in reducing feelings of isolation amongst tutors. Collaboration, however, goes hand-in-hand with professional development. "Once launched into orbit educational personnel still need the occasional 'booster rocket'" (Weeks, 1994, p. 33). Participants in this study certainly seem to agree that extra training is vital to remain 'fuelled' and motivated when working somewhere in 'orbit.' Weeks (1994) reminds us, however, that in-service training is only one form of professional support and that it is usually not enough, because staff members typically only go to one in-service course (or less) per year, and still remain feeling left outside of 'orbit' of the larger system.

Even modest gestures can go a long way to help tutors to feel like they are part of the system. Gestures such as replying to letters, returning phone calls, sending supplies on time, putting ourselves in their shoes and understanding their problems, being contactable and sympathetic, etc., that cost almost nothing except time (Weeks 1994).

Although not stressed as much in this study as in other studies (Schrum and Ohler, 2005) coordination of staff members remains a focal point in decreasing feelings of isolation. Like the Schrum and Ohler 2005 study, participants in this study also indicated a need for the Central Unit to foster teamwork between tutors and make available opportunities for professional development. The Central Unit should also help in administrative matters such as receiving resources on time and having, at minimum, basically equipped centres. In addition, the Central Unit should guide inexperienced tutors in matters such as programme planning, advertising, and course sequencing (Schrum and Ohler, 2005).

Even if all of the above are in place, a seemingly minor detail like job insecurity could compel tutors to look for jobs in a more stable and secure environment. If universities are to survive, they must invest in their most valuable assets – their staff (Wheeler 2004). The most effective way of achieving this is providing greater job security. If staff turnover is rapid, a university will likely have staff who feel unsure of themselves and their jobs, a dynamic which further isolates

themselves from each other. They will be eager to move to a more secure environment. Conversely, if there is a solid foundation (i.e., permanent staff), this would better support research, an important determinant of funding and the most important method of achieving credibility and legitimacy in the greater academy (Yick, Patrick and Costin, 2005). Taking the above into consideration, some suggestions are listed as tactics to help curb staff isolation:

Administrative staff

- Continue supporting tutors with administrative matters, even if the tutors are not new staff members. Such support should include help with general administration and marketing. Help with administrative matters will give tutors more time to do the research necessary to keep up the academic standards and reputation of their centres.
- Take a proactive role in ensuring that tutors have the basic resources they need to do their jobs effectively.

Academic support staff

- Arrange at least one (preferably two) in-service training sessions per year for tutors. This would serve to increase collaboration between staff members, increase motivation to conduct research, which will help reduce feelings of isolation.
- Reply to emails and phone calls promptly, send supplies in a timely manner, and be willing to help tutors solve problems that they cannot solve.
- Initiate contact with tutors regularly, to foster a culture of 'staying in touch' not only with academic support staff, but also with fellow tutors.
- Encourage tutors to contact academics at other institutions (i.e., list-serves, conferences, etc.), as this creates a culture of collegiality and collaboration, which in turn, decreases uncertainty about how one compares with colleagues at other institutions.

Fellow tutors

- Make a point of calling, emailing and, if possible, meet with tutors at other centres face-to-face, especially new tutors who do not yet have a support system of colleagues to rely on. Also, remember that your colleagues will not contact you if you do not contact them.
- Build friendships with colleagues – they are a safe audience with whom you can solicit feedback on ideas, writing, problems, etc.
- Find out about opportunities for professional development (e.g., short courses, workshops, seminars, etc.), and invite colleagues to join you. Also, share what you learned with your fellow tutors.
- Forward interesting articles and other material to colleagues – they might soon start doing the same, which could decrease the time you spend looking for articles and other material.

- Get involved and initiate new programmes in which you can collaborate – this is good for your own professional development (and your colleagues) and decreases feelings of isolation.

It is “people who get things done, so it is essential to know how to bring out the best in people, to understand their aspirations and expectations” (Weeks 1994, p. 9). By supporting staff members who often already work in difficult circumstances and in professional isolation from colleagues, universities can retain and strengthen the valuable resource of experienced and motivated staff members. An initial investment of time and money in existing staff members, could potentially save universities much more in terms of time and money needed to recruit and retrain new staff members.

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Appendix A

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	0 tutors	3	37.5
	1 tutor	2	25.0
	2 tutors	1	12.5
	3 tutors	2	25.0
	Total	8	100.0
Missing	Missing	1	
Total		9	

Table 1: How many of your fellow tutors do you meet on a monthly basis?

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	1-2 times	3	37.5
	3-5 times	1	12.5
	20-40 times	2	25.0
	> 40 times	2	25.0
	Total	8	100.0
Missing	System	1	
Total		9	

Table 2: How many times per year do you meet with your co-ordinator?

Appendix B

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	1-2 times	2	22.2
	3-5 times	1	11.1
	6-10 times	2	22.2
	10-20 times	3	33.3
	> 20 times	1	11.1
	Total	9	100.0

Table 3: How many times per month do your colleagues call you telephonically?

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	1-2 times	3	33.3
	3-5 times	1	11.1
	6-10 times	2	22.2
	10-20 times	2	22.2
	> 20 times	1	11.1
	Total	9	100.0

Table 4: How many times per month do you call your colleagues telephonically?

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	3-5 times	5	55.6
	9-11 times	1	11.1
	> 11 times	3	33.3
	Total	9	100.0

Table 5: How many times per month does your co-ordinator call you telephonically?

*Fouche ~ A Multi-Island Situation Without the Ocean:
Tutors' perceptions about working in isolation from colleagues*

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid 1-2 times	2	22.2
3-5 times	2	22.2
6-8 times	1	11.1
9-11 times	2	22.2
> 11 times	2	22.2
Total	9	100.0

Table 6: How many times per month do you call your co-ordinator telephonically?

Appendix C

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid 6-10 times	3	33.3
10-20 times	3	33.3
> 20 times	3	33.3
Total	9	100.0

Table 7: How many times per month do your colleagues e-mail you?

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid 1-2 times	1	11.1
6-10 times	4	44.4
10-20 times	3	33.3
> 20 times	1	11.1
Total	9	100.0

Table 8: How many times per month do you e-mail your colleagues?

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid 6-10 times	2	22.2
20-40 times	4	44.4
> 40 times	3	33.3
Total	9	100.0

Table 9: How many times per month does your co-ordinator e-mail you?

*Fouche ~ A Multi-Island Situation Without the Ocean:
Tutors' perceptions about working in isolation from colleagues*

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid 1-5 times	1	11.1
6-10 times	2	22.2
11-20 times	2	22.2
20-40 times	2	22.2
> 40 times	2	22.2
Total	9	100.0

Table 10: How many times per month do you e-mail your co-ordinator?

Appendix D

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid Not at all	1	11.1
A bit	3	33.3
Medium	3	33.3
Yes	1	11.1
Very much	1	11.1
Total	9	100.0

Table 11: How much does your regional centre help you with general administration and logistical arrangements?

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid Not at all	3	33.3
A bit	2	22.2
Medium	3	33.3
Very much	1	11.1
Total	9	100.0

Table 12: How much does your regional centre help you with marketing your centre?

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid Not at all	4	44.4
A bit	1	11.1
Medium	2	22.2
Yes	2	22.2
Total	9	100.0

Table 13: Do you have all of the basic resources you need to run an effective Reading and Writing Centre?

Appendix E

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid Never	3	33.3
A few times a year	2	22.2
On a monthly basis	3	33.3
On a weekly basis	1	11.1
Total	9	100.0

Table 14: How much personal contact (by means of phone calls, meetings, discussions, personal e-mails) do you have with colleagues working in the same field, but at other universities?

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid Never	3	33.3
A few times a year	2	22.2
On a monthly basis	2	22.2
On a weekly basis	2	22.2
Total	9	100.0

Table 15: How much contact (other than personal, e.g. by means of newsletter, mailing groups etc.) do you have with colleagues working in the same field, but at other universities?

Appendix F

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid (1) = Not at all	1	11.1
(2)	0	00.0
(3)	2	22.2
(4)	1	11.1
(5) = Very much	5	55.6
Total	9	100.0

Table 16: To what extent does your department support your professional development (e.g. by means of training, help with further studies, forwarding articles about your field, etc.)

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid (1) = Not at all	0	0.00
(2)	1	11.1
(3)	1	11.1
(4)	3	33.3
(5) = Very much	4	44.4
Total	9	100.0

Table 17: To what extent do you take responsibility for your own professional development (e.g. by means of training not organised by your department, finding articles about your field, further studies etc.)?

Appendix G

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Much less	0	00.0
	Less	1	11.1
	The same	2	22.2
	More	4	44.4
	Much more	0	0.00
	I don't know	2	22.2
	Total	9	100.0

Table 18: How would you describe your experience and ability, in terms of Reading and Writing instruction, as compared to your fellow Reading and Writing tutors?

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Much less	1	11.1
	Less	1	11.1
	The same	2	22.2
	More	2	22.2
	Much more	0	0.00
	I don't know	3	33.3
	Total	9	100.0

Table 19: How would you describe your experience and ability, in terms of Reading and Writing instruction, as compared to colleagues at other universities?