



Editorial

Convergence in diversity: Evaluating faculty development across the globe



Why a special issue on the evaluation of faculty development?

Over the past few decades, we have seen an increasing concern for the quality of teaching and learning in post-secondary education (Biggs, 2003). In response to these concerns, post-secondary education institutes across the globe have set up dedicated centres tasked with organizing and supervising initiatives aimed at supporting faculty development. However, in spite of the increased investments in a wide variety of faculty development opportunities offered by these centres, little evidence is typically provided regarding the impact of these initiatives (Stes, Min-Leliveld, Gijbels, & Van Petegem, 2010). Yet, in order to advance the work of an emerging group of scholars in faculty development (Taylor & Rege Colet, 2010), insight is required into the factors that impact the extent to which faculty development initiatives improve the professional practice of its participants. These insights might aid staff in faculty development and faculty support centres, as well as those involved in making teaching policy, to effectively foster the professional learning of faculty and, consequently, improve the quality of teaching in post-secondary education.

This special issue aims to present a response to the lack of available insights into the impact of faculty development. The question guiding the contributions is: What do we learn from evaluation studies into the impact of faculty development initiatives? To facilitate cross-pollination of ideas within the community of scholars in faculty development worldwide, we aimed to bring together authors from a multitude of countries, including Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland, Australia, South Africa, the USA, and Canada, who study a variety of post-secondary educational contexts, including research-intensive universities, 2-year colleges, and a technical college. As post-secondary institutes differ in their methods and degree of support for faculty development, they also differ in their support for research into the effectiveness of faculty development initiatives. While some authors report on nationally or regionally funded initiatives they participate in, other authors are supported by their institute. This diversity is reflected in the variety in the scope of the faculty development initiatives described in the contributions in this special issue as well as in the variety in scope, methodology, and sample size of the evaluation methods used. We are delighted that Alenoush Saroyan from Canada and Keith Trigwell from Australia agreed to work together on a concluding article (Saroyan & Trigwell, 2015) in which they discuss the contributions in this special issue.

For the purpose of this special issue, we understand faculty development as the professional development of those who serve as faculty members, professors, and/or teaching professionals in post-secondary institutions such as universities, colleges, and vocational institutes. Most contributions in this special issue primarily focus on the development of faculty in their role as teacher (also called 'instructional development' (Taylor & Rege Colet, 2010)). However, faculty development has a broader scope, covering not only the teaching component of a faculty member's job but also, for example, his or her research activities and/or broader social duties. Faculty development even encompasses the aspect of organizational development, which focuses on creating institutional policies and structures that foster an effective learning and teaching environment (Taylor & Rege Colet, 2010).

Faculty development does not happen in isolation

Faculty development encompasses a complex and multifaceted endeavour. Each contribution in this special issue highlights aspects of this complexity. First of all, there is a recognition that faculty development does not happen in isolation but is impacted by the organizational and social worlds that faculty members inhabit. In this respect, the next contribution to this special issue, by Van Schalkwyk, Herman, Leibowitz, & Farmer (2015), provides a reflection on the culture, structure, and agency that impact professional learning of lecturers at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. In response to a call for increased attention to professional learning as it happens naturally at work, Van Schalkwyk et al. (2015) focus on how professional learning is embedded in workplace structures and cultures, describing professional learning as "the enhancement or change of teaching and assessment practices of lecturers in order for quality student learning to take place." Their findings blatantly reveal the realities and choices involved in becoming or being a good teacher at a research-intensive university. Though these realities are well known, the authors reflect on ways in which dominant discourses, spaces, culture, and processes could (and should) be considered and possibly changed by those aiming to support and lead instructional excellence at universities.

The importance of social connections is also highlighted by Van Waes, Van den Bossche, Moolenaar, Stes, & Van Petegem (2015) in the third contribution to this special issue. This contribution examines changes in collegial interactions throughout a faculty development programme at a research-intensive university in

Flanders (Belgium) and investigates mechanisms that may inhibit or support these changes. Results indicate that teachers' networks expand during participation in a faculty development initiative. Future research is needed to examine the extent to which this impact of faculty development on professional networks leads to actual changes in teachers' teaching (Van Waes et al., 2015).

In the fourth contribution to this issue, Hum, Amundsen, & Emmioglou (2015) describe the evaluation of an institutional programme aimed at supporting individual instructors in the development of their teaching practice at Simon Fraser University in Western Canada. In addition to the goal of fostering "professional experimentation," this programme aims to foster institutional engagement in a community of teaching professionals. Professional experimentation involves deliberate practice of a teaching approach along with systematic collection of feedback to evaluate its effectiveness. Professional experimentation as such is expected to lead to enhanced knowledge that can be generalized to other aspects of an individual's teaching practice. The authors respond to a call for detailed and reasoned descriptions of the design of practice (Stes et al., 2010) and provide a careful description of their evaluation procedures, which involve a survey, interviews, programme statistics, and documents. While preliminary, the findings suggest that the programme does indeed enhance professional practice and institutional engagement.

Thus, the first three empirical papers in this special issue might serve as examples of how universities could start to change social realities and dominant discourses and create spaces in which teaching and teachers can flourish.

Reflection on teaching and student learning as part of professional learning

In addition to enhancing workplace practices to increase the impact of faculty development initiatives, the following five papers in this manuscript point to the importance of the subjectivities that individual faculty members bring to the professional learning experience as well as the consequent need for faculty to reflect on their work.

In the fifth paper, Taylor and Znajda (2015) evaluate the impact of an intervention in which faculty at research-intensive universities in Canada receive support in developing a course and engage in reflective practice, fuelled by feedback received through classroom observations. While the sample size of the evaluation study was small (only ten faculty members participated), the study illustrates the complexities of professional learning. The findings highlight that throughout the initiative, participants gained confidence and enhanced their reflective practice. More importantly, the findings indicate that acquiring the right set of learner-centred beliefs about teaching is, in itself, not enough to ensure learner-centred teaching practices. In fact, the authors found that "it was through negotiating the misalignments between stated beliefs and actions that significant learning emerged."

The sixth paper, by Boerboom, Stalmeijer, Dolmans, & Jaarsma (2015), also acknowledges the importance of reflection to improve teaching. More specifically, the study focuses on feeding back the results of student ratings as a way of stimulating teachers' reflection and professional growth at a faculty of medicine in a Dutch research-intensive university. The study concentrates on teaching in a clinical workplace context and provides an overview of the current state of the literature into effective feedback mechanisms available for teachers in this setting. The strengths and limitations of using (student) evaluations for enhancing teaching effectiveness in the clinical workplace are described. This contribution also discusses the acceptance and effects of several feedback facilitation strategies for optimally stimulating the

improvement of teaching. The authors argue that student ratings, combined with a well-designed feedback facilitation strategy, promise to be a valuable addition to other faculty development initiatives.

The seventh paper describes a study by Nevgi and Löfström (2015), conducted at a research-intensive university in Finland. This contribution also stresses the importance of reflection. Drawing on findings from Kelchtermans (2009) Nevgi and Löfström (2015) explored the development of teacher identity through academics' self-image and self-efficacy as teachers, motivation to teach and develop as a teacher, and task perception. To describe each teacher's identity and development, core narratives were created based on interviews and practicum reports. Four teacher identity types were identified at the end of university teacher development according to the academics' task perception (university teacher/researcher versus educational developer) and reflection on teaching (reflection versus no-reflection). The results indicate that "the willingness to reflect is crucial for the development as a university teacher."

In the eighth paper, Hoekstra and Crocker (2015) describe the design, implementation, and evaluation of an ePortfolio approach to faculty development at a vocational educational institute in Western Canada. The authors point out that the ePortfolio approach was designed to support the professional learning of faculty as it naturally occurs in the workplace. The ePortfolio approach is described as an "initiative that encouraged faculty to (1) collect feedback from multiple sources on multiple aspects of their role; (2) compile this feedback in their ePortfolio, reflect on it, and make changes to their teaching practice, if necessary; (3) formulate goals for future growth based on the feedback and reflection; and (4) share their ePortfolio with their supervisor to collaboratively assess their performance and determine goals for the next year." While the uptake of the ePortfolio approach by the pilot participants was limited, the findings suggest that the ePortfolio approach assisted the participants to collect more and different types of feedback, think more explicitly about planning and monitoring their professional learning, and become aware of areas of improvement.

In the ninth contribution to this issue, Bickerstaff and Cormier (2015) studied the type of questions posed by teachers at community colleges in the United States, who went through a 3-year instructional reform process. As this process unfolded, faculty questions seemed to change according to the stages of the implementation of the reform. Faculty initially queried the purpose and nature of the reform, then posed questions about its implementation. As faculty moved through teaching the newly developed courses, questions started focusing on classroom practice and, ultimately, on student learning. One of the challenges identified was that "many faculty have little experience critically reflecting on student learning." For faculty developers, the study highlights the importance of being responsive to the particular learning needs of the faculty involved as well as being mindful of the fact that these learning needs may change over time. Learning opportunities responsive to instructors' questions shared two characteristics: "they were sustained and they were tied to the work of developing and refining the reformed course."

Towards systematic evaluation of faculty development

To meet the call for using robust methodologies to evaluate the impact of faculty development initiatives (Stes et al., 2010), the framework developed by Chalmers and Gardiner (2015) might be helpful. In the tenth contribution to this issue, Chalmers and Gardiner (2015) describe the process and outcomes of a national project in Australia designed to address the complex matter of evaluating the effectiveness of faculty development. The key

research question of the project asked the following: How can we evidence the effectiveness of faculty development programmes? By way of an action research methodology, an initial version of the so-called 'Academic Professional Development Effectiveness Framework' was developed. The framework was informed by evidence derived from literature and practice and aims to facilitate the systematic collection and analysis of data related to the intended outcomes of faculty development programmes. Based on the findings of a trial of the framework with nine university teams, the framework was refined. Chalmers and Gardiner (2015) conclude that the final version of the framework enables providers of faculty development initiatives to look at the intermediate and longer-term effects of academic teacher development programmes. The framework also helps us understand what the effects are as well as how and why they occur.

Suggestions regarding the future of (research into) faculty development

This special issue concludes with a paper by Saroyan and Trigwell (2015), both senior experts in the domain of faculty development, in which they discuss the contributions in this issue and present their critical reflections. The paper starts with an analysis of the extent to which academic development research can be considered a research discipline. Concluding that the field is not yet developed as a discipline, new questions and pathways for future research into faculty development are presented. The authors then identify five converging themes and observe that in the contributions to this issue, the indicators used in evaluation typically include input and process, sometimes include output, but never include the outcome. Based on their critical reflections, the authors propose two important avenues for future research: (1) studying the mechanisms of change, that is, clarifying why and how impact comes (or does not come) about and (2) measuring impact of faculty development initiatives at the outcome level, that is, the level of student learning. The authors propose that the field could profit from consulting with the workplace learning literature as well as literature on student learning. This research would provide insights into the factors impacting faculty professional learning as well as insights into methodologies that could be used to study the impact of faculty development initiatives at the level of student learning.

In addition to pathways and questions for future research, the contributions in this special issue also provide us with suggestions regarding the practice of faculty development. First of all, they remind us how existing workplace cultures and practices may hinder or foster professional learning of faculty. Professional learning is impacted not only by faculty development initiatives but also by the organizational structures and practices within which faculty members operate. Providers of faculty development should first understand the role of the workplace (including tenure and promotion practices) and then design their initiatives accordingly. Second, as indicated in the papers by Taylor and Znajda (2015), Boerboom et al. (2015), Nevgi and Löfström (2015), and Hoekstra and Crocker (2015), faculty development initiatives should, at best, incorporate reflection on teaching (beliefs) in order to stimulate an actual impact on teaching practice. Third, the work of Taylor and Znajda (2015) and Bickerstaff and Cormier (2015) also shows that activities involving sustained collaboration on

tasks closely tied to faculty members' immediate teaching practice, such as the development of courses and teaching materials, seem promising in invoking meaningful reflective dialogue about student learning. Finally, this special issue reminds us once again that we continually need to subject the work in the field of faculty development to empirical analysis. This requires, amongst other strategies, the systematic evaluation of the impact of initiatives on teaching practice (McAlpine, 2003). The Academic Professional Development Effectiveness Framework (Chalmers & Gardiner, 2015) described in this issue provides a promising start. Continued inquiry into the design elements of effective faculty development initiatives along with systematic evaluation are required to move the field of faculty development forward.

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