

Staff and Educational Development Case Studies, Experiences & Practice

Helen EDWARDS, David BAUME and Graham WEBB (eds)
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Staff and educational development is relatively a new field in higher education. It has recently been emerging as a systematic activity in higher education. The staff and educational development as a professional function includes teaching and training, human resource development and management, organizational development, management and implementation of policy and strategy on teaching and learning. Though earlier, it had been limited to a few common activities like

workshop, training programme for new teaching staff and the provision of written and multimedia material. Different authors have tried to provide a direction to the activity of staff and educational development. The editors of the volume under review have made one such effort. Helen Edwards, David Baume and Graham Webb have tried to put at one place the experiences of the thoughtful staff and educational developers on different aspects handled by them for the benefit of the rest. The authors for such an endeavour have appropriately chosen the case study format.

The volume has been divided into five main sections containing 19 Chapters by different stalwarts in the area of staff and educational development. The introduction of contributors and areas covered provided by the editors prepares the readers for assimilating the experiences provided by the former while expanding the scope of activities in staff and educational development beyond conventional framework of workshop, programming in teaching and written and multimedia materials about learning and teaching.

The primary concern of staff and educational development is the improvement of student learning through extending the capabilities of the staff and institution involved with providing education. The book has made an effort to translate the theory set in staff and educational development into practice and has succeeded in this endeavour to a great extent. The different parts of the case studies develop the theme gradually. The last part on "Case Reporter's Discussion" provides a critical and in-depth analysis of the case trying to satisfy the curiosity and anxiety of the readers developed through the rest of the chapter.

Chapter-1 by Serge Piccinin discusses how to establish the likelihood of individual teaching consultation leading to lasting improvement and whether such consultation is worth the time and effort. The canvas upon which the case study develops is a large urban Canadian University.

Chapter-2 by Barbara Grant, through a case study set in an established university in Aotearoa, New Zealand, raises the issues pertaining to designing of professional development courses that support ongoing change in practice for both academic advisors and other academic staff.

Lindy McAllister, in Chapter-3, deals with the effectiveness and efficiency involved for a head of a programme providing staff development and support for the new academics in the establishment of a new course and development of a new curriculum.

Pip Bruce-Ferguson in Chapter-4 provides a case study, which explores issues of workload, balance and identity in a New Zealand Polytechnic concerning teachers using their own teaching practices in order to develop a research programme.

Chaper-5 by Jackie Lublin discusses the issues pertaining to reluctance of teaching staff to acknowledge that assessment involves know-how and skill, and the difficulty of encouraging staff to change their behaviors around assessment. Glenda Crosling in

Chapter-6 raises issues about the attitude of academic staff towards faculty based academic support for students anchoring on a business faculty of a large multi-campus university in Australia. The author is of the view that staff development and change of attitude can also be facilitated through a 'hands-on working together' approach from the bottom up.

Joy Higgs, in Chapter-7, explores the costs and benefits of mentoring which is more of an affirmation of choices made and offering recognition of individual's valuable supportive role rather than being able to help him in achieving success in promotion. Greater support for and recognition of mentoring is needed to sustain this valuable staff development activity.

Carmel McNaught in Chapter-8 discusses how a staff development unit can react when the university administration demands evidence of outcomes related to strategic goals and the financial implications thereof. These are-adhering to established principles, dealing with the emotional aspects of change, finding the middle grounding and using reflection to enable growth.

David Murphy in Chapter-9 emphasises the need to be alert for staff development opportunities that may arise from unexpected or unanticipated sources. The case study narrates the development and presentation of an online course offered by a distance teaching university.

In Chapter-10, Robyn Lines and Peter Muir discuss as to how to create a collaborative action learning team to effect major curriculum development together with coping with dissent at different levels on the basis of a case study occurred in an Australian University during 2001. The case raises number of other issues for professional developers adopting an action learning approach to staff development.

Chapter-11 by Anne Oxley discusses the ways to encourage and support staffs to engage with inter professional teaching and learning based on the experiences gained at Sheffield Hallam University.

Jamie Thompson, in Chapter-12, deals with the issue as to how a university can make academics feel more valued in their teaching role. Along side growth in skills and knowledge, the staff and educational system has also to respond to the practical needs of teachers.

Chapter-13 by Veronique Johnston raises the issues pertaining to stimulating changes to culture and practice in order to enhance the students' experience and improve their chances of academic success. The author emphasizes that all retention projects start with good intentions and, often, a great deal of zeal. She propagates the theory of retention strategy as sorting, supporting, connecting, transforming the institution and transforming the students.

Chapter-14 by Steve Outram explores how a university can make itself distinctive and how to enable a top-down initiative to work throughout a university.

Chapter-15 by Roger Landbeck deals with the topic on introducing changes in policies and procedures in an institution of higher education in order to improve teaching and learning. Before introducing a change, the staff developers need to know the will of the academic staff and respect their expertise, be prepared to cut their cloth according to the local situations and work with the overall institutional vision to assist the institution in achieving its goals.

Chapter-16 by Sylvia Huntley-Moore and John Partner discuss about introduction of staff and academic development to a traditional collegiate university. The issues involved are institutional culture, location of activities, focus, strategies and long-

term survival. The issue of resources - both human and financial, has a profound effect on the form and scope of the entire staff development programme.

Chapter-17 by David Baume discusses as to how to cope with a success that threatens to damage the system and anticipate and provide what the members will require in a drastically changed environment. The author emphasises that teaching is more than a collection of skills, since it is based on particular values underpinned by particular knowledge about learning and teaching as well as the discipline taught.

Suki Ekaratne in Chapter-18, discusses as to how to gain acceptance from universities and their staff that staff development is needed for personal, institutional and national development, and then how to bring about this development across a country.

Chapter-19 by Alison Holmes discusses the issue pertaining to career progression for lecturers who are bored with their subject area but remain fascinated by teaching and learning. The case explains that having only one approach to solve a problem is not sufficient. What works in one situation may not work in other. Finding an optimal solution to a problem often, therefore, necessitates using multiple methods. The staff and educational developers need to rise to the practical challenge and find ways to assess the effectiveness of their efforts, develop the theory of their practice and support the emergence of their profession.

The case studies presented in the volume are subjective narratives of the experiences gained by the authors themselves pertaining to the systems, which they have once been a part of. Though the experiences of the authors imbibe in them rich knowledge and present a way out to tackle different difficult situations in an institution of higher education, while providing facts and figures, the authors go philosophical quite often, which distracts the focal point and deviates the attention of the readers towards petty things. Overall, the volume is a good compilation of experiences in staff and educational development at higher education institution level.