## Turning teachers into academics? The role of educational development in fostering synergy between teaching and research

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The history of educational development is rooted in the improvement of teaching techniques. As a result, centres or units have normally been located in central registrars or human resources departments, library, learning and technical support services, or established as semi-autonomous entities. The alignment of educational development with research at a teaching-led UK university marks a radical departure from these established patterns. The paper will explore some principles for the development of synergy between teaching and research through presenting the conceptual and strategic case for locating educational development in a university-wide Graduate School. This includes institutional commitment to renewing research capacity and the acceptance of a holistic model of academic practice and re-shaping of academic identity through strengthening the links between research and teaching via professional development. Three different approaches to bridging the cultural gap between teaching and research are compared and illustrated with examples from this case study.

**Keywords:** academic practice; educational development; teaching and research synergy

## Introduction

According to a range of authors, educational development is chiefly concerned with improving teaching practices and techniques including assessment and curriculum design; contributing to strategic policy development and implementation in relation to learning and teaching; conducting research into the student learning experience; and working in support of professional staff and student development (Badley, 1998; Bath & Smith, 2004; D'Andrea & Gosling, 2001; Gosling, 2001; Land, 2004). Educational development provision tends to be organised as '"service' units with the aim of improving university teaching' (Rowland, Byron, Furedi, Padfield, & Smyth, 1998, p. 134). In elaborating the remit of educational development several authors refer to the importance of conducting, promoting and disseminating pedagogic research (e.g. Bath & Smith, 2004; Brew, 2002). While spreading understanding of research into pedagogic aspects of higher education is clearly seen as a legitimate part of the role of educational developers, a broader remit in relation to the development of staff research skills is rarely asserted. The dominant, 'default' view is that educational development is essentially concerned with teaching and learning rather than broader aspects of academic practice (Blackmore & Blackwell, 2006).

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This first part of the paper will outline the case for locating educational development in an institution-wide Graduate School as a means of strengthening links between research and teaching. The role of a Graduate School is widely understood across international higher education as offering programmes leading to advanced degrees. While some Graduate Schools offer a range of masters degrees others focus exclusively on doctoral programmes. At Thames Valley University (TVU) in the UK, a Graduate School was established in 2005 with a focus principally on the growth of doctoral degree programmes, the management of research governance, and the support and encouragement of research capacity across the university. Educational development was also re-located to the Graduate School in order to promote a holistic model of academic practice that encompasses research as well as teaching development.

The second section of the paper addresses the challenges associated with this site's decision particularly by reference to professional identity in a university that has recently merged with a further education college to form a comprehensive post-compulsory institution (Garrod & Macfarlane, 2007). Some different approaches to bridging a research–teaching divide will be explored with examples of how the Graduate School provides a good environment for a holistic approach to educational development to flourish. While it is too early to judge the empirical case for this innovation, a conceptual argument is presented. Finally, the use of the phrase 'educational development' in this paper will refer to work to enhance the practice of academics and others with a significant learner support role. In this respect it is distinguished from broader 'staff development' and is analogous to 'faculty' development in a North American context (Macdonald, 2003).

## A question of credibility

Obtaining and retaining 'credibility' has been identified as a significant tension for educational developers (Blackmore & Wilson, 2005). This is connected, at least to some extent, to where educational developers 'belong' within a university's organisation (Bath & Smith, 2004). In a survey of UK educational development centres or units most were found to be positioned in stand alone central units often in academic services, personnel or the registry. Just 13% were located in a school or faculty of education indicating that a central services unit rather than an academic home is the modal model for locating the work of educational developers (Gosling, 2001). This survey largely supports Robson's (2006) assertion that most 'centres' with a teaching and learning development remit are linked to central management or human resource functions.

The dominant positioning of educational development in central support services damages the credibility of educational developers, many of whom are not employed on academic contracts (Brew, 2003; Rowland, 2003). A central services location can also reinforce perceptions among academic staff that educational development is an ally of a managerial culture. Indeed, educational development may be seen as the key means by which the institution's strategic mission with respect to learning and teaching will be implemented, referred to as the 'human resources' or 'managerial' approach (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2001). Here, there is a tension between the organisational positioning of educational development to promote strategic objectives and the identity and values of staff in such units (Blackmore & Blackwell, 2006). Aligning educational development closely with management structures sends out a signal to the

academic faculty that educational developers are 'one of them' rather than 'one of us'. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that educational development has become unpopular among academics in some disciplinary areas sceptical of a growing managerialism (Mills & Huber, 2005). Such negative perceptions can, moreover, result in educational developers meeting 'strategic resistance' from members of academic faculty (Mills & Huber, 2005).

Location in an academic school or faculty does help to reinforce understanding that educational developers are 'real' academics in the sense that they conduct research as well as teach. It helps to support Webb's (1996, p. 14) argument that educational developers should be 'meta-professionals'. Locating educational development in a school or faculty of education, however, does not guarantee that negative perceptions will be dispelled altogether. While this may increase the credibility connected with possession of expert knowledge in an academic field, the field of education does not enjoy a high status as an academic tribe within many institutional environments (Becher & Trowler 2001; Rowland, 2003). Few departments of education contain higher education specialists (Brew, 2003) and this may mean that educational developers are marginalised within what should be their 'natural' home. On a practical level, a position within one school or faculty may also give a false impression that educational development centres or units and staff are not providing a university-wide service. Educational development placed in an academic faculty may find it difficult to fund its activities and resource its programmes sufficiently if it is treated as a self-sufficient unit dependent on revenue from student fee income or internal 'consultancy' fees.

Hence, the ideal location for educational development would appear to be both central *and* academic. However, in many, if not most, academic institutions this type of structure is often not available to educational development. Central units are rarely configured in academic terms and the case for making an exception would disrupt neat organisational structures and the conventional attitudes of institutional managers that educational development is a support service rather than an academic undertaking (Brew, 2003).

### Turning teachers into academics?

The role of educational developers has been characterised, and perhaps disparaged, as 'turning academics into teachers' (Rowland et al., 1998, p. 133). However, at TVU in the UK, the re-location of educational development within a newly established Graduate School represents, in many respects, a reversal of Rowland's characterisation. In a teaching-intensive UK university which aims to increase its research base, the work of educational development represents an attempt to broaden the identity of lecturers beyond that of a 'teacher'.

TVU resulted from a merger of a number of higher education institutions in West London and the Thames Valley corridor in 1991. It was briefly the Polytechnic of West London before being designated as a university in 1992. In 1998 TVU became headline news for the wrong reasons when its Vice Chancellor resigned following a critical report from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA, 2003) which stated that the university's academic standards were under threat (Brown, 2004). While the legitimacy of some of the criticism contained in the report has been disputed, the incident cast a long shadow over the institution during its subsequent period of recovery. In 2004 TVU merged with Reading College and School of Arts

and Design to become one of the largest 'dual-sector' institutions in the UK. It is also one of the most diverse institutions by student profile which comprises 126 nationalities, 45% ethnic minorities, 60% female, 30% registered on further education courses, 60% part-time and 50% over the age of 30. In 2001, TVU was the most lowly ranked higher education institution in the UK Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). Just under one in five staff were selected as part of the RAE submission and returns indicate that, at the time, there were just seven full-time equivalent research student registrations at the university. TVU also returned the smallest proportion of research-active staff of any university and, as a consequence, received the smallest amount of research funding in the sector. Subsequently, the university lost many of its research-active staff to other universities including a high-profile Centre for Food Policy. The long shadow cast by the QAA report of 1998, the poor performance of the university in the 2001 RAE and the more recent merger of TVU with Reading College provides an important context in understanding the concern of the university to re-new its reputation for research and develop a fresh identity.

As a dual-sector institution, the university now comprises significant numbers of staff on either a further education (FE) or higher education (HE) contract. These contracts contrast markedly in respect to conditions of employment. In common with other post-1992 UK universities, staff on HE contracts teach for a maximum of 550 hours per year and are entitled to time to carry out 'research and scholarly activity' (Robson, 2006, p. 47). By contrast, staff within the merged university on FE contracts teach up to 850 hours per year and have no parallel entitlement to dedicated time to conduct research and scholarship. In a UK context, the distinction between a pre-1992 and a post-1992 university is significant in respect to the contractual conditions affecting academic staff. These are historically linked to higher teaching loads. The role of faculty in institutional governance tends to be weaker in post-1992 institutions most of which are former polytechnics dating from the 1970s. This is because, in contrast with older universities, post-1992 institutions are legal corporations with Boards of Governors largely made up of 'independent' members rather than faculty representatives (Evans, 1999).

As a result of this history, the teaching function, rather than research, is central to academic identity at post-1992 universities such as TVU (Henkel, 2000). This means that even among the HE staff research is still seen by many as a developmental or aspirational part of their working life rather than key to their identity. While research activity as part of professional identity may be only weakly established among many HE staff it plays an even more marginalised role among FE staff. The identity of FE lecturers is shaped more strongly by their first professional or occupational role outside the education sector. The concern of FE staff tends to focus on maintaining their credibility through keeping up-to-date with changes in working or professional practice (Robson, 2006).

The status gap between university and FE staff is closely associated with the research function. University lecturers, unlike teachers in schools or FE, are perceived to be involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in creating knowledge rather than just disseminating it (Hoyle, 2001). This status gap is a particular tension that exists in a dual-sector institution where there is a danger that 'research' may be regarded as an even more exclusive and elitist activity than in a conventional university without a significant sub-degree-level provision. It is, thus, vital that educational development works in a way that is sensitive to this context in promoting institutional-wide research activity.

**The conceptual case for re-location**

In 2004 a new university strategic plan identified, *inter alia*, the need to build research capacity. This led directly to the development of a proposal to create a Graduate School. At the time, a Head of Educational Development had recently been appointed to the academic registry. Monies earmarked for the enhancement of teaching and learning from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) provided an opportunity to put plans in place to establish an educational development structure. A number of principles informing the creation of an educational development team were identified. Namely, these were that educational development should be:

- *Scholarly* in promoting an evidence-based approach to the continuous improvement of professional practice;
- *Inclusive* in recognising and servicing the needs of all learning facilitators *and* in providing support for all aspects of academic practice including teaching, research and service; and
- *Decentralised* in working with a faculty-based network of developers linked to a small central team.

The first principle invokes the 'educational researcher' model of educational development (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2001). This places research into learning and teaching as an evidential basis for the continuous improvement of professional practice and institutional policy. Inclusivity is a principle that also refers to the recognition of the contribution made by all learning facilitators to student learning in addition to lecturers. This includes graduate teaching assistants, careers and learning skills advisors, information specialists, learning technologists, laboratory technicians and Web developers, among others. It also refers to educational development conceptualised as about 'academic practice' rather than being more narrowly configured in terms of 'learning and teaching'. This means that the legitimate reach of educational development includes working to enhance the generic research skills and capacity of staff beyond the narrower domain of 'pedagogic research'. Finally, research indicates that educational development is most effective when a balance is struck between central teams and processes and decentralised or devolved structures (Land, 2004). This third principle is further supported in university-wide terms by a 2003 institutional review conducted by the QAA (2003) and is reiterated in the University's 2004 strategic plan.

The conceptual case for locating educational development in a Graduate School was identified in terms of supporting a number of key objectives, especially:

- Enhancing teaching and supervisory skills at postgraduate level through validated and externally accredited provision in learning and teaching and research supervision.
- Developing graduate teaching assistants for teaching duties through an accredited certificate in Teaching and Learning Support leading to Associate Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy – the UK professional body for HE teachers.
- Building the generic research capacity of staff through research development events and funding for pedagogic research on teaching innovation and student retention, in particular.
- Encouraging a stronger institutional focus on pedagogic research through an Educational Research Group, a Teaching Fellowship scheme and the research output and scholarly profile of members of the educational development team.

● Enabling academic staff to develop a stronger external profile and consultancy capacity through funding 'buy-out' time for University Teaching Fellows, nurturing members of the Educational Research Group, supporting inaugural professorial lectures, engaging the University professoriate as development facilitators and establishing a Centre for Research in Tertiary Education through a grant from the English funding council for a research project focusing on the management challenges of dual-sector education.

However, shifting the identity of teaching staff to one of teacher-researcher will not be easy if teaching and research continue to be viewed as separate entities. The next section explores how the Graduate School is enabling us to challenge the separation between the two cultures.

### Bridging the cultural gap between teaching and research

Teaching and research have often been perceived as opposite ends of the academic spectrum. Institutions commonly separate teaching and research both strategically and culturally through, for example, separate committees for teaching and research. Research development usually occurs in faculties or departments, while teaching development is organised centrally (Reid & Petocz, 2003). The research–teaching divide is not helpful for academic practice because it encourages staff to identify either as teachers, who do little or no research, or as disciplinary researchers who teach. Academic identity is complex and is dependent on many factors such as discipline and institutional status (Becher & Trowler, 2001) but we suggest that in disciplines apart from education itself academics tend to perceive the teaching and research roles to be competing for their time rather than complementary.

There is a growing literature in the UK available to help institutions build synergy between teaching and research, for example, in promoting research-informed or research-led teaching (Jenkins & Healey, 2005). Educational development has a role in helping academics reconsider their position with respect to research and teaching. The second part of this paper identifies three ways of bringing research and teaching development closer together and we will explore how each is enabled through aligning educational development more strongly with research in the Graduate School.

The first of these is providing a continuing professional development framework (CPD) in which research development and teaching development are combined (Clegg, 2003). Clegg also argues that such a CPD framework needs to allow for informal as well as formal learning and will be more successful if informed by an emancipatory rather than managerial agenda (Land, 2004). Building on the policy outlined above, educational development in the Graduate School provides a research development series aimed at PhD students and academic staff with nascent or more established research interests. It further provides a taught Masters in Learning and Teaching which covers theories and practice of teaching and learning in addition to a number of workshops and seminars on learning and teaching issues. An 'academic citizenship' series is planned which will include seminars focusing on areas such as mentoring, teaching observation, external examining and developing work-based learning. The common location for the above activities enables educational development to offer a range of events and opportunities related to a broad conception of academic practice. In addition, although the Graduate School does have a stake in the

more managerial quality assurance agendas, the ethos is one of empowering, rather than coercing staff into developing their practice.

However, in the approach above teaching and research are separate and there is little scope for challenging the polarisation of teacher versus researcher academic identities. The second approach is developing teaching through research enabling a new academic identity of teacher and pedagogic researcher to emerge. Based on some successful case studies in Australia, Reid and Petocz (2003) recommend that teaching and research development be combined in projects in which educational developers work with academics to research teaching in their discipline and innovate on the basis of their own practice. In such a scenario, an educational development unit needs to have expertise in both teaching and research. The Graduate School has staff with a background in both research and educational development, sometimes held by the one person. The School facilitates an Educational Research Group in which academic staff from across FE and HE contexts are encouraged to undertake educational research and present their findings to others in the group. Many of the projects are aimed at developing teaching and innovation to improve student learning and some have received internal funding. There is potential for these research projects to be supported by educational developers although this has not always occurred. Staff are also able to present and discuss research in learning and teaching at an annual Teaching Conference and papers are selected and edited by educational developers and University Teaching Fellows. A Centre for Research in Tertiary Education has been established by core members of the educational development team with a mix of internal and external funding to act as a focal point for much of this work.

A final approach could be to treat research and teaching as similar activities and develop both simultaneously. Research and teaching have many activities and attributes in common (Scott, 2004). Dissemination of ideas to appropriate audiences is necessary for teachers in the classroom and for researchers at conferences. The skills required to give a conference presentation are similar to those of presenting material to learners, including features such as clear structuring and maintaining contact with the audience. Professional requirements for teaching and research also share much in common. Both activities involve reviewing and giving feedback on the knowledge production of others whether for papers for academic journals or for student assessment. Teaching at HE level is likely to require knowledge and information seeking to prepare learning materials or lectures and these activities form a significant part of research too. The overlap means that it makes sense to develop research and teaching together rather than duplicate effort. In the Graduate School, the organisation of a number of book groups each year, and associated learning lunches where authors come and speak about their publications, provides an opportunity to demonstrate that 'teaching' and 'research' do not need to be artificially divided into separate sets of activities. For example, over the last two years, while a number of books focused on the improvement of teaching practice have been selected so too have titles that pertain to research such as *Empowering researchers in further education* (Hillier & Jameson, 2003) and *The research game in academic life* (Lucas, 2006). Selecting books about teaching that are based on original research or are, at least, research-informed also sends an important signal to staff about the commitment of the educational development team to a scholarly approach to the improvement of practice.

A new initiative designed to strengthen the links between teaching and research has added impetus to our aim of developing a more holistic conception of educational development. In 2006, the English funding council for higher education announced a

'Teaching Informed by Research' initiative worth £40 million to support work that will strengthen the link between teaching and research. This new funding is allocated to universities in inverse ratio to their 2001 Research Assessment rating (HEFCE, 2006). This means that many English institutions, such as TVU, with modest prior research returns, will receive additional funding to support initiatives to build stronger links between teaching and research. Prompted by the work of Jenkins and Healey (2005), educational development has led the establishment of a study leave scheme that embraces a variety of interpretations of 'linking teaching and research'. These include, but are not confined to, pedagogic research ('research-informed' teaching). Among other interpretations of the way this might be achieved students learn about research findings ('research-led' teaching), students learn to do research ('research-oriented' teaching) and students learn in inquiry-based mode ('research-based' teaching) (Jenkins & Healey, 2005). In essence, the key criterion is whether study leave leads to a direct and demonstrable impact on student learning often via some form of curriculum innovation. This initiative will enable educational development to appeal to a wider constituency of academics rather than those whose interest is confined to pedagogic research and encourage more general teacher–researcher hybrid identities to flourish. It will also help to further legitimise the role of educational development in research development work whilst building research capacity across the university. A number of projects have now been funded and the progress of beneficiaries is being monitored and supported by a Senior Research Fellow appointed as a member of the educational development team to lead the initiative.

## Conclusion

The synergies between development in teaching and development in research discussed above can and do occur in educational development departments with very different institutional alignments. However, the persistent demarcation between research and teaching in HE has encouraged academic staff to identify primarily with one or the other. We have found that the location of educational development in a central position such as a Graduate School, with its research and research degree focus, has been a great help to us in taking a more holistic approach to professional development for staff with teaching identities and it illustrates some principles for challenging the research and teaching divide. While Rowland saw the role of educational developers as 'turning academics into teachers' in the context of a university without a strong research culture we regard our role as turning teachers into academics.

## Notes on contributors

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