

COMMENTARY

Reflections on the changing nature of educational development

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Educational development has changed in many ways over the last 40 years and the International Consortium for Educational Development has highlighted the sheer variety of practices by bringing together educational developers from countries where activities differ markedly. These reflections identify the wide range of foci of attention that are visible – what it is that developers are trying to develop – and the different change mechanisms that they adopt. It also highlights changes that can be seen over time, as educational development within a university, or within a country, matures and expands. Observations are made about the value and desirability of some of these changes. It is hoped that outlining the changes in educational development helps educational developers to recognise their own activities in a different light and to prompt reflections on what else they might do and what direction they might move in.

Keywords: educational development; changes in educational development

Introduction

Over the past 40 years, I have engaged in such a wide variety of ‘change tactics’, with the broad intention of improving teaching and learning, that it is sometimes difficult to encompass them all under a banner like ‘educational development’ without feeling that the term is being stretched a little. What we call educational development has also changed out of all recognition over this period. In the mid 1970s, an enterprise involving perhaps 30 people in the whole of the UK, mostly part-time, has become an enormous enterprise involving thousands of people and well over £100m a year of investment. Similar growth, in scale and complexity, has been experienced in a number of countries, though it often takes different forms in different contexts. The sheer growth in scale, and its accompanying specialisations, was bound to bring about profound changes in what it is possible or sensible to do. But, there have also been sweeping changes over time in what is seen as important, what conceptual underpinnings are fashionable, in the extent of ‘professionalism’, in scholarly pretensions and in the organisational position of educational development. It occurred to me that it might be helpful, especially for those in contexts where educational development is relatively new and as yet not well developed, to be able to glimpse what might lie ahead. It might be possible to gain some perspective on what, at a particular moment in time, might seem inevitable or ‘the only approach possible’, but which in retrospect appears simply as one of a number of stages on a long and winding road, or as one of a number of different paths that it might be possible to take.

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First, it is necessary to identify the wide range of activities that can be engaged in to develop a university's teaching and learning. They involve quite different foci of attention, and quite different beliefs about what matters and about how change occurs. They pull different levers and involve quite different expertise. They require rather different organisational and political environments – for example, some require a high level of credibility amongst departments or amongst senior management, or access to extensive networks or to the levers of power, while others are 'grass roots' and can be undertaken without the centre even knowing that they are taking place. Most educational development functions within universities only spend their time on a sub-set of these activities, sometimes a very small sub-set. It is hard to imagine any educational development enterprise engaging in all of them at once because they involve somewhat contradictory assumptions and beliefs, quite apart from the necessity to prioritise the use of resources. Sometimes different units within a university engage in these different functions somewhat in parallel, for example quality assurance and quality enhancement might involve quite separate groups of individuals in different offices. Educational development is defined within an institution by the sub-set of change mechanisms in use that they are responsible for (and also, by default, the sub-set others are responsible for). The educational development cake is sliced in a wide variety of ways in different contexts, and many of those undertaking educational development would not describe themselves as educational developers. While the list in Table 1 is long, it probably is not exhaustive.

Trends in educational development

What I have noticed over time is that educational development within an institution does not simply grow and do more of the same kinds of things, but tends to move on from certain of the activities listed in Table 1 to others, as it matures. What is more it does so with an evolving rationale and focus of attention. I have attempted to characterise these changes by outlining a series of dimensions along which educational development varies.

Many of the shifts along these dimensions involve increased sophistication and understanding of the way change comes about and how it becomes embedded and secure within organisations. In this sense, moving along these dimensions is a good thing and something to aspire to. Usually, educational development within a university is at a different level of sophistication in relation to different dimensions.

I am not arguing that all educational development units experience all of the changes discussed below, or even always in the suggested direction. But, such changes are common, and are experienced in different countries, in which educational development is at different stages of development, at different times. I think it is possible for a country with an embryo educational development community to look at more mature systems and to spot what might happen next.

From a focus on the classroom to a focus on the learning environment

Early books about university teaching were about lecturing or discussion groups: about what happened in class. Early efforts to improve teaching tended to involve classroom observation, and the use of video and student questionnaires, to provide feedback to teachers on their classroom practice. Over time, the perspective has

Table 1. How to develop a university's teaching and learning.

Activities to develop a university's teaching and learning	Examples
<i>Developing individual teachers</i>	
Developing teachers' practice	By observing classroom teaching followed by a consultation
Developing teachers' thinking	By discussing their teaching perceptions and decisions in relation to ideas in the literature
Developing teachers' motivation	Through teaching awards and changed career structures
Developing teachers' ability to 'self-improve' so that they need little or no support in future	Through using teaching portfolios that encourage reflection
<i>Developing groups of teachers</i>	
Developing communities of practice	Through discussions involving a whole department
Developing leadership of teaching	A programme to groom future heads of department who will change teaching across their departments
<i>Developing 'learning environments'</i>	
Curriculum and teaching change across a degree programme, with coherent and aligned pedagogies and programme-level educational goals	
<i>Developing the institution</i>	
Change inflexible teaching room booking system	Removing regulations that outlaw pedagogically effective practices such as giving feedback on draft assignments, or inflexible teaching room booking systems
Developing facilities that support teaching	Classrooms with flexible furniture arrangements and libraries with noisy social spaces
Developing educational policies	Concerning appointment and promotion criteria that emphasise teaching
Developing an institutional learning and teaching strategy	Orienting all policies and practices towards coping with diversity and improving retention
Aligning components within the learning and teaching strategy	Making sure that research strategies are symbiotic with teaching strategies rather than undermining them
Developing an institutional pedagogy	PBL at Maastricht or learning through assessment at Alverno
<i>Influencing the external environment</i>	
Individual educational developers working through SEDA developed standards, for training and accrediting teachers, that have now been adopted throughout the UK	
<i>Identifying emergent change and spreading 'best practice'</i>	
Funding local innovators and adopters to work together, rather than only funding innovation, or only trying to push change from the centre	
<i>Developing students</i>	
In particular their study skills, their self-efficacy, their meta-cognitive awareness and their communication and writing	

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Activities to develop a university's teaching and learning	Examples
<i>Developing quality assurance systems</i>	Through course documentation and student questionnaires that focus on the quantity and quality of learning effort rather than only on teaching
<i>Developing the credibility of teaching improvement efforts</i>	Through seeking external awards and recognition, earning external funding, establishing a research reputation and demonstrating impact
<i>Undertaking educational evaluation</i>	On a consultancy basis in response to local interests, or on behalf of the institution, to review the effectiveness of strategies or delve deeper into performance indicators such as National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) scores
<i>Undertaking educational research, or educational development research, and supporting the scholarship of teaching across the institution</i>	Helping departments to turn pragmatic programme evaluation into scholarly research, and to publish it in disciplinary journals.

widened to the whole course the classroom teaching contributes to, created by assignments, assessment, learning resources, the nature of the students, the learning milieu, and so on, and teachers' classroom behaviour is emphasised much less.

From a focus on individual teachers to a focus on course teams, departments and leadership of teaching

There has been an increasing recognition of the limits on the extent to which individual teachers can change or improve in effective ways if their colleagues and other courses do not, and on the difficulty of innovation and permanent change where the local culture and values are hostile to such change, or even hostile to taking teaching seriously. Studies of why some departments are much more educationally effective than others have tended to identify the role of leadership of teaching, and the health and vigour of the community of teaching practice, rather than seeing the whole as being no more than the sum of the (individual teacher) parts.

From a focus on teaching to a focus on learning

Barr and Tagg's seminal paper on this paradigm shift (Barr & Tagg, 1995) captured a phenomenon that had been going on for some while. The 'Approaches to Teaching Inventory' (Trigwell & Prosser, 2004) in effect measures the extent to which teachers have made this paradigm shift themselves. Early educational development efforts appeared to perceive teaching almost as an end in itself, rather than an (indirect) influence on learning. Later efforts ask what students are doing, and thinking, during the teaching, and what they do afterwards. The difference between the questions contained in the Student Evaluation of Educational Quality (Marsh, 1982) on the one hand, and NSSE (2012) on the other, illustrate this shift.

From small, single, separate tactics to large, complex, integrated, aligned, multiple tactics

I used to encounter institutional teaching development efforts, and even one national teaching development organisation, that did nothing except run workshops for teachers. A sea-change took place in the UK educational development scene on the late 1990s when large sums of government money were made available to every university in return for articulating and implementing a ‘learning and teaching strategy’. In the mid 1990s, few institutions had such a strategy or could even imagine what one might contain. A decade later, the strategies became almost universal and also very much more comprehensive, coherent and sophisticated than previously (Gibbs, Habeshaw, & Yorke, 2000). Teaching concerns got built into appointment procedures, career structures and promotion criteria. The implications of institutional missions for teaching were thought through more carefully and course approval and review, and evaluation of courses and of teaching, were aligned with these missions. Educational development units became central to the implementation of these strategies, and in doing so greatly extended the range of their activities.

From change tactics to change strategies

In return for resources and some long overdue attention, teaching development units were expected to work with central management to align their efforts with other developments within the university. Change tactics (such as running workshops) were trumped by change strategies (such as how to lever more attention to teaching across the institution) and units lost some autonomy but gained a seat at high table. While this change was especially rapid and comprehensive in the UK, it has strong echoes in Australasia (e.g. Holt, Palmer, & Challis, 2011) and also in those European universities that have established a reputation for strategic change and improvement. It is still relatively rare in the USA, where teaching development often remains largely peripheral and focuses on change tactics largely in isolation from centrally directed institutional strategies. Sometimes, the strategic component of educational development tactics is hidden from view or not apparent until later. For example, one of the most important consequences of training of newly appointed teachers is not that they teach better in the classroom the next week, but that some come back to the educational development unit for help a decade later when they eventually become head of department. Utrecht adopted this ‘growing change agents’ strategy explicitly through changing career paths as well as identifying and training future leaders.

From a focus on quality assurance to quality enhancement

Most national quality assurance systems, as they have matured and learnt from their mistakes, have shifted their focus from assurance to enhancement. Student feedback has been seen as less of a measurement and more of a diagnosis of what to pay attention to. Processes such as periodic external review of a Bachelors programme have focused more on what issues have been identified and acted upon since the last review, and what plans exist for future enhancement, rather than only on monitoring and judgements about past quality. This shift has levered all kinds of working relationships between those whose quality is being assured and enhanced, and educational development professionals. A record of having worked with the central teaching development unit is often valuable to departments being reviewed.

From a focus on fine-tuning of current practice to transforming practice in new directions

Early efforts often involved ‘improving lecturing’ or ‘improving exams’. Over time, a gradual tuning up of a traditional repertoire of practices has been supplemented, or even replaced, by more radical reconfigurations. For example, the adoption of ‘learning outcomes’ across Europe following the Bologna Agreement has had, in some contexts, a radical impact on curriculum design and assessment practices, and as a consequence on the teaching and learning methods designed to achieve these outcomes, which ‘fine-tuning’ could not have achieved (e.g. Lindblom-Ylänne & Hämäläinen, 2004, and other articles in the *International Journal for Academic Development (IJAD)* special issue in which this article appeared).

Conceptual changes

Psychological to sociological

Educational development often seems to start off with an underlying rationale that is, at least implicitly, behavioural and cognitive, and certainly psychological, about the actions of individual students or teachers more or less in isolation from each other. In much of North America, this is still very dominant. Elsewhere, there has been a noticeable shift towards more sociological perspectives that are concerned with students as a group, with teachers as a community of practice, with values, with learning milieu and with local cultures. Underlying assumptions about how individuals change have been supplemented by models of organisational change.

Atheoretical to theoretical

Early editions of Bill McKeachie’s ‘Teaching Tips’ (e.g. McKeachie, 1978) were based on, if anything, empirical evidence, just as was Donald Bligh’s *What’s the use of lectures?* (Bligh, 1972). Neither presented a coherent conceptual or theoretical position from which to view teaching and its development. The ‘53 interesting ways to teach’ books (e.g. Gibbs, Habeshaw, & Habeshaw, 1984) were underpinned by the authors’ shared conceptions, but these conceptions were deliberately hidden from view and they looked theory-free so as to avoid frightening the horses. Today, educational developers are much more likely to be explicit about the theoretical underpinnings of attempts to change teaching. The reason TESTA (Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment) (Jessop, El Hakim, & Gibbs, 2011) works so well as a research and development process is that it involves a way of thinking about assessment, rather than only a way of collecting data using reliable tools. Educational development seems to have become more confident about theorising and teachers like credible explanations.

Experiential and reflective to conceptual and empirical

As a young and enthusiastic teaching development professional, I spent my evenings and weekends trying to ‘learn my trade’ by attending Tavistock groups (Freudian), encounter groups (Rogerian), human relations workshops, co-counselling training, Interpersonal Process Recall, synectics training, experiential methods workshops – it was a long list. Dominant approaches emphasised looking inside oneself,

paying attention to the affect, and reflection. It was a focus not just on individual teachers, but on teachers paying attention to themselves and to their interpersonal relations with others. In the 1980s, Trevor Habeshaw managed to train about 400 teachers at Bristol Polytechnic in co-counselling techniques (Habeshaw, 1980). The approach to developing new teachers at Newcastle Polytechnic involved ‘Interpersonal Process Recall’.

While educational researchers developed ever more reliable student feedback questionnaires, educational developers had to actually meet the teachers with poor ratings and somehow turn this into an opportunity for improvement, and for this you needed to be good at people rather than good at factor analysis.

If one were to examine the sessions at annual conferences today, this focus of attention is largely missing. We seem to have moved on to an affect-free world in which rationality prevails, driven by educational theory or by empirical evidence (such as in uses of the NSSE). ISSOTL events do not resemble the ‘encounter group’ feel of the 1990s POD gatherings.

Unscholarly to scholarly

When I began in the 1970s, educational researchers and educational developers did not go to the same conferences. Most educational developers I knew neither researched nor wrote, unless it was about ‘tips’, few were well read, few had full academic positions, and none were Professors. When a scholarly journal about educational development was first suggested about twenty years ago, there were many who said this was an oxymoron and that there would be nothing to publish – it was the *IJAD*. The fastest expanding teaching development movement today is probably ‘the scholarship of teaching’. An educational developer at Sydney probably could no longer be promoted unless they undertook educational research – and I do not mean pragmatic evaluation, but funded research published in high-status refereed education journals.

From amateur to professional

Academics used to be proud to be amateur teachers and thought an academic was not a professional (Warren-Piper, 1994). How times change. The end of academia as a ‘non-profession’ has been predicted in this journal (Baume, 2006) and the latest proposals in the UK to inform customers (we used to call them students) about what they are going to get for their money, includes publicly collated data stating the percentage of a university’s teachers who possess professional teaching qualifications. Already one university is able to state that the proportion is 100%. There are Western countries where school teachers still do not need any professional training or recognition by a professional body, so this is hardly a phenomenon of universally recognised benefits, but the direction of change seems clear enough. And training to professional standards does work (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Nasr, Gillett, & Booth, 1996).

From organisationally peripheral to central

I once visited a prestigious university and interviewed the Provost. The head of the educational development unit asked if she could accompany me because she had

never, in many years, met her own Provost. It has become more common for heads of educational development units to be influential members of key central committees, to regularly brief senior management on educational issues and even to migrate into very senior management positions.

From context neutral/blind to context- and discipline-sensitive

For many years, there have been two parallel teaching development movements going on. One has been generic, centrally located within universities, with specialisms concerned with educational domains, such as educational uses of technology. The other has been disciplinary, often positioned as offshoots of national disciplinary associations, such as the American Sociological Association. These movements have often had little to do with each other. Sometimes, discipline-specific educational development exists within faculties, as at Lund, or is configured centrally in ways that suit an institution's disciplinary character, as with the 'Learning Lab' at MIT. What is changing is central generic units gradually becoming more aware of disciplinary differences and educational developers being drawn from those disciplines or specialising in certain disciplines. The differences involve not just disciplinary pedagogies but disciplinary cultures about how teaching is talked about and changed. Change processes that succeed in Law flop in Engineering, and writing about teaching that engages Psychologists leaves Art Historians cold. Educational development also works differently in 'teaching intensive' and 'research intensive' universities and differently in large strategically managed universities compared with small institutions where informal mechanisms and social networks take the place of policy and management.

Conclusions

I do not know if some of these changes can be 'short-circuited', to save time and wasted effort, or whether it is necessary, or unavoidable, to plod through each stage. Universities with different organisational cultures (collegial, bureaucratic, corporate or entrepreneurial, McNay, 1995) tend to adopt different change strategies regardless of what stage the national educational development movement is at, and educational development functions within the university often find that they have no choice but to fit in. It is also the case that some components of educational development may be run with less sophisticated conceptions of how to bring about widespread embedded change than others, within the same institution. For example, student development may be located centrally, focus entirely on individual students and ignore their teachers, assessment and feedback practices, curricula, even disciplines, while teaching development has become much less centralised, exploiting many institutional mechanisms for change and becomes more sensitive to contexts.

Some of the shifts over time are essential to effectiveness. It is simply not possible to change a university's teaching by working repeatedly with the same few enthusiasts, however comfortable and personally rewarding that is. You have to find ways to engage almost with everybody. Even modest changes to regulations and policies can have profound impacts on everybody, and simply accepting the context without trying to change it seems almost cowardly. Once you have moved beyond working only with individual teachers, an understanding of organisational change and leadership seems vital. Some of my recent work that involves extended rela-

tionships with whole course teams, instead of short encounters with isolated individuals, has been revelatory (at least to me) in terms of the scale and impact of the changes that followed. The work coming out of Lund on this issue (e.g. Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009) will, I suspect, be seminal.

I am not arguing that all of the shifts in educational development I have observed are always helpful. At Oxford, the main programme we ran for teachers was almost entirely about ‘teacher thinking’ and virtually ignored their practice. This was in response to the dominant intellectual culture and the sacrosanct nature of college fellows’ private tutorial practices. Participants could probably have earned their diploma whilst being poor classroom teachers, though we never knew because we never saw them teach.

I am sceptical about the value of the rush to scholasticism. Most teachers in the universities I have worked in have never read any of my refereed journal articles, though many thousands have read my practical manuals and guides and come up to me when I give talks in out of the way places to tell me how important these pragmatic publications have been in their teaching lives. I have both citation evidence, and a long record of requests for copyright clearance, to confirm that it is not, in the main, my scholarly work that has been influential. It is possible to gain high levels of academic credibility, and develop a stellar career, but to have only little useful function as an educational developer. It is also possible to be scholarly, but to write accessibly and for a non-specialist audience. My own recent review of evidence about what it is about a university education that predicts how much students will learn (Gibbs, 2010) was written as policy guidance to senior managers and to the government, somewhat in the style of the USA journal *Change*, and it has been read widely and received well by those who never otherwise read educational literature, including the Minister for Higher Education. My point here is that this review is ‘grey’ literature, freely downloadable from the web, and probably not citable in any review of my research productivity.

I regret the loss of focus on the affect and the lack of acknowledgement of the roles of passion, fear and pride in teaching. Some of the ‘rush to scholasticism’ seems to me to be a flight from feelings. Accounts by prize-winning teachers about why they teach in the way that they do are full of emotion but commonly lack any reference to educational literature whatsoever. Can they be wrong and still be recognised as the best teachers? Scholarly articles about emotions in teaching are rare (though see Moore & Kuol, 2007).

While being strategic and working with the institution seems to me essential if you want to have a wide impact, some institutional attempts to be strategic about the improvement of teaching resemble crude managerialism and may have more negative than positive consequences. Educational development can become to be seen as a tool of oppressive, and ignorant, management if it is not careful. I have recently been interviewing senior managers in universities in the UK about how they are responding to the new market environment in which public data about educational quality is made available to help students to choose where to spend their, very varied, fees. Educational development units are in some cases being co-opted into some highly questionable processes that involve closing down ‘unpopular’ courses on the flimsiest of educational evidence, and their independence as advisors has been compromised. Where educational developers have declined to be associated with such practices, they have sometimes lost their jobs or their entire unit. The choice seems to lie between having high ideals but being pretty ineffec-

tive, or being highly influential but losing integrity. Educating senior management seems to be one way out of this conundrum, though educational developers are unfortunately seldom involved in that. Becoming senior managers ourselves is perhaps a better solution, and that is starting to happen more often.

Despite my reservations about ‘progress’ always being a good thing, I hope that in outlining changes I have observed it helps educational developers to recognise their own activities in a different light and prompt reflections on what else they might do, and what direction they might move in.

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Notes on contributor

Graham Gibbs is currently an honorary professor at the University of Winchester and was previously professor and head of the Oxford Learning Institute, University of Oxford. He is the founder of the International Consortium for Educational Development in Higher Education, the organisation that runs this journal, *IJAD*.

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