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## Researching What Lecturers Want: Supporting Academic Staff in the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching

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# Researching What Lecturers Want: Supporting Academic Staff in the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching

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# Abstract

- During the past fifty years third level education has expanded and diversified and the demands and expectations being placed on Higher Education Institutions are now formidable, with changes in the student body and increased pressure from government on costs, procedures and results. For academic staff, there are increased pressures through increased teaching loads and growing reporting and administrative requirements. Staff are also under great pressure to develop and strengthen their research profile while also achieving excellence in teaching and fulfilling the expectations of their learners and other stakeholders.



# Abstract

- There is no professional training requirement for higher education teachers in the Republic of Ireland as far as their teaching is concerned. However, there is growing recognition within the sector for the need for training for lecturers and other academic staff who have a teaching component to their work. The Learning and Teaching Centre was set up in 1999 in the Dublin Institute of Technology and provides workshops for academic staff on aspects of learning and teaching in higher education. It also runs a very successful Postgraduate Programme (Certificate, Diploma and Masters) in Third Level Learning and Teaching.



# Abstract

- To support academic staff in the area of new and improved ways of teaching and to deepen their understanding of how students learn is a challenge for educational developers. Walker (2001) describes the dominant paradigm in academic staff development in Britain as too often emphasizing ‘the practice and perfection only of methods and techniques’. As educational developers, we were coming from a position where we wanted to support professional development in the context of academic staff reflecting on their practice.
- The extended workshop seeks to investigate the needs of academic staff in relation to professional development, and the extent to which there is engagement with and support for such development. In addition, it is important to establish what type of academic support would staff most desire and appreciate in the context of third level learning and teaching.



# Abstract

- For the first phase of the study, a large scale survey approach is being used to gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of determining the relationships that exist between specific events. This extended workshop will involve participants in an advancement of knowledge about professional development currently taking place within Irish higher education.



## 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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