Proposal for a Professional Development Plan for the Educational Developers' Caucus

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During the February 2005 meeting of the Educational Developers' Caucus, participants identified topics, specific content, and formats for their own professional development needs over the next several years. As the attached Table 1 reflects, that session was very productive, and we have ideas for professional development projects we can share for sometime in the future.

Organizing the data you generated into a plan was a challenge. First there is the complexity of our roles. Collectively and individually, we work at all levels of our academic communities: with individuals, academic units and the institution as a whole. We work with colleagues from across the career span. We contribute to teaching, curriculum, and organizational development. We build teaching and learning capacity by influencing the intellectual, social, administrative and physical environments for learning. For each of us, the emphasis and synergy among these parts is slightly different. Many of us contribute to the larger community of educational development through work with national and international groups dedicated to post-secondary education.

Second, there is the diversity of our contexts. We exercise our diverse and interacting roles in very different kinds of institutions and across discipline cultures. Across these contexts, we have both similar and unique responsibilities.

Your task in our session was to find, in our varied practice contexts, some of the common themes in our professional development needs and to recommend how we can best use our collective resources (personal, intellectual, financial, and structural) to create a systematic approach to meeting these needs.

There has seldom been a better illustration of the adage "be careful what you wish for…" than in the ideas you produced. In attempting to organize the expressed needs in a plan, I was guided by several ideas:
1) We are a development organization, and as such, a developmental perspective should frame our approach to our own development across the career span, and to creating a sustained and evolving PD plan.
2) One of our collective assets is that we come from varied backgrounds and have diverse knowledge, experience, and skill sets. This is a resource in terms of recruiting expertise to a PD program, and a challenge in trying to structure a developmental sequence. One of the implications of this diversity is that, while PD opportunities can be seen as following a career span progress, I would not recommend limiting access to particular topics, except in the choices people might make about the priorities they perceive in their own learning needs, and the invariable challenges we will face is scheduling competing sessions at our meetings.

3) Acknowledging the practical resource and time constraints we all face, the present plan builds on existing opportunities we have to interact in person and on-line. Your ideas for how this can proposal can be enhanced in the future are, as always, welcome.

4) Although there are many ways in which PD experiences can be offered, your input indicates that our membership values, and appreciates, the opportunities for face-to-face interaction that is provided at the EDC Winter meeting and STHLE Conference. Members see the value in offering different types of activities at our face-to-face meetings and would like to see a combination of peer-reviewed presentations, professional development workshops and integrated/flexible times for critical reflection, sharing of best practices, and opportunities for collective brainstorming. You also identified resources that can be appropriately offered and facilitated on line.

Time line:
Based on the data you produced (summarized in Table 1) and these ideas, I have organized a plan around themes, rather than career stage (with the exception of providing strong support for new colleagues in the educational development field). Table 2 indicates a suggested timeline for implementation (major topics are elaborated in Table 1). Of course, the timeline is limited by our opportunities to meet and the multiple agendas that compete when we do meet. My personal view is that our opportunities for business, networking, and sharing the scholarship of educational development (all of which overlap with and contribute to professional development) are equally important and our available times must be shared. If anyone can step up with an offer to facilitate or lead a project, changes in the proposed plan are easily made. In general, the plan is an attempt to meet PD needs across our community.

The plan for implementing the proposed plan involves two major strategies. The firs is simply to add a call for PD sessions to the session call for our meetings and/or invite proposals for sessions on particular PD topics, guided by this plan. Second, for larger projects, such as developing and "Institute" for new educational developers, or developing sustained on-line resources on various areas, a longer term-"project team" approach will be more appropriate.

Resources:
Since our time and financial resources are far more limited than our collective expertise and enthusiasm for professional development, we will need both an elastic time line and collegial sharing of expertise. For topics on which face-to-face meetings are important, I propose that a call for PD sessions, based on the topics you identified, be part of our winter meeting call for proposals and the STLHE call. You have also proposed a number of topics we can pursue on line, and for this we need teams of people to lead and sustain initiatives. Your participation is not only welcome, but also vital, to our collective development.

Next Steps

One of the defining characteristics of a "profession" is that colleagues within the profession provide professional development opportunities for the professional community to which they belong. One of our critical next steps is to identify resources – intellectual, experiential, and personal – within our community that can contribute to addressing the PD needs identified. The commitment of colleagues to this task is crucial to its success. I will make a personal commitment to coordinate the logistics of creating these learning spaces for us, but we are dependent on our collective resources to realize our goals.

Our next challenge is to identify and coordinate some of the resources we have available within our community to develop PD opportunities in these diverse areas. Your comments and contributions will be welcome during the EDC meeting in Charlottetown, and by email at Lynn.Taylor@dal.ca. I look forward to discussing this plan with many of you next week.