

Conference Report: The Scholarship of Academic and Staff Development: Research, Evaluation and Changing Practice

A joint conference organised by SEDA and SRHE, 9-11 April, 2003, Wills Hall, University of Bristol

This second joint conference with the Society for Research into Higher Education - the first being held in April 1999 - focused once again on the links between research, evaluation and changing policy and practice in tertiary education. With the headline title *The Scholarship of Academic and Staff Development*, keynote speakers and other contributors presented under a number of key themes:

- Developing a scholarship of academic and staff development
- Researching and evaluating educational development practices
- Building capacity for research and evaluation
- Examining the links between research, evaluation, policy and changing practice, including teaching, assessment and supporting learning.

The conference opened with a thought-provoking keynote presentation by Keith Trigwell, from the University of Oxford, entitled *The Scholarship of Academic Development: A Boyerian perspective*. Building on Ernest Boyer's four scholarships – of discovery, integration, application and teaching – Keith developed a modified model of the Scholarship of Academic Development. This comprised four scholarships:

- The scholarship of development or change – the aspect of our practice that is most like teaching, where the aim is to make transparent how learning has been made possible.
- The scholarship of integration – the aspect of our work that draws together the information from a variety of academic sources for public use.
- The scholarship of application or engagement – scholarly work showing publicly how development knowledge is applied (on committees, for reports, at conferences, etc.)
- The scholarship of discovery – published (peer reviewed) research which is on, or relevant to, academic development and contributes new knowledge to the field.

Keith stressed that all academic development activity should be scholarly, where “to be scholarly is to be engaged in personal, but rigorous, intellectual development involving values such as honesty, integrity, open-mindedness, scepticism and intellectual humility” and where the process is taken for scrutiny into the public arena. Further, whilst not every individual need necessarily be engaged in all four constituent scholarships at the same time, “an academic development unit engaged in all four forms of scholarship will have enhance credibility, validity and integrity in attempts to foster scholarship university-wide.”

Glynis Cousin from the Centre for Academic Practice at the University of Warwick made a lively presentation entitled *Less is more: evaluating educational development projects*. Glynis introduced us to a number of metaphors for evaluation research:

- The judge – representing judgement-oriented evaluation
- The friend – illustrated by the example of appreciative inquiry which sought to accentuate the positive when evaluating
- The fool – who provides illuminative evaluation through asking questions, raising issues and using paradox and irony
- The mafia – where the intention is to protect evaluation power and “defend one’s existing boundaries, feelings and self-definitions.”
- The anorak – or ‘trainspotting for evaluators’ – with an emphasis on collecting masses of detail
- The detective – who is intuitive, inductive, contemplative and pays attention to details – illustrated by Lieutenant Colombo, clad in dirty mac and smoking a cigar.

Glynis reflected that we needed to adopt characteristics of many of the metaphors to be effective evaluators.

The final keynote was presented by a familiar face at SEDA Conferences, Liz Beaty. Previously a Co-Chair of SEDA and Director of the Centre for Higher Education Practice at the University of Coventry, Liz is now Director (Learning and Teaching) at the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Liz spoke to the title *Linking Policy and Practice: the research agenda for academic and staff development*. After setting the current and developing policy context, including the themes in the recent White Paper on the Future of Higher Education in England, Liz reflected on the possible research questions arising from the enhancement agenda.

Liz also presented us with a series of challenges for linking research and practice which moves beyond the hints and tips and generic texts aimed at new lecturers. With some obvious opportunities in front of us, not least the emphasis on the professionalisation of teaching and a new focus on rewards for excellence, Liz saw the need for us to connect policy and practice through academic and staff development working in collaboration through SEDA, SRHE and the new Academy for Learning and teaching.

One participant commented to me afterwards that it was the first conference he had been to where all keynote speakers spoke to the theme of the conference in a coherent way.

Whilst the conference saw many familiar faces making contributions, it was heartening to see quite a number attending for the first time and making presentations or running workshops on some exciting developments in academic and staff development. Personally I valued the enthusiastic and positive engagement by those who came to my own workshop and this spirit was echoed by all I spoke to.

The conference also provided an opportunity for the SEDA Research Committee to meet and to reiterate its aim to work collaboratively with other organisations to promote research and scholarship in educational development. In particular, it was acknowledged that we should provide opportunities for networking as well as working with other educational sectors, including schools, further and adult education.

A further challenge to all participants was provided by ImpAct Ltd, a drama group using performance to illustrate issues around equal opportunities and diversity. The opportunity for the audience to interrogate the performers, in role, about their reasons for behaving as they did raised many questions about where the responsibility lies for dealing with these issues. Julie Hall, SEDA Development Officer, can provide contact details if you get in touch with her through the SEDA office.

Perhaps I'm a SEDA conference 'junkie' but I did leave Bristol feeling challenged and enlivened with ideas, references and people to follow up. The venue may not have been to everyone's taste but the advantages of having its sole use made for a more relaxed atmosphere with plenty of opportunities for discussion and reflection.

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