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Changing Practice: Research on the Impact of Continuing Professional Development in Higher Education

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Changing practice: research on the impact of continuing professional development in Higher Education

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Abstract

- In higher education, we still have much to learn about the nature of teacher thinking, about the construction of curricula, and about how teachers become reflective about their practice. Eraut (1994) emphasised that professionals continually learn on the job but that unless time is set aside to deliberate, the learning may not be integrated into any general theory of practice. Also, it is argued in the most recent literature (Day & Sachs 2004) that there is a gap in our knowledge of the effects of CPD upon the thinking, planning and practice of individual teachers. Kelchtermans (2004) highlights the need to answer the key question as to what kind of professionalism continuous professional development should contribute and the discussion is set in the wider context of the debate about the professionalism of the academic community in these changed times.



Abstract

- The aim of this paper is to explore important issues in relation to the professional development of the academic community through the detailing of a research study which measured the impact on the teaching practice of lecturers who have graduated from the Postgraduate Certificate in Third Level Learning and Teaching Course over a period extending from 2000-2003. A qualitative questionnaire was distributed to the forty five successful graduates of the course to establish the impact the course had made on these lecturers' professional practice.
- 25 lecturers returned completed questionnaires; all indicated that impact had been made on their teaching practice, and a number of changes had taken place. The most significant of these had been increased reflection on current teaching practice; the introduction of new teaching strategies; increased focus on the design and delivery of classes; more work taking place on course teams; an increased in confidence about learning and teaching and a more student-centred approach taken to teaching.



Abstract

- The paper argues that a new professionalism in higher education can be realised through an approach to professional development that focuses on nurturing inquiry, building reflective practice and encouraging dialogue and collaboration within a tradition of scholarship.

References

- Day, C. and Sachs, J. (2004) 'Professionalism, performativity and empowerment: discourses in the politics, policies and purposes of continuing professional development', in C. Day, and J. Sachs, (ed.) *International Handbook on the Continuing Professional Development of Teachers*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Eraut, M. (1994) *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence*. London: Falmer Press
- Kelchtermans, G. (2004) CPD for professional renewal: moving beyond knowledge for practice, in C. Day, and J. Sachs, (ed.) *International Handbook on the Continuing Professional Development of Teachers*. Berkshire: Open University Press.



Effects of CPD on Thinking, Planning and Practice of Academic Staff in HE

- PHASE 1 research study: measure the impact on the teaching practice of lecturers who have graduated from the Postgraduate Certificate in Third Level Learning and Teaching Course over a period extending from 2000-2003.
- A qualitative questionnaire was distributed graduates of the course to establish the impact the course had made on these lecturers' **thinking, planning** and professional **practice**.




Effects of CPD on Thinking, Planning and Practice of Academic Staff in HE

8 participants graduated in 2001

12 participants graduated in 2002

25 participants graduated in 2003


Total Sample Size = 45



Effects of CPD on Thinking, Planning and Practice of Academic Staff in HE

Freedom is given to implement new strategies; colleagues are interested in new ideas; funding is also given for attendance on the L&T course.


Positive encouragement by Dept Head and peers; timetable adjustments made to facilitate attendance and follow-up study of L&T courses; discussions take place on teaching methods.



Effects of CPD on Thinking, Planning and Practice of Academic Staff in HE

Very uninterested in discussing, changing, supporting or researching student learning; curricula change only happens at individual level; no meetings or internal discussion with H/D about student work, teaching contexts etc; no grants offered for staff to train.


It does not come into what they do; too partial, bitty; based on personalities and their initiatives; no concerted departmental efforts are resourced and pushed on by political will.



Effects of CPD on Thinking, Planning and Practice of Academic Staff in HE

Question to identify an underlying philosophy and ethos of the course was answered positively by 41 respondents and the main themes regarding a course philosophy emerging were:

*constructivist active student learning
and reflective teaching practice*




Effects of CPD on Thinking, Planning and Practice of Academic Staff in HE

More student oriented, keep the learning experiential where possible; using a wider range of teaching methods; use of reflection to pinpoint changes needed.

Better planner; constantly reflecting on my practice and looking at different methods.

More group work now; focus on student learning outcomes; less prescriptive approach; better assessment process; more empathy with students; perhaps more respectful of students; more participation from students in class time.



Effects of CPD on Thinking, Planning and Practice of Academic Staff in HE

The structured activities in lectures mean that the students are involved and are attempting to apply what they have learned instead of sitting back listening; students who have been present for these activities usually pass related questions on the assessment tests during the year.

Have a higher number of requests for classes but could be coincidence; have been nominated to the Science Faculty T&L committee.

Effects of CPD on Thinking, Planning and Practice of Academic Staff in HE

establishing the nature of change to course participants' teaching practice:

Confidence in new language/terminology

Supporting colleagues/resource assistance

Deeper knowledge of course design/teaching methods

Changes in teaching practice/
learning environment

Stronger personal conviction in L&T

Increased dialogue with colleagues in L&T

Dept. and Institutional awareness raised about L&T





Thinking/Planning

You become less concerned with the content although that is important and reflect more on why you are teaching what you are teaching, how it links to everything else and the most appropriate way to present it to a particular group of students.

I now think about the learning rather than the teaching and that make me think about the best way I as a teacher can enhance the learning experience. I certainly reflect more on what I do.

I question much more what I do, why I am doing it and what the students will get from it.



Practice

I have developed skills and knowledge to deliver and organise better lectures and tutorials but the most important professional development has been gaining an understanding, awareness and ability to question myself about the approaches I use in teaching and ask myself why I do it and could I do it more effectively?

Keep in Touch...



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