

EDC 2009 Final Grant Report

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Grant Title

Focusing Your Pathway to the Profession of Educational Development

Project Goals and Overview

A subset of a larger international research study examining pathways to the profession, this project brought together a group of faculty members and educational developers to collaborate on a study designed to investigate: (1) why people become involved in educational development activities and (2) what facilitates and/or impedes their entry and advancement with the field on a full-time basis. Through focus group discussions with university and college based educational developers we aimed to:

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
7. contribute to the scholarship of ED by presenting and publishing at / in peer reviewed conferences and journals

Data Collection

Data from the focus group sessions conducted in four countries: Canada, England, Scotland and the United States were collected and analyzed for this study. Most of the focus groups were facilitated by the project partners individually or collectively at educational developer annual meetings and/or scholarly teaching and learning conferences (regional/national/international) at which they were already in attendance. In some cases, an attending research assistant co-facilitated the sessions with the project partner. In one case we called upon an educational development colleague (not a project partner) who was geographically positioned to facilitate a focus group in her area with colleagues from a range of higher education settings. As per our approved research protocol, participants were asked to sign a letter of consent to participate in the study. The same guiding questions and probes were used conduct each of the focus groups.

Findings in Brief

The intended brevity and purpose of this report do not allow for a full reporting of findings. As such we have highlighted four areas of interest that speak to the project goals. They include: (1) how developers see themselves/their work, (2) how they learned about and entered into the field, (3), when they began to self-identify as educational developers, and (4) what has kept them in the field.

1. **ED Work/Role:** Educational developers in this study labeled themselves and understood their role to be multifunctional and broad in scope. The following descriptors, many of which reflect Ray Land's (2004) work, were repeatedly referenced by the focus group participants. They include, but are not limited to: convener, connector, facilitator, responder, researcher, coach, designer, creator, change agent, teacher, consultant, and broker. These and other descriptors signal the growing complexity and diversity of ED work and the variety of constituent groups with whom

we engage (i.e., individual academics, departments, committees, institution).

2. **Awareness of/Entry into ED:** In most cases there was an element of serendipity (i.e., no direct path) involved in learning about and entering into the field of educational development, but situational and personal factors also played a role. Many participants cited the importance of key individuals (e.g., mentor, colleague); their own involvement and interest in teaching, learning and technology; accidentally stumbling into the profession (e.g., job opportunity); an institutional role which necessitated connection with their campus ED centre, and being asked to do ED work because of the relevance of their discipline training and expertise. These examples highlight the types of critical incidents that impacted the trajectory of each participant's pathway to the profession. Some were more direct, already having an educational focus and a foothold within academia, while others took a more convoluted road to ED coming to it from outside the higher education.
3. **Self-Identification with ED:** Self-identification as an educational developer often came after officially entering the field. For some, it was the formality of their position (i.e., labeled as educational development and paid) that crystallized the link. For others, it occurred when faculty colleagues and administrators, for example, validated and recognized the value of their work by calling on them to support individual, program, department or institutional goals and initiatives. Others still identified the point where they could begin to share stories and knowledge with others about their ED work as the point at which they "came to be" an educational developer.
4. **Staying the Course in ED:** Participants identified a range of factors that sustained (e.g., thrive) their interest and commitment to the field, including, but not limited to: their broad scope of practice (i.e., there's always something new to do/learn), a sense of making a difference in people's confidence/ability to teach (or do their work), the many opportunities for networking, collaborating, sharing, and connecting with a welcoming community and a diverse client group, the sense of being part of a movement – contributing to something bigger, and the many opportunities for applied research and scholarly practice.

Dissemination of Findings

So far, members of the project team have reported on their findings at the 2009 annual conference of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. The session was titled: "Focusing Your Pathway to the Profession of Educational Development." More than 20 participants attended the session sharing their own experiences and pathways to the profession. Plans are also in the works to submit an article to the publication: *To Improve the Academy* this coming December (2009). The *Journal of Faculty Development* is another likely source. Individually, the project partners have also reflected on and shared summary findings in conversations with their colleagues at regional and international meetings and conferences. As more data is collected and analyzed we intend to disseminate our findings at future conferences. Finally, there may be opportunities to weave project findings into the various chapters of an upcoming edition of the *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* series edited and authored by many of the project partners.

Next Steps

While funding for this project under the EDC grant program has come to a close, we continue to identify and plan for more focus groups in various international settings (e.g., Belgium and Australia). Unfortunately, due to changes in conference and travel plans, and the scheduling of meetings at some venues, a few of our planned focus groups in China and South Africa did not take place. As such we are exploring and have already scheduled focus groups in other global locations in the coming months that our project partners can access through planned travel, conference, and professional development opportunities. As we conduct more focus groups we will add to our dataset and situate ourselves to identify differences and similarities across contexts (goal #4) and further our understanding of developer pathways for ongoing development of the field and its members (goal 5).

Project Funds / Budget

The monies (\$2499) provided by the EDC grant program were spent entirely on the funding of research assistantship support. Given the geographical location of some of the focus groups and the availability of the students themselves, we had more than one research assistant (RA) working on the project. These research assistants reported to the principle and/or the co-applicant of the project.

The research assistants performed a broad range of roles and responsibilities, including but not limited to: (a) a review of the literature for presentation and publication purposes, (b) analysis of focus group data, (c) a search of potential sites for focus groups, (d) a search of potential sources for publication, (e) co-facilitation of focus groups, (f) preparation of materials for presentation, (g) transcription of digital recordings from focus groups, etc.

In addition to the funds provided by the EDC grant program, in-kind support was provided by the project partners. This took the form of funds used to attend (travel, registration, accommodation, meals, etc.) the conferences and meetings at which the focus groups were conducted; office, computer and staff support; printing and copying of materials used to conduct the focus groups; teleconferencing expenses; general overhead costs, and the time of the project partners themselves.

Copies of the time sheets/invoices for each of the research assistants are attached in a separate file. The table below outlines the funds paid to the research assistants inclusive of vacation and benefits required by law in Canada and the province of Ontario.

Research Assistant	Number of Hours Worked	Total pay*	Money in/out
			\$2,499.00
C. Hoessler	90	\$1,868.40	\$ 630.60
R. Newhook	3	\$ 62.28	\$ 568.32
S. Ayerst	30	\$ 622.80	\$ -54.48
	123	\$2,553.48	\$ -54.48

Rate of Pay Mandatory Employer Benefits Hourly Rate
\$20 including 4% vacation X 9.77% (EI, CPP, EHT, WSIB) = \$20.76 per hour