

2nd International Conference on Higher Education Advances, HEAd'16, 21-23 June 2016,
València, Spain

Promoting change: professional development to support pedagogic change in sessional teaching staff

Jennifer Banks*

UTS:Insearch, 187 Thomas St Haymarket, Sydney 2000 Australia

Abstract

The use of sessional academic staff, contracted semester by semester, has become a characteristic of the Higher Education landscape across the world, and it can be argued that this type of employment, in itself, disadvantages staff in taking up formal and informal professional development. Academic staff employed on a sessional basis often have extensive experience in teaching and bring with them practices and approaches they believe are 'tried and true', and, depending on their career stage, their enthusiasm and willingness to interrogate their own practice and adopt changes to their pedagogy may be low. When UTS:Insearch sought to introduce a new pedagogic approach to deliver content to students it was discovered that, in addition to developing changes aimed at students, implementation of a new professional development model that addressed the issues surrounding the sessional nature of our academic staff's employment, their career stage, and their beliefs and values of teaching was required. This model is teacher centred and directed, uses student progress as evidence of efficacy of new approaches and actively supports and encourages involvement in professional development activities. While the program is still in its infancy, early indicators are that the approach is, albeit slowly, achieving its aims.

© 2016 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of HEAd'16

Keywords: professionalism; development; pedagogy; change; sessional staff.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +61-292-188-734.
E-mail address: jennifer.banks@insearch.edu.au

1. Introduction

Like most Higher Education institutions in Australia, UTS:Insearch relies on sessional academic staff to deliver its programs to students. These teachers work on semester by semester contracts, and the amount of work they receive in any given semester is dependent on operational needs. Some teachers work exclusively at UTS:Insearch, while others undertake additional work at other institutions or within their own professional practice areas. This arrangement between an educational institution and teaching staff is not unusual and has increasingly become a characteristic of the Higher Education landscape worldwide. It is also viewed as contributing to a “deconstruction of academic professionalism” (Marginson in Courtney 2013) that leaves sessional academic staff disadvantaged in taking up formal and informal professional development opportunities (Courtney 2013).

In 2013 UTS:Insearch identified the need to embed technology enhanced delivery of content to students, and a crucial starting point for this project, which commenced in 2014, was the creation of a technologically innovative teaching culture amongst academic staff. Strategies were adopted to encourage them to learn about this more student-centred approach that was hoped would better and more ‘naturally’ embed technology enhanced learning strategies that engage students, and staff, enhance our students’ learning experience and more authentically prepare them for future study and work. While this was largely successful, this shift in approach was more the result of Subject Coordinators, who have responsibility for the day-to-day management of subjects, adopting the approaches and incorporating them into lesson plans. While paid professional development activities to support these approaches were a regular feature these appeared to be ‘tick the box’ activities for many of the academic staff who attended, with little or no evidence incorporation of new strategies into their face-to-face work with students.

The challenge being faced in developing better professional development opportunities for staff are the competing needs of the organisation to implement new teaching strategies and approaches to content delivery, and the priorities sessional teaching staff place on professional development. The average age of teachers at UTS:Insearch is 47 years, with the average length of time worked at the organisation being eight years, in addition to previous teaching other organisations. For many of these teachers, work at UTS:Insearch falls towards the end of their teaching careers where some are unmotivated to learn new approaches. This is additionally compounded by the unpredictable nature of the teachers’ sessional employment which can create a tendency for some to feel there is little personal gain in modifying habitual practices or adopting new pedagogic practices.

2. Understanding the complexities

Understanding how to best situate an approach to professional development activities required understanding both our staff’s reluctance to take on new approaches to their practice, and their reluctance to engage with new technologies. Our initial approach was to use Huberman’s framework of teacher career development, however it was also important to understand the basic beliefs that may be driving teacher change, or reluctance to change, in relation to their practice and the uptake of new technologies. These understandings are important in framing the provision of future professional development opportunities for staff that support the innovative teaching culture the institution has sought to create.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1107127>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1107127>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)