PAPER CODE: han00419

The Professional Engagement Model of Academic Induction into on-line Teaching

*Paper prepared for the Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Sydney, December 2000*

By Michael Ryan, Mary Hanrahan & Margot Duncan

Faculty of Education, QUT, Brisbane.

The current imperatives at work in tertiary education settings are resulting in a second wave of academics (cf. the "early adopters") using on-line technologies in their teaching. This has provided universities with a considerable professional staff development challenge just when university budgets are shrinking. This paper briefly reviews traditional professional development models involving centralised PD units and proposes an alternative model of "professional engagement". We reconceptualise the challenge as one of building on existing workplace structures, including recruiting academic on-line teaching advisers for each School in the Faculty, showcasing existing exemplary practice, and setting up Professional Engagement Groups with a support team. Once underway, we can focus on other challenges such as the design of flexible on-line courses, addressing graduate attributes, experimenting with interactive multi-media technologies, etc. These second-order enhancements however are dependent on a robust and effective professional engagement model.

Introduction

Traditional approaches to academic development have been criticised for their failure to reach the majority of staff or to lead to significant change in those they do attract (Angelo, in press; Boud, 1999; Jenkins, 1997). Staff currently involved in formal academic staff "development" on three continents have argued that it should be adapted to fit the complex realities of universities today, rather than using models created for a different time-space, where development was seen to be achievable by a single approach such as centralised workshops that were decontextualised and directed at the individual (e.g., Angelo, In press; Boud, 1999, Jenkins, 1997). This is particularly pertinent in the context of current imperatives in tertiary education settings that are resulting in a second wave of academics (cf. the "early adopters") beginning to use on-line technologies in their teaching- a situation that has provided universities with a considerable professional staff development challenge just when university budgets are shrinking. We present a Faculty of Education case study featuring teaching-related examples, to support the notion that academic "development" needs to be rethought in this new context, and use this opportunity to explore a hybrid model using informal, peer-based workplace learning as its focus but depending also on a broader network structure at the Faculty level with links to even more centralised support structures.

Questioning Professional Traditional "Development"

In most fields of organisational development, there has been considerable evidence that, although staff at all levels (including professionals) report that off-site training and courses
result in new learning, the usual result is a lack of effective transfer of the knowledge gained to the work situation (e.g., Watkins, 1991). Argyris & Schön (1974) make a distinction between "espoused beliefs" (what people have consciously learned and say are the beliefs underlying their practice) and "theories-in-use" (what can be inferred from their practice), claiming that the two have been shown to be in conflict more often than not. In the Education field, there has been considerable research and writing on problems of transfer of school learning (e.g., Jones & Idol, 1990), vocational training (e.g., Stevenson, 1992) and university-level learning (e.g., Candy & Crebert, 1991) but the field of academic development is young and only recently has there been much written about the comparative failure of centralised lectures and workshops usually conducted away from the work-site by members of a professional development unit (Boud, 1999).

Boud (1999) has listed several phases academic development has passed through in recent years, with a particular focus on Australia and the United Kingdom, each phase having its associated theoretical ideas. He sees development as having originally moved from being embedded and invisible in academic life to being seen as an additional voluntary individual effort supported by centralised seminars and workshops. More recently staff development was seen as being driven by corporate policy that all staff should be trained and deployed strategically. Finally Boud writes about the current situation that he believes calls for a more multi-dimensional and distributed approach, particularly one that locates development "in the context of academic work" at the local level (p. 9).

He discusses both the advantages and disadvantages of a centralised approach, whether directed at volunteer individual academic staff or, more strategically, all staff, and argues for it to be balanced by a localised approach, such as "reciprocal peer learning", on the grounds that it is in sites of academic practice "that academic identity is formed and is most powerfully influenced" (p. 3) and where practice and implementation of new learning can occur. Similarly Angelo, (in press), commenting on the academic development situation in the United States of America suggests that decontextualised academic development can do little more than tinker round the edges and result in "rather modest rewards" (p. 112), in contrast to a model that takes systemic factors at both the local and institutional level into account and consequently has a better chance of achieving real transformation. This may be illustrated with a counter-example that was seen to be less than successful. With regard to academic development for on-line teaching Rice and Bantow (1999) present an example where "a strategic decision was made to standardise the approach to technology use by introducing computer conferencing in all courses". The five-week compulsory training course for academic staff was met with much resistance and negativity, with concerns about group dynamics and lack of individual involvement, and the authors concluded that making such training compulsory was counter-productive.

Also supporting a localised approach but viewing it from a different perspective, Jenkins (1997) suggests that academics' allegiance is primarily to their discipline and only secondarily to the institution. He argues that this means that their pedagogical concerns are very much tied to "particular curricular and pedagogic concerns" (p. 50) that results in resistance to centralised moves that are seen to disregard these concerns. To have a significant impact on the broad mass of staff, he concludes, educational developers with the relevant academic background should work with discipline-based concerns. Moral grounds for concern that would support such an approach have also been raised in recent years. McWilliam (2000) sees such centralised professional development as comparable in some ways to colonial "monocropping", where, for example, locals might be convinced to give up growing fruit and vegetables to produce coffee, an outcome that may be good for the broader economy, but that produces impoverishment of the culture at the local level.
Overall, the literature reviewing traditional approaches seems to suggest that professional development that is supported at the local level by staff with the appropriate background in terms of discipline knowledge is likely to be more relevant and productive than a centralised, decontextualised approach.

**Informal Learning in the Workplace**

Towards the opposite end of the continuum of formality of "workplace learning" we find what is termed "informal learning" (with what Marsick & Watkins (1990) termed "incidental learning" being even further along the line). Informal learning would include such practices as learning on the job. Boud (1999) lists as the first of the historical stages of thought about academic development "development as embedded and invisible in academic life", with the kind of learning taking place as being seen as "situated learning" (e.g., Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991 cited in Boud, 1999), where "participants do not conceptualise what they do as learning but as peripheral participation in the work in which they gain expertise" (Boud, 1999, p. 3). Other sociological approaches that have something in common with the "situated learning" approach have some of their roots in Vygotskian theory about the social construction of knowledge and/or critical theory that is concerned with the active participation of individuals in decisions made about changes affecting them. Marsick and Watkins (1990) pointed out that informal workplace learning is highly valued both where formal learning may have been lacking, or in the professions where formal learning has often failed to transfer to the work situation. Billett (1992) wrote that it is "the richness of the social and cultural context that plays a major role in learning" (p. 148).

Garrick (1998), however, cautions against uncritical acceptance of the legitimacy of co-opting *informal* learning, even when it aims to empower workers, when the ultimate goal of such moves is to achieve the goals of corporate management. He attempts to unmask "contemporary corporate language" to challenge the "underlying economic, philosophical and organisational rationales" for this new focus on informal learning, a focus whose outcome may not be as empowering as Marsick and Watkins (1990) have suggested.

**Lightly Formalised Learning**

In between the extremes on the continuum can be found professional development whose goals are more explicit and whose structure is more formalised. Teaching, Research and Collaboration (TRAC) groups at QUT (Weeks, 1994) were set up as part of a slightly more formalised staff development project that relied on learning based on real world practice, a voluntary reflective practitioner approach, based on Schon's notion of "cooperative inquiry" (1983) and regular meetings of groups of academics. These groups were cross-disciplinary, but were composed of academics who had a common interest in a particular teaching issue (examples included student journal writing, large class teaching, small group work, graduate attributes, postgraduate supervision), as well as a common interest in developing their personal practical knowledge through shared reflection-in-action, and a common interest in collaborative action of some kind, which varied from publication of their joint findings to contributing to changes in policy or practice at the university level. Even though they were initiated and led by academics, they were coordinated centrally and were being actively researched as part of a PhD study (Weeks, 1994).

While very successful over a long period (in spite of the difficulties of arranging meetings across faculties and even campuses), they largely faltered when central support for them was withdrawn and was replaced by a teaching and learning program of workshops and seminars. It could be said that they had always risked being less sustainable, given that they were not a natural community with the participants sharing a common workplace or a common disciplinary culture. Nevertheless they had much in common with peer learning
projects described by Boud (1999), that involved interested academics who were part of the same academic community and who met regularly to discuss practice related to a common interest.

Communities of Practice

Boud (1999) presented two examples of "reciprocal peer learning" projects that had been successful, both concerned with publishing, but also involving collaborative critical reflection on practice. One involved investigating and documenting innovative features of current education programmes that were exemplary in terms of good adult learning principles, while the other involved collaboration between academics to enhance writing for publication and grants. He commented that their success as academic development depended partly on their being focused on work that was viewed as an intrinsic part of academic work. They were also helped by the fact that they arose from local needs, rather than university-wide policy. They were compatible with the system in which they were located, fitting in with "normal reward processes, ...the strategic priorities of the faculty, and the aspirations of staff members" (p. 8).

However, this did not mean that the process should be entirely dependent on local culture and that central staff specialised in staff development weren't needed. Although Boud (1999) saw it as important that new initiatives be "embedded in changing work patterns of departments", he also pointed out that central programs could "challenge the taken-for-grantedness of local ways of operating" (p. 5), and be active in initiating and supporting local practices such as reciprocal peer learning. He suggested that professional developers might be being better able to help academics manage the complexity and sensitivities involved in maintaining one's image of personal competence while risking exposure to criticism from peers at different status levels. This may explain why the TRAC groups referred to above faltered when central support for them was withdrawn. There is also some evidence that there are other qualities that participation by "outsiders" to a community setting may provide, including theoretical frameworks that add an extra critical dimension to efforts at improving practice.

More formal are systems-based approaches that preserve the feature of taking place within a communal workplace setting are action science (Argyris & Schön, 1974) and action research (Dick, 1998; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Wilkinson, 1995). While there are many variations of action research, they are all concerned with action and change, and value the flexibility and opportunity for responsiveness offered by working in multiple cycles of planning, acting and observing, and reviewing, while engaged in a longer-term project. As well as being focused on action they are all concerned with a systematic approach to documenting and evaluating the process.

One of the features that may vary between different types of action research is the level of participation in the research process, with some versions of action research, for example, critical action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Marsick & Watkins, 1990) aiming to have as many as possible of those who will be affected by the planned changes participating in all stages of the research, including the planning. Another variant is the importance given to the pre-planning stage during which the facilitator identifies the stakeholders, builds effective working relationships with them, negotiates roles and responsibilities, builds a climate for change, and seeks agreement for mechanisms for participation (Dick, 2000).

A related process called action learning (Revans, 1982) has been used by professional developers as part of various systems change approaches in organisational development, including action research, to provide the structure for collaborative inquiry on the on-going practice of the participants. Ellis & Phelps (1999) report on a study that using ongoing
collaborative action learning as part of a team approach to development for academics involved in the adaptation of units in a courses going online. They cited enthusiasm, collaboration and a sense of ownership as factors important to the change process, with the major barriers being “difficulties of dividing time between varied commitments, the importance of timeliness of training components and the need to develop policy and guidelines ‘on the run’” (p. 71). One could add that one of the greatest challenges of academic work, and hence of professional development that is compatible with it, is that the time demands and variety of activities require almost continual shifts from the administratively mundane to the pedagogically challenging and all points in between.

Overall, the evidence in both the professional development literature and the organisational change literature suggests that, whether it concerns individuals or whole organisational areas, change must be meaningful within a community of practice. It further suggests that development proceeds best when local interests are recruited and local best practice is abstracted and fed back into the system. The literature also suggests that centralised support personnel who understand and empathise with local interests may provide the necessary impetus and support for collaborative and critical inquiry that might otherwise dissipate given a tendency to preserve the status quo and local hierarchical structures.

An ideal area to test out such theories of professional development is the current movement towards increased use of on-line teaching and learning technologies, which offer particular threats to established beliefs and values within most of the disciplines in universities, but which help meet the demands from both clients and the institution for increased flexibility in modes of teaching and learning at universities. Rather than seeing the situation as one in which external technical experts can bring about change, it may be more profitable to see it as a case for support for change in community practice. Cleary, Little & O'Brien (2000), in reviewing a strategic approach to such change in their university wrote, "Flexible learning cannot be a bolt on afterthought to the traditional structures and work practices. It requires a vision that connects with the beliefs and values of faculty about the academic enterprise and quality learning." (p. 37). They further advise that, among strategic changes at executive level, what is needed is "linkages with Faculties to operationalised the vision; [and] resources to reward and compensate staff for new priorities and mechanisms to monitor problems and evaluate concerns." (pp. 37-38). Among the techniques likely to facilitate the process, they cite O'Brien (1990)'s recommendations for the "[d]evelopment of slack in the system to enable staff to explore new ideas and think creatively [and the] [c]reation of new rituals, values, and symbols to embed the cultural values." (p. 30)

The following part of the paper describes a particular case involving the use of on-line teaching and learning technologies where a community-based model of academic "professional development" was being trialed as somewhat of an alternative but also an adjunct to poorly attended centralised lectures and workshops. It is notable firstly in being both localised not only in the workplace of academics in the Faculty of Education, but more specifically in the different Schools in the Faculty (with their particular sub-disciplinary foci). Secondly it is notable in the degree of informality of its functioning while nevertheless being supported by a formalised infrastructure. In fact it does not claim to be about "professional development", which suggests moving from an undeveloped state to a more developed one that is known in advance. Such a stance would be untenable in the emerging field of online pedagogy. Rather our approach has been to take advantage of what already exists and facilitate its enhancement in a culturally appropriate way. 

Data for the analysis of the case study came from individual interviews with relevant academic staff in the Faculty (such as School Online Teaching Advisers or SOTAs and exemplary practitioners), notes taken at weekly review and planning meetings, group meetings of the SOTAs, a focus group interview with and/or survey data from those involved
in the Professional Enhancement Groups (PEGs), and email between the participants on issues raised during the more formal dialogue.

**The Case Study**

This case study exemplifying a model of localised engagement in a change process, which we are calling the Professional Engagement Model, has resulted from a project specifically concerned with the academics in the Faculty who are seeking support in using new technologies for teaching and learning in undergraduate or postgraduate units. It has paid particular attention to issues of culture and identity, seeking to locate change within the specific culture of the discipline, and within the larger system. However, while the action is integrated with the "normal business" of the academics, and depends on voluntary participation by the academics in a peer setting, it also acknowledges the place of structures set up by Faculty and central management in the process of change. The project has several distinct but integrated aspects: small groups at the local organisational level (the PEG groups), the setting-up and support of School On-line Teaching Advisers (SOTAs), the abstraction of exemplary practice, a website, multimedia workstations, Faculty support staff and collaboration with central support staff.

**Professional Engagement Groups (PEGs)**

The main unit of operation is the Professional Engagement Group (PEG). A PEG has usually consisted of two to four academics from within the same School in the Faculty of Education. Occasionally a group could be much larger when others decided to join at the last minute. Further, the members of the PEG seeking support were generally geographically close, being housed in the same building, and preferably within a few doors of each other in the same corridor, or at least linked by a common purpose, such as wanting to put resources on-line for a common course unit, create personal home pages, or learn how to use images in digital resources.

The School on-line teaching advisers (see following section) sometimes began with an initial meeting with a small group with a common interest, but tended to work one-on-one for more extended help. The key to the working of the PEG group was flexibility and responsiveness to a particular situation. Geographical proximity, usually combined with close work responsibilities and neighbourliness among group members was also considered an important factor to facilitate continued interactions between the group members as they continued to develop what they had done at a PEG meeting. The impetus for the setting up of a PEG group came from an expressed request from an academic or group of academics for help with accomplishing a particular task at a particular time involving online teaching technologies. A group might meet only once, on a regular basis, or whenever a new need arose. Typically such meetings would take place in one of the academics' offices at the particular academic's workstation, with the academic controlling his or her own keyboard and mouse. For more complex multimedia tasks, however, the group would meet at the multimedia workstation situated in their building, or even, when a larger number was interested in a common topic, in a small computer laboratory. Mid-semester PEGs tended to be triggered by problems encountered by individual academics whereas out of semester they were more likely to arise from a group request for help with planning new online resources or activities. Initially, before the SOTAs were appointed, a PEG group would be set up and led by someone from the project support team, particularly to provide help with technical issues. However, they also kept pedagogical issues in view by suggesting different ways of using the technologies when moving from off-line to on-line resources and ways of communicating.
School On-line Teaching Advisers (SOTAs)

In each School in the Faculty, financial support was provided to release at least one academic (in some Schools this later became two) to have some time to give to supporting moves towards using on-line teaching technology within the School, for each of two semesters in 2000. It should be noted that the Faculty of Education at QUT is a particularly large faculty of education, with each of the Schools within it having an average of 25 full-time staff and a similar number of part-time academic and administrative staff. The School On-line Teaching Advisers or SOTAs as they came to be called, were chosen, not because they were technically expert in a range of skills, but rather because they were adventurous enough and confident enough to try out new ways of teaching in one or two areas using the new technological tools available and were willing to help others like themselves who wanted to try out something new in a supportive atmosphere.

They played a variety of roles besides helping other academics, each on-line teaching adviser being left free to create and adapt the roles to suit his or her own context. A grounded theory analysis of documents relating to the advisers, including interview scripts and notes taken at their meetings revealed that the on-line teaching advisers moved between several roles, those of helper, problem-solver, experimenter, reporter, modeller, critical thinker and advocate (see Table 1 for a note on each of the roles).

Table 1. Roles of School On-line Teaching Advisers (adapted from Hanrahan, Ryan & Duncan, 1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helper</td>
<td>To be someone academics feel entitled to ask for help and to provide a safe learning environment for novices to on-line teaching to explore pedagogical possibilities and gain technical expertise in using online teaching technologies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant &amp; Problem Solver</td>
<td>To help School and individual academics make decisions involving online teaching technologies, answer questions about what is going on in the Faculty and QUT, or refer on other technical problems to the project support staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimenter</td>
<td>To gain exposure to new technologies and systems and to experiment with new ways of using them pedagogically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporter</td>
<td>To provide (mainly) verbal and documentary reports to the project team so that they, in turn, could build exemplars, FAQs, and report on the professional engagement group process, or the PD process as a whole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modellers</td>
<td>To present to individuals or small groups (unit teachers, course or school groups), modelling new teaching practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinker</td>
<td>(similar to reporter, but more critical) to consider and discuss more strategic issues and implications arising from teaching-with-technology practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate</td>
<td>To be pro-active in letting staff know about support available to cope with Faculty and QUT changes, and when necessary, to argue persuasively for practices and ideas that have proven useful.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As reported in Hanrahan, Ryan & Duncan (2000) different advisers spent a different proportion of their time in any one role. Even though they were remunerated so as to enable them to buy teaching release time, all were not in a position to help beginners. Either they did not have the time available (only one was in a position to buy teaching release time) or staff in their school did not have the time or energy to get involved during the semester or else had teamed up with another staff member. Nevertheless, as the on-line teaching advisers for their schools, they were called upon to solve problems, were enthusiastic in
demonstrating the possibilities of on-line technologies, and they were all very keen on improving their knowledge and skills. They were also keen on learning from each other (and anyone else available) and all felt the need to find out about new multimedia and other emerging technologies and wanted to try out the new multi-media workstations in their schools. Meetings of the on-line teaching advisers and support staff were held when a need was perceived to share and discuss emerging issues.

As we commented in our earlier paper, what we were supporting here was not radical, since these roles could be expected to exist within any teaching group. However, what was novel was the idea of supporting and showcasing existing good practice as a way of enhancing organisational change at the local level. "These roles were embedded in a wider process of identifying existing good practice, abstracting and representing it so that it could be fed back into the system and developed incrementally, using existing social and organisational support systems" (Hanrahan, Ryan & Duncan, 2000).

**Exemplar Identification**

One of the first tasks undertaken by the project team was the investigation of and writing up of exemplars of good practice with respect to online teaching technologies. The first stage of this was developing awareness of what was already taking place within the Faculty, which was done informally by keeping in contact with as many staff as possible and engaging them in talk about what they were doing, which was facilitated by the fact that the offices of each of the project team were in a different work area within the Faculty and generally each had contact with a different group of staff. Moreover the project manager knew and was known by most of the academic staff in the Faculty, through his role as manager of the Faculty computing services.

The exemplars were of interesting uses made of new technologies to achieve pedagogical objectives that had previously been achieved by other means when all of the students had had internal enrolment and had been able to attend face-to-face lectures and workshops. For example, one lecturer used an online forum in a project management unit "to provide a communication space in which students [were] held accountable for the implementation of their chosen project on a weekly basis. The forum act[ed] as a 'public' project management diary, ensuring students stay[ed] on track and that any problems with their projects [were] quickly resolved" (Duncan, 2000). Most of the first set of exemplars covered came from units taught by the School on-line teaching advisers, since they tended to be among the "early adopters" for technology use in their area. Each exemplar owner was amazed that a simple use they had made of Internet technologies was seen as exemplary. They were surprised to see that what they had done was indeed a unique use of the Internet within the Faculty and that it was, in fact, more complex than they had noticed, having been gradually tailored, sometimes over more than one semester, to fit the particular students and better serve the aims it had been developed to achieve.

Some of the "exemplars" developed into "showcases", particularly where they formed a substantial component of the course unit and were difficult to describe in isolation from their context (as was the case with the above exemplar). In these cases, we presented the exemplar in the context of the class demographics, the goals of the unit, the personality and working style of the lecturer, the assessment tasks, and the work of the students.

**The Web Site**

An important part of the support system for the above processes was the On-Line Professional Development* website. As well as being a place to publish the Exemplars and Showcases, it played various roles, providing information about the Support Structures, help
with the design of flexible units (an issue that emerged en route), as well as help with problem-solving that included Frequently Asked Questions about using multimedia, email, forums and chat, authoring web documents, and managing workstation files. A search facility for the site was also set up.

It needs to be stressed, however, that the web site should not be equated with on-line teaching development. The website existed to enable the interactions between people in the workplace, in particular PEG discussions. While the web served as a publication medium for capturing that part of professional practice that could be captured in this way, it was only a pale shadow of the face-to-face community practices involved.

At the meta-level of the project, collaborative publishing was important to the process as a focus for critical discussion of the model and the way it was being implemented. It helped make explicit the assumptions underlying the different facets of the model, so that they became available for discussion and critique.

**Multimedia Workstations**

Another important part of the project was the purchasing of multimedia workstations for each work area within the Faculty, so that staff could have access to tools for creating and editing digital images, scanning both images and text, and video and audio-streaming and editing. As well as including a computer equipped with more sophisticated software than was available on staff machines, the workstations include a scanner and digital camera.

**The Faculty Support Staff**

Besides the School on-line teaching advisers, there were four support staff at the Faculty level, the manager, two research-assistants-cum-project-coordinators, and a web designer, though there was also some overlap and flexibility about who fulfilled these roles. Overall, the roles of the team included managing and coordinating the setting up of the various aspects of the project, reviewing progress, building tools needed for technical tasks, researching and reporting on the project, as well as prompting and providing support and technical expertise to the School on-line teaching advisers, whether in PEG groups, at group advisers' meetings or workshops held from time to time to address technical issues, through a website, or through casual meetings in corridors. They also undertook some teaching within the Faculty where possible, and/or came from teaching backgrounds, which was considered important for grounding them in and sensitising them to the local cultural and institutional setting, and for enhancing their authenticity in the eyes of the academics with whom they were working. Building trusting relationships with Faculty academics was an important ongoing task for all members of the support team.

There was some differentiation of roles within the support group, with a balance and integration being sought between a managerial role where the concern was to ensure the effective implementation of University or Faculty policies, and a personal support role, where the concern was to help academics achieve their particular purposes for the use of on-line teaching technologies. One project coordinator commented that she saw part of her role as being "to personalise institutional demands by acting as a bridge between the 'admscape' of the faculty/university and the lived reality of lecturers in a school [and to] work between the two to harmonise the motives of each group, thereby hoping to encourage positive and productive activity (i.e. satisfying results)."

The Faculty support staff held weekly meetings to report on progress, plan for the following week, and review progress towards longer-term goals of the project. Such meetings tended to be relatively unstructured so that they could respond to emerging issues, events, and
concerns; roles and tasks were also somewhat flexible, allowing for personal factors such as emerging interests and talents, as well as for extended periods of leave. While this flexibility and comparative lack of structure had its advantages, it also created uncertainty and instability and, at one stage, it was decided to formalise procedures to some extent, with an agenda being set to which any one of the four could add items, and an administrative assistant was engaged to keep track of "actions arising".

As well as this project management team, there was also a Faculty team of computing support officers who provided specialised workstation support to academics at the Faculty level.

**The University Central Support Staff**

Executive policy at the university required that all faculties should move from a faculty-based on-line management system to a centralised management system. Close collaboration became necessary between the Faculty support team and staff from the unit developing the centralised on-line system. There was also a central system of workstation support for centralised computing systems.

This case study, set in the context of a move in the University towards increased use of on-line technologies for teaching and learning, can be seen to have many of the characteristics that the literature review indicated were likely to be most effective in supporting desired changes in academic practice. It illustrates how a "community of practice" approach to organisational change can be set-up and supported, as well as some of the challenges involved. We have called our model of supporting change in academic practice the Professional Engagement Model. The final section of this paper explores the implications of our model as exemplified in this case study.

**Characteristics of the Professional Engagement Model**

The above project can be seen as implying a model that answers many of the concerns previous writers have had about centralised, decontextualised, monocultural, resource-based professional development. It goes further, however, in problematising the very notion of "academic development". As we commented above, in the field of on-line pedagogy where future possibilities are largely unknown, then traditional notions of "development" may no longer be appropriate. Academic development suggests that the main focus is the "development" of skills and knowledge in individuals, that the change is about changing academics, whereas we want to suggest that what we are looking for is engagement of academics in negotiating the process of change going on in their work environment, but as part of their everyday practice of adapting to change. Hence our approach has been to take advantage of what already exists and facilitate its enhancement in a culturally appropriate way.

The main advantages of the Professional Engagement model are its responsive to patterns of academic work and to the immediate needs of academics, the way it enhances the visibility of exemplars of academic work, its cost-effectiveness and scalability, and the way there is a complementarity of local and centralised support systems. There are limitations, however. One must take into consideration that such engagement with staff takes time to build up, its structure lacks visibility, and the outcomes are hard to measure. This final section addresses these advantages and limitations.
Focus on community of practice

An important factor in the success of the project has been the way it responded to the recognition that learning happens in practice and that practice happens in social and organisational systems and not in isolation. Angelo, citing Senge (1990 in Angelo, in press), advised the academic community to "apply systems thinking to departmental planning" (p. 121), taking into account "institutional structure and agenda" as well as "existing systems of academic staff roles and rewards and of students' academic careers" (p. 121). The use of School-based SOTAs in supporting geographically close PEG groups within the Faculty meant that local culture and needs were taken into account.

A major factor was the way this model allows for the time constraints involved in patterns of academic work. The processes involved in this project have been driven by the changing needs of participants, whether in the Professional Engagement Groups, in the way the School on-line teaching advisers responded to their different School contexts, in the way the website was constructed and continually updated, and in both the content and the process of workshops arranged. One of the main reasons that Central seminars and workshops fail to attract satisfactory attendances is that they are not convenient for busy academics, and cannot be timed and organised to suit their most immediate needs so that they are not seen as an intrinsic part of academic work (cf. Boud, 1999). The PEG groups formed either in response to a need immediate enough to take priority over other tasks for a short time, or at a time outside the semester that suited academics planning for the following semester. Larger PEGS such as induction workshops were also organised within Schools during windows of opportunity best known to those within the School, and when they were seen as an intrinsic part of the academic work in the School. The move to three semesters and shorter breaks offers a threat to the "slack" O'Brien (1990) believes is essential to enable staff "to explore new ideas and think creatively". However, the practice of time release for the SOTAs and the "new rituals, values and symbols to embed the cultural values" involved in the PEGs and the exemplars and the rest of the website are a more in the direction she suggests.

At the level of the project support team, keeping in contact with all levels of the academic and administrative systems throughout the project meant that plans were able to be based on realistic expectations, and were able to change in response to changes in any part of that system. Change could be supported at a system level. There was a focus on continual negotiation with an increasing circle of interested stakeholders. Emails went out to Faculty academic staff, to Heads of Schools, to the Dean, to Faculty course coordinators, as well as to School on-line teaching advisers. Such emails served several purposes: detailing the implications of system changes, telling stakeholders how the Faculty could support academics, and how they could help themselves and others accommodate the changes or at least minimise the stresses they might bring. There were also emails to executive staff from other areas such as the Divisions involved in making decisions involving information technology that would impact on the Faculty, to explain foreseeable problems of particular policies and suggesting alternative paths. Another kind of email, answers to queries from individual staff about problems encountered with on-line technologies, was copied to all on-line teaching support staff, to keep them informed of progress with such problems.

Another aspect of the community-of-practice approach to professional engagement that enhanced participation and ownership was a focus on developing trust and building a climate for change (cf. Dick, 2000), an aspect given a high priority in action research approaches to organisational change. For example, as the project progressed, the School advisers were trusted to be doing whatever was possible for them to do with regard to online teaching in their local area, and were interviewed to find out what they were doing rather than being told what to do. They had initially been given a model of how they might proceed.
in helping staff in their School, but whatever they did was accepted and incorporated into the
definition of their roles, so that they adopted roles that fit both their interests and work
practices, whether this be working with individual academics or being the Adviser at School
meetings. As one SOTA commented, if they had been told what to do and it did not fit easily
into their already overcrowded academic roles, no-one would willingly take on the task of
being a SOTA. Because responding to urgent staff needs could be quite time-consuming,
the roles they took on had to be in an area in which they were already inclined to give.

Since informal rather than formal processes were used, the importance of positive
relationships was paramount in the success of every step of the process. Highly motivated
staff peers were used as the point of engagement for staff who were just beginning to move
towards using online teaching technologies. We could not simply rely on established
processes to provide the momentum for the process; the energy for the build-up of the
process has come from processes designed to build trust: publishing exemplars of best
practice and showcases from within the discipline, interviewing participants to get their
viewpoint, and arranging meetings to give participants the chance to develop a shared
language and goals. Angelo (in press) has stressed the importance of "taking time at the
front end to develop shared trust, shared language, and a small number of shared goals" (p.
121), and has commented on how shared examples: "start with a focus on success" and
"promote group work and team learning" (p. 121). We believe the above processes such as
the showcases, contributed to this promotion of group learning, as see this as a contrast to
the view (and reality?) of tertiary teaching as a lonely, isolated activity.

Enhancing the visibility of exemplars of academic work

The identification and publishing of exemplars of on-line teaching was an important factor in
the growth of visibility of the PEG model. The capturing on-line of particular instances of use
of various on-line facilities provided concrete examples of ways of responding to
pedagogical issues raised during problem-solving with those beginning to move on-line and
interested in the new possibilities opening up for them. However, they also provided a focus
for reflection for the academics who had been interviewed and later asked for feedback
regarding their exemplars. These academics became more aware of the changes their
innovation had been through over time and the process seemed to stimulate further
reflection and change, so that there was an incremental adjustment over time.

Legitimacy

This model has legitimacy on several fronts. Because it takes the cultural context very
seriously, it has high credibility. It is situated within their discipline and does not disregard
curriculum and discipline-specific pedagogic concerns (cf. Jenkins). It assumes "that the
academic profession collectively knows a great deal about promoting effective teaching,
learning, collaboration, and change in higher education" (Angelo, in press) and uses
exemplars from their own context to show them what has already been tried (cf. Jenkins,
1997). Hence it builds on what is in place rather than imposing radical change. It uses the
academic networks that already exist within the work place, for example, in course unit
teams, or in buildings.

Nevertheless, it realises that there needs to be collaboration with centralised units that also
have a part to play in strategic institutional change (cf. Boud, 1999). Without centralised
support and organisation, academics are less likely to find the space to reflect on current
practice and possibilities and to see culturally appropriate ways of meeting their needs. The
PEG groups were successful because they were needs based and because the SOTAs
understood local culture, and could refer academics to local best practice. Without
centralised support, however, this structure would not have been set up and supported.
Cost effectiveness and scalability

Even with the remuneration given to the School on-line teaching advisers this process of inducting staff into the use of on-line teaching technologies is cost effective in comparison with maintaining centralised academic development units running workshops and seminars that are often poorly attended by academics and often do not result in change in practice in any case.

Because of its organic nature, it can begin small and grow as needed. In second semester the number of advisers in Schools grew and included part-time as well as full-time academics, and there was increasing collaboration with the centralised multimedia unit. Even though the model is not intended for mass production, because of its flexibility and readiness to adapt to local culture, the process is geared for expansion, and it could be implemented in an increasing number of settings across the university in a way that is responsive to the particular circumstances of the setting. This growth would be limited not by the size of a unit, but rather by cultural barriers encountered with spread between different work areas. It needs to build up from the ground in each area.

Limitations

Takes time to build up

The fact that the project involved the building up of relationship of trust between the project support team and academics in five Schools meant that it did not happen overnight. Embedding an innovation in cultural practice has to take place gradually. However, using academic support staff from within the Faculty who already knew and understood the values of local staff, and who were trusted for this reason, meant that the process was quicker than it might have been for staff brought in from outside the Faculty. Similarly with the SOTAs: other academics in the same school could be reasonably sure that their needs would be understood. However, because of the lack of visible structure or regulated function, it took some time for the news of the existence of the SOTAs to filter through to all staff in each area.

Lack of visible structure

The lack of visible structure, for example, in the roles of the School on-line teaching advisers, and within the Faculty project team, was at times exhilarating and at times disempowering. It gave both the SOTAs and the project coordinators the freedom to achieve tasks in a way that suited their learning and working style, and the freedom to use suggestions for activities to develop the project in any direction they saw fit. At the same time, the lack of structure for the SOTAs and the lack of a clear definition of their roles may have been responsible for the lack of PEG groups conducted in some Schools. However, there seemed to be another explanation for this, in that the formation of PEG groups seemed to happen when a semester had finished and staff had time to plan together for the following semester's unit, whereas in-semester needs seemed to be more likely to be related to individual problems that had cropped up. As mentioned above, the web exemplars became a visible manifestation of the on-line work that was going on in the faculty, and increased interest in the project.

Hard to measure effectiveness

One disadvantage of such an informal, evolving approach to enhancing professional engagement is the consequent difficulty of measuring outcomes. The processes used to build trust, flexibility and responsiveness to needs and to the cultural context also mean that
ways of measuring progress could not be set up to provide results in a systematic fashion at regular intervals. Nevertheless, it has been done qualitatively to some extent through the interviews, email interactions, and the continual publishing of aspects of the project at various stages. Attempts at more systematic evaluation were less successful because of the flexible way different SOTAs responded to the immediate needs of the academics within their Schools. In the end, the best formal measure seemed to be the measure of the increase in use and sophistication of on-line resources and computer-mediated communications in teaching and learning within the Faculty.

At the level of project management, the action research was also quite informal. However, we were continually engaged in reflection on the action and modifying it in the light of emerging data. At the level of administration of the project, there were weekly meetings of the team where plans were reviewed and updated continuously in the light of observations about progress towards achieving the goal of the project (to provide effective support for academic staff engaging with new on-line teaching technologies). At one level, the concerns were largely technical concerns, with technical answers often being decided by one or other of team members with little discussion. However since evaluation was an important task of the project itself and hence a frequent topic of discussion, reflection on the project was inevitable. What helped make such reflection both critical and constructive was a combination of the fact that team members came from a variety of backgrounds and provided a variety of perspectives and the fact that they were invited to be open about their views and creative in their contributions in a very supportive sharing environment where risks could be taken safely. This practice of critical reflection was also extended to and modelled in the other modes of communication, such as the various email channels, the website and the forum.

At the level of the School Online Teaching Advisers and others who provided the on-line teaching exemplars, the signs of a cyclical process of developing, observing and reviewing teaching activities was also visible, catalysed to some extent by the interviews and conferencing involved in the publication of the exemplars. There is a certain novelty in seeing components of one's teaching practice reified on a website, and as such, serves as a rich stimulus for reflection and a desire for incremental improvement.

The university had set up as one of its goals that all academic staff would have reached a particular level of use of online resources for teaching by the end of 2000, but rather than being driven by such goals or making such use compulsory at anything more than a minimal level, we saw our main role as increasing awareness of what was already going on in the Faculty and supporting staff when they were ready to take on more in this area and had questions of their own to ask.

**Conclusion**

This paper has shown an alternative way of responding to the current imperatives for moving towards the increased use of on-line teaching and learning technologies in tertiary education settings. Instead of seeing this as a professional staff "development" challenge we have reconceptualized it as the revaluing, exemplification, and expansion of already existing workplace structures, including peer mentoring, within the context of a disciplinary unit.

However, this is in line with recent papers in the professional development literature, where decentralised, culturally relevant peer processes of engagement are supported by centralised professional development units, which, instead of running programs and seminars expected to serve the whole university, provide expertise and support in response to expressed needs of localised communities of learning. The model exemplified in this paper included recruiting academic on-line teaching advisers for each School in the Faculty,
showcasing existing exemplary practice, and setting up Professional Engagement Groups with a support team and support structures such as a website and induction workshops. The process of building up the support structures has been a slow one, but this has allowed adaptation to various contexts and should allow it to continue as we begin to meet other challenges within the Faculty, such as the design of flexible on-line courses, addressing graduate attributes, and moving to increased use of interactive multi-media technologies in external units. The success of these second-order enhancements however will depend on continuing to support what we believe to be a robust and effective model of professional engagement.

* Note that the phrase "professional development" was used for the website because of its greater currency among academics

References


