

Title: **Learning to Teach in Higher Education: learning from colleagues in departments**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, participants should be able to:

- critically reflect on a number of key factors that support or inhibit new lecturers' non-formal learning in the workplace, in particular obtaining feedback from colleagues in academic departments
- discuss how we, as staff and educational developers, might better support new lecturers' non-formal work-place learning

Session Outline

This first part of this session will present the findings from a case study concerning the experiences of new lecturers learning to teach in a small, research-led, higher education institution. A growing body of research indicates the need for accredited initial teaching development programmes (ITDPs) to be flexible and responsive to the circumstances of the learner and the work setting in which they are learning to teach, e.g. Brew and Barrie (1999), Boud (2001).

Many programme leaders have responded by introducing formal peer support for work-based learning, e.g. action learning sets comprising participants on the ITDP. However, the work of Wenger (1998) and Eraut et al (1998) indicates that non-formal learning from colleagues in the work-place is an important source of support, largely ignored by accredited programmes.

As a practitioner-researcher and an ITDP leader myself, I wished to illuminate my own understanding of new lecturers' experiences of non-formal learning from colleagues. I also wished to enhance the understanding of new lecturers about ways in which they might draw more effectively upon feedback from colleagues. Rich data was collected through focus group discussions with new lecturers. The discussions focused on their experiences of obtaining feedback from colleagues in their departments in relation to their professional development as teachers.

The findings from this research indicate that most new lecturers in the study needed to be proactive if they were to obtain feedback from colleagues; that those who were self-directed in their learning benefited by receiving more specific and timely feedback; and that many of the new lecturers concerned felt they would be able to obtain more useful feedback if they were to have more choice and control over the support they receive, e.g. if they were able to choose their own mentor, choose when their teaching was reviewed, by whom and why, and were able to obtain feedback at critical times in their teaching. During the second part of this session participants will have the opportunity to discuss what these findings might mean and how we, as staff and educational developers, might better support new lecturers' non-formal work-place learning.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

25 minutes presentation of research findings plus 20 minutes discussing issues raised in the finding, for example:

- Do you recognise similarities between this case study and the experiences of new lecturers in your own institution?
- Should staff and educational developers focus more on new lecturers' non-formal learning in the workplace?
- How can we encourage and enable new lecturers to be proactive in their work-based learning?
- How can we enable them to have more choice and control over the support they receive from more experienced colleagues?
- Are there strategies we can adopt to encourage experienced colleagues to enhance their support for new lecturers in their departments?

References

Boud D (2001) 'Creating a work-based curriculum' In Boud D and Solomon N (eds) *Work-based learning: a new higher education?* Buckingham: Society for Research in Higher Education and Open University Press.

Brew A and Barrie S (1999) 'Academic development through a negotiated curriculum' *International Journal for Academic Development* 4 (1) 34-42

Eraut M, Alderton J, Cole G and Senker P (2000) 'Learning from other people at work' In Coffield F (ed) *Learning at work* Bristol: The Policy Press.

Wenger E (1998) *Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.