

Approaches to and perceptions of, the role of Academic Development Units

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Notes on this session:

The purpose of this workshop was to stimulate inquiry and discussion about the role of academic development units in times of economic and institutional change. This conversation requires critical reflection on changes both in approaches to teaching and learning and institutional strategic policy and how these changes impact academic development work. After over two decades of research, strong evidence shows that perceptions and approaches of faculty influence students' approaches to learning (Salter, 2013; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999) but less is known about how approaches to academic development can lead to institutional change (Skelton, 2005).

This session will explore whether perceptions and approaches to academic development are changing in parallel with changes in higher education. How do we ensure that the roles we create in our centres are aligned with new institutional missions? How do we ensure faculty awareness of these changes and encourage participation in academic development activities to enhance the student learning experiences? What should these activities look like? How are we 'rethinking' the activities we provide?

During this workshop, the facilitator will lead guided writing and discussion activities with participants actively involved throughout the session.

At the conclusion of this workshop, participants will:

- a.) Have identified changes in their own institutions
- b.) Have shared ideas about changes happening nationally
- c.) Have considered implications and next steps for their own practice
- d.) Be invited to participate in a research study to further explore ideas and measure changes in perceptions of, and approaches to, the work of educational development.

The presenter argued that based on sound research it is clear that in order to engage students in deep learning (that leads to their achievement of learning outcomes) teachers must approach their role in a way that will change students' approaches to their learning (see slides 18 and 19). However, a great deal of academic development activity is still focused on helping teachers in the traditional role as a 'presenter of information' as demonstrated by courses/workshops with a focus on preparing content (making power point presentations) and delivering lessons (micro teaching). While these aspects of a teachers' role are relevant to being a well-organized and prepared 'teacher', they are not sufficient to guide faculty in the type of teaching needed to fit with the learning centred paradigm that is espoused in many institutional visions.

More in keeping with many of today's institutional visions, is research on approaches to teaching and learning that recommend a shift from 'what the teacher does' to 'what the student needs to do'. Approaches to academic development must similarly be re-aligned to shift the focus from helping teachers with the delivery of content to a focus that creates opportunities for faculty to engage in professional discourse about teaching and learning as a professional activity and to consider how their approach to teaching influences their students approaches to learning.

References

Prosser, M., & Trigwell, K. (1999). *Understanding learning and teaching: The experience in higher education*. Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press.

Salter, Diane. (2013). *Cases on Quality Teaching Practices in Higher Education*. USA: IGI Global.

Skelton, A. (2004). *Understanding teaching excellence in higher education: Towards a critical approach*. London, UK: Routledge.