

Extended abstract for the SRHE Conference

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A Swinglish experience

Working collaboratively is an established feature of good practice in progressing pedagogical developments with staff and students on a local or global stage (Healey et al, 2014). Effective engagement depends on trust, an understanding of shared working practices and creative thinking within established quality boundaries to progress sustainable outcomes which satisfy individual expectations and organisational perspectives (Allin, 2014). These ingredients are particularly challenging when the collaboration crosses international borders with differing approaches in practice, style, language and culture (Gemmill et al., 2015).

Historically, continuing professional development involved staff across hierarchy levels to enhance and accredit their individual practice. Early adopters relished challenges of new approaches in learning and teaching based on sound pedagogical theories and readily progressed along their learning and teaching journey. However, engagement with other staff groups often relied on progression through subject based development channels or appraisal.

Recognising the need for greater innovation, creativity and ownership of the need for development, a different type of engagement approach was sought; one which was based on the scholarship of learning and teaching to place developments into a practical context and heighten awareness of the benefits and impact from such change. An organisational analysis identified the middle manager positions as holding “knowledge translation” positions in subject areas as well as possessing subject-based learning and teaching experience. As such, they would be in prime positions to promote, encourage and enable a greater sense of ownership of pedagogical ideals from individual and organisational perspectives based on the need to enhance staff and student experiences.

A long standing collaboration between colleagues at Halmstad University, Sweden and the University of South Wales, UK has enabled international perspectives to inform a blended learning pedagogical leadership and management course at Halmstad University, Sweden. Reflecting a "good standing" approach with participants expected to continually enhance their practice over a designated time period, it demonstrated an organizational desire to be user-centred. Consultation through paper based questionnaires to staff across Halmstad University and a national conference held there were supplemented by online focus groups. Outcomes demonstrated interest in developing pedagogical style influenced by practice based approaches as well as a keen interest to use modern technologies. In particular, it was apparent that there was a desire to involve scholarship and research to influence pedagogic practice as learning content. It was clear that staff needed the course to be accessible within their busy schedules. Mobile friendly information was popular. Also, staff indicated

that they needed to relate to the tutors, gain from them sharing their experiences and seek support when required as they progressed along the course at their own speed.

Reflecting the “knowledge translation” ideal, academic managers across Halmstad University were the first group to progress through this innovative course. These "change champions" were well placed within their subject based communities of practice through their day-to-day experience of leading and managing pedagogic practices and their awareness of the opportunities and challenges presented by them. They were encouraged to identify strengths and recognise areas for continuing development of their individual and group pedagogic practices informed by research and professional practice and progress a wider institutional enhancement programme of promoting, developing and embedding learning and teaching scholarship.

This management community with a wide range of experiences in learning, curriculum and research development are not typically seen or see themselves as pedagogical leaders. All too often, the result was that pedagogical developments slide off priority agendas leading to a wide range of outcomes and lack of impact with a reduced profile of learning and teaching. With students and their University learning forming the majority of income to Universities, this accidental tragedy leads to increased challenges in the management roles in maximising the potential of learners. Enhancing the pedagogical leadership outlook and experiences of this management community is designed to increase the raise the profile of learning and teaching across the University as well as increasing the confidence and capability in those in influential “change management” positions.

Demonstrating the international mission and vision of the University and the need for demonstrable impact, the course used the Senior Fellowship criteria of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) (Higher Education Academy, 2015) aligned with the Swedish learning and teaching system. Although there was no explicit expectation of accreditation at individual or institutional levels, engagement with the UKPSF criteria was specifically designed to encourage and enable the pursuance of such within any future curriculum partnerships as well as providing an international quality assurance perspective to the development. Participants were expected to reflect on existing individual and group teaching and pedagogic research practices to increase impact and enhance the overall leadership and management of new and existing activities and approaches (Bovill et al, 2011).

The three main elements of the blended learning course focused on broad themes of Learning, Teaching and Assessment Theories, Applying Learning, Teaching and Assessment in Practice and Enhancing Learning Through Technology. Reflecting staff feedback, the flexible approaches to delivery enabled a core group of staff to deliver the modules in face-to-face and online mode while also involving visiting staff from across the University thereby providing in situ experience of application scenarios and displaying a diverse range of area involvement.

Feedback from the first implementation has opened a window on the pedagogic world at Halmstad by raised awareness of existing practices and new opportunities for collaborative initiatives across the institution between areas with limited previous commonality but now with common ideas through pedagogic practices and ideals. Possibilities have been highlighted to enrich student experiences through the seamless bi-directional links between teaching and research, the need to use appropriate embedded technologies in learning and teaching practice and the collaborative opportunities through greater awareness of international learning and teaching frameworks. In particular, through using equivalences of accreditation with experiences through the SFHEA level of the UKPSF, it has demonstrated the value of internationalizing pedagogic continuing professional development initiatives by encouraging managers to reflect an approach of “believe and achieve” to raise the levels of scholarly based achievements.

References

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