RESEARCH SNAPSHOT	Are we asking the right questions? A review of the educational development literature in higher education.

Purpose

This conceptual review of educational development literature in higher education focuses on improving the evaluation of educational development practices by identifying core characteristics of these practices (clustered into six groups, below). The researchers defined "core characteristics" as the "intention or goal of an initiative, the processes and activities planned to realize the intention or goal, and the evidence collected to demonstrate success in achieving the intention or goal" (p. 92).

(1) Skills Cluster

These general interventions focused on changing a behavior that had received low ratings or were identified by the teacher as an area needing improvement. They occurred as workshops or as consultations and followed a pattern of "pre-test, intervention, post-test," or "intervention-post test." Post-test measures included assessments by students, observers, and teachers themselves.

(2) Method Cluster

The method-based literature focused on strategies related to a particular "view of learning that underpins [the strategy]," such as a theoretical stance (e.g. social justice design, problem-based learning) (p. 100).

(3) Institutional Cluster

Despite overlap with the methods cluster, the institutional focus cluster had its own designation due being "top-down" interventions. They were seen as benefitting the university as a whole or a unit within the university, and assessment focused on "successful diffusion" (p. 102).

(4) Reflection Cluster

This focus assumes that "reflections lead to conceptual change and that this in turn leads to change in teaching practice" (p. 98). Although these programs focused on the *process* of reflection, as opposed to observable outcomes, reflection interventions were also assessed. Assessment tools included journals, teaching philosophy statements, teaching portfolios, and projects, in addition to outcome-focused assessment instruments.

(5) Disciplinary Cluster

This cluster emphasized that teaching practices and methods are only meaningful when understood from within the discipline—discipline specific knowledge structures, cultures, and practices are essential to course design and teaching methods. Interventions were collegial (based on discussion and critique) and/or project oriented.

(6) Action Research or Inquiry Cluster

The action research or inquiry cluster focused on the process of inquiry as learning. Initiatives were either individual (focusing on a particular teacher's practice) or group efforts. In addition to making use of theoretical research on teaching and learning, the concept of communities of practice and learning communities also provide a conceptual framework for these initiatives.

→ → See back for table of development clusters and elements of thinking and design. ← ←

Development clusters and elements of thinking and design
Skills Focus
• Emphasis on observable skills and techniques (e.g., presentation skills) • Largely generic, not discipline based • Focus of intervention is to support change in specific behaviors identified through course ratings, class observations, or self-reports • Assessment of impact is based on change in student perception (e.g., course ratings) or observable skills (e.g., class observation) • Draws on relevant literature (e.g., individual consultations based on student ratings) (p. 98)
Method Focus
• Emphasis on learning about a particular teaching method and how to use it (e.g., problem-based learning) • The elements that make up the method have integrity and coherence • Design of training models the method being taught • Assessment of impact based on how well the method is demonstrated during training (e.g., trueness to approach, consistency) and how widely adopted afterward (once training is finished) • Draws on theoretical, ideological, or empirical literature relevant to the particular method. (p. 98)
Institutional Focus
• Top-down approach with the assumption that the initiative is useful and beneficial for all Strategic planning involved • A focus on human resource development • Assessment of impact focuses on diffusion and uptake of the initiative • Draws on relevant literature (e.g., organizational change) (p. 98)
Reflection Focus
• Assumption is that reflections lead to conceptual change and that this in turn leads to change in teaching practice • Design of activity is to prompt and support individual reflection • Includes a collegial element to aid individual reflection • Assessment of impact based on individual change in conceptions about teaching and learning and sometimes the link from changed conceptions to new teaching practices • Draws on relevant literature (e.g., teaching conceptions, reflection) (p. 98)
Disciplinary Focus
• Assumption is that teaching is different (at least in part) in different disciplines because the structure of knowledge is different • Assumption is that academics identify best with their own disciplinary culture, knowledge, and practices and, therefore, disciplinary understanding is the foundation on which to build pedagogical knowledge • Activities are focused on scholarly discussion among colleagues • Assessment of impact is informal (e.g., participation in discussions, reflection portfolios, and ongoing teaching projects) • Draws on relevant literature (e.g., discipline-based understanding) (p. 98)
Action Research or Inquiry Focus
• Work is peer based • Focus of the inquiry is chosen by the individual or group • Involves mentoring among group members • Inquiry process initiated by faculty, instructional developers, or both in collaboration • Assessment of impact is informal (e.g., reflection on course materials, action plans, dissemination of findings and materials produced by individual or group) • Draws on relevant literature (e.g., communities of practice, scholarship of teaching and learning) (p. 99)