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Section II: Overview

Title: Focusing Your Pathway to the Profession of Educational Development

This project brings together a team of international educational developers from Canada, the United States, Scotland and Britain who are actively engaged in educational development (ED) at the faculty, developer, consultant or administrator level. Our shared goal is to further a cross-cultural “pathways” research agenda, established in June 2007 by a SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada) funded think-tank, to better understand (1) why people become involved in ED activities and (2) what facilities and/or impedes their entry and advancement within the field on a full-time basis.

Guided by the above two research questions, this study (a subset of a larger research agenda which includes interviews and personal narratives) will consist of a set of focus groups (6-8 individuals) conducted by the project partners and research assistant at various international teaching and learning and faculty development type conferences and/or annual meetings between now and October 2009. Three types of participants will be invited to participate: (1) those who are situated within the field and consider themselves to be full-time developers, (2) individuals (i.e., graduate students, faculty, administration, etc.) who are on the periphery of ED, but are aware of it as a field of scholarly study and practice, and (3) individuals who previously worked in ED on a full-time basis, but have since left the field (i.e., returned to their discipline, retired, consultant, etc.). Four guiding questions with multiple probes for each will guide focus group discussions. Data will be analyzed using a thematic approach with particular attention given to how stories vary regionally and by career status. Ethics approval to conduct these focus groups has been received from Queen’s University, reference number: GEDUC-351-07.

Intended Outcomes: (1) better understand why people become involved in educational development activities; (2) identify what enables (or inhibits) some individuals to enter into and progress within the field of educational development; (3) determine what enables (or inhibits) some individuals to commit to a primary appointment in educational development; (4) identify regional differences and similarities in practitioner pathways;

(5) provide (or contribute to) a baseline on which other research can build upon toward advancing the profession and supporting educational developers; (6) further an international, cross-cultural pathways research agenda with international colleagues; and (7) contribute to the scholarship of ED by presenting and publishing at / in peer reviewed conferences and journals.

Timeline:

- hire student(s) to aid in collection and analysis of data (September, 2008)
- use position papers of project team members to develop preliminary codes and identify evolving themes (October, 2008)
- invite participants via society and association listservs to participate in research at respective conferences (September 2008 – October 2009)
- begin analysis (August to November, 2009)
- prepare report (November 2009)
- submit conference proposals to submit to conferences (January - August 2009)
- prepare manuscript for publication (Fall 2009)

Rationale:

As a profession, we are lacking an understanding of how individuals within higher education become educational developers and what attracts them to the field, both those on the periphery of the field looking in (potential educational developers / champions of ED) and those who are already well established in the profession in primary appointments. At this time, there is no prescribed pathway (i.e., common educational requirements, graduate program, or formal career path) into ED, what Lynn McAlpine, editor of the *International Journal of Academic Development (IJAD)*, calls “academic structures” (2006). What draws people to the profession (i.e., why do they get involved in educational development activities), the routes that facilitates their entry and advancement, and the contexts in which this happens are not clear or consistent. Our research provides a starting point to begin to fill this gap by examining group narratives of practitioner pathways into the profession of educational development.

With respect to the EDC Five Year Plan, the outcomes of this project will contribute to the scholarship (i.e., study of profession and practitioners), organizational development (i.e., recruitment), and literature base of ED, the latter of which has expanded in the last 10 years to include the study of the field and its members (see IJAD e.g., Andresen, 1996; Bath & Smith, 2004; Fraser, 1999; Hicks, 1997; Land, 2001; Lewis, 1996; McAlpine, 2006; Mintz, 1997; O'Leary, 1997; Stefani, 1999; Taylor, 2005; Webb, 1996a), representing a departure from an earlier but continued focus on developing teachers (to support learners) (Äkerlind, 2005) and reporting on and about various program types, models and approaches (e.g., Bergquist & Phillips, 1975; 1977; Riegel, 1987) that dates back to the early 1970s. The research will also address cross-cultural issues with its team of international project collaborators bringing multiple perspectives to the conduct of the focus groups and the analysis of the data, the latter of which includes a focus on comparing international voices and stories of ED practitioners regionally and by career status.

Scholarship:

Educational development is a scholarly field of study and practice in higher education that aims to improve the effectiveness of faculty in all their professional roles. Others hold a broader conceptualization of the field that includes, for example, the development of administrators, future faculty, individual departments and the university as a whole through an ever expanding range of programs, services, resources and initiatives (e.g., the scholarship of teaching and learning, curricular design) (Brew & Boud, 1999; Lewis, 1996). Depending on regional jurisdictions and developers themselves, the field is variously known across the world as educational, academic, staff, faculty, and instructional development. In Canada we use the term educational development. This usage is consistent with our international body – ICED.

ED in its relatively short history has progressed from an informal set of teaching development activities to a scholarly field of study and practice. Its scope has expanded from a singular focus on select instructional improvement activities to a broad range of educational initiatives designed to advance and support teaching and learning in higher education at all levels (e.g., organizational, departmental, individual). The educational

developer professional role has also moved from the fringes to the mainstream of higher education both here in Canada and elsewhere (Kahn & Baume, 2003; Kahn, 2004). Likewise, ED units have undergone a period of institutionalization (i.e., having institutional funding, support and authority) (Moses, 1987) even transformation, taking on, for example, increasingly significant roles such as change agent and policy leader (Gosling, 2001; 2006; Havnes & Stensaker, 2006).

Like other specialized occupations in colleges and universities (e.g., Student Affairs), the ED movement has evolved in response to a variety of internal drivers such as institutional positioning, faculty accountability, program reviews, as well as external factors such as institutional response to government policy and funding directives, reports questioning the quality of higher education (e.g., Smith, 1991 – Canada; Dearing, 1997 - Britain), calls for accountability, a diverse student population, and the explosion of educational technology and research on teaching and learning in higher education to name a few.

The diversity of educational development practices and programs is equal to the diversity of educational developers themselves. Lacking a common educational requirement and a formal career structure, developers comprise an eclectic group of professionals (Weimer, 1990). They have varied educational backgrounds, disciplinary allegiances, academic status (e.g., faculty, professional staff, graduate student), types of appointments, positional responsibilities, orientations to practice, institutional values, local contexts, career motivations, and pathways into the profession.

The number of new individuals entering the field is also growing. We see evidence of this at our respective annual general meetings, in the membership numbers for our various national professional associations, and in the number of national networks (e.g., African, Australasian, European, North American). It is also documented by our colleagues to the south. In a recent survey of mostly Canadian and American developers, Sorcinelli and colleagues (2006) discovered that more than 50 percent of developers, from consultant through to director, overall, have five or fewer years of work experience in the field suggesting growth in ED programs in general and ongoing need for development and support of ED professionals overall. Indeed, the need for developer expertise and growth in ED development numbers is reinforced by countries

like Norway, Sweden, and now Britain, who “require some form of initial training for university teachers” (Baume, 2006, p. 57) and initiatives such as the European Union funded NETTLE project that “aims to develop European-wide academic frameworks within which to equip educators in higher education with the competencies and skills necessary to provide effective and validated support for learners” (Network of European Tertiary Level Educators, 2005, p. 1).

We see this further in the formation of ED professional organizations (e.g., Educational Developers Caucus 2003 – Canada; Heads of Educational Development Group, 1995 / Staff and Educational Development Association, 1993 – United Kingdom; POD, 1976 – United States; Higher Education and Research Development Society of Australasia – 1972; ICED, 1993). ICED documents the greatest growth with the number of national member networks doubling between 1995 and 2007 (Organizational and Staff Development Services website, 2007). As the picture here and elsewhere suggests, the field is maturing (Wright & Miller, 2000) and organizing, and the need for educational developer expertise and research into these areas is growing.

Dissemination:

- (1) conference/association meeting presentation (EDC Conference)
- (2) article in peer-reviewed journal
- (3) pathways website (www.edpathways.com)
- (4) invited talks

Section III: Budget

For the purposes of this grant, funds will be used to support the conduct, transcription, coding, and analysis of the focus group data. A research assistant (RA) will be hired to support each of the above stages in addition to writing up the findings and co-presenting at conferences. **The student will be hired for a total of 119 hours at \$21 per hour (including vacation and benefits) for a total request of \$2,499.** The Centre for Teaching and Learning at Queen’s University and Teaching Support Services at Wilfrid Laurier University will provide whatever in-kind support may be needed to facilitate the project (e.g., office, computer, administrative and research support).

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