The Practitioner's Model: Designing a Professional Development Program for Online Teaching

DEEBI WEAVER AND DIANE ROBBIE
Swinburne University of Technology, Australia
dweaver@swin.edu.au
drobbie@swin.edu.au

ROSEMARY BORLAND
Deakin University, Australia
rosemary.borland@deakin.edu.au

This article describes the experiences of staff responsible for developing and delivering professional development (PD) in online teaching in three universities in the same Australian state. Each university draws on a similar pool of staff and students, and operates under the same government regulations, but has used different models of policy and resourcing to implement their PD program. The implications of this are discussed, and a model for an “ideal” implementation presented.

The last decade has seen enormous growth in the use, scope, and extent of online teaching and learning in higher education. Claims that information and communication technologies (ICT) could enhance high quality education and reduce costs has engendered enthusiasm in industry and universities in the uptake of these technologies, and the demands of flexible learning have led to the implementation of a variety of Learning Management Systems (LMSs) in the higher education sector. As a result, the nature of education and the role of the academic teacher in this additional teaching and learning environment have changed, and are continuing to change.

Online learning has become one of the biggest opportunities and challenges that universities are currently facing but, frequently, greater emphasis is placed on the development of content and on perceived administrative efficiencies than on the educational strategies being employed online. As Prendergast (2004) argued: “Too often considerations about information technology have become the dominant factors in many strategies adopted by academic institu-
tions. This has resulted in a rich information technological environment that fails to capture, motivate or retain the learners” (Prendergast, 2004, p. 2).

The current changes in higher education are placing increasing demands on academic staff in their ability to deal with the rapid developments and implementations of ICT. The use of these new technologies for teaching requires the development and use of a wide range of skills, both technological and pedagogical, often beyond the existing skills of many academic staff, and can be a frightening prospect for many (Alexander & McKenzie, 1998). Bates (2000) commented that supporting teaching staff to alter their teaching approaches to fit a nonlinear, flexible environment: “…is not something that can easily be picked up along the way as something to be done off the side of the desk while engaged in important or time-consuming activities such as research” (p. 98).

Brabazon (2002) described the increasing demands on academic staff using the internet for education as changing roles and expectations, involvement in the administration, management and design of online courses, capacity to provide flexibility and excellence in teaching, expectation to learn new computer skills, and understanding and awareness of teaching and learning online. Brabazon (2002), along with others, is skeptical, believing that the focus on content delivery and the belief that access to technologies will invariably improve the educational quality, “teachers and teaching are being challenged and undermined through the internet. Learning is not technologically dependent. It is reliant on commitment, interest and passion” (p. 17).

Introduction of LMSs is rapidly changing the conventional teaching context and moving it towards a more student-centred model, and, with this shift, academic staff are being encouraged to rethink their methods of teaching and to understand more about how students learn (Biggs, 1999). Biggs recommended that academic staff be encouraged to immerse themselves in the “scholarship of teaching.” Changes of program flexibility offered through the use of technologies is encouraged, however much of the traditional teaching practices are being replicated online without full consideration of the benefits that technologies can offer (Bates, 2000).

While many academics have worked independently within the university framework in their subject’s curriculum, they now have to seek assistance from experts, not necessarily in their discipline, to improve the quality of the learning experiences of their students, or if working independently, can no longer be just content experts, but also designers and developers.

**Approaches to Academic Development**

Centrally established units, providing educational expertise to academic staff, have been created in many universities to implement the teaching and learning needs of the institution. These units provide access to a range of skills, including staff developers, educational developers, instructional design-
ers, project managers, technical support, programmers, and media developers.

University-wide professional development (PD) programs are planned by these central units to prepare and equip teaching staff to operate effectively in the new teaching environments. Some PD options include generalized group workshops followed by individual support, personnel and expertise for discipline-based PD, or team support through identified projects. Working in teams and seeking expertise from a range of people on matters related to their teaching is a major cultural change in the historical teaching practice of many academic staff. The introduction of ICT and the involvement of others in a team approach exposes the academic teacher to new skills, understandings, roles, and methods of working. Not only are they discovering the technologies available to them, but also learning about project management, copyright laws, intellectual property laws, educational design, organisation of the technological infrastructure within the institution, understanding of the students’ learning experiences, student orientation and induction, and helpdesk support. While some of these demands and challenges are outside the control of the individual teacher, working as part of a team and being provided with opportunities to attend a variety of PD programs and participate in project teams can help ease the transition in the changing teaching and learning environment (Kenny & McNaught, 2000).

Teaching with technology requires a skill level that necessitates not only the technological training, but importantly, educational practice. The demands arising from new ways of teaching and the changes in organisational culture can be mediated through a project management approach, however the role of the academic can be challenged in this process, as a tension exists between a collaborative team approach and the traditionally autonomous nature of an academic teacher’s work regime (Bates, 2000; Kenny, 2004; Steel, 2004).

Each of the authors are employed in central units offering PD in e-teaching, at three major universities in Melbourne, Australia. The three institutions operate under the same government legislation, and attract students from a similar diverse population. However, each institution has implemented different organisational and educational models for delivering PD in this field, each with its own successes and challenges. This article describes the different models implemented, and proposes our ideal model, from the point of view of the academic developers themselves.

**INSTITUTIONAL EXPERIENCES**

**Monash University**

*Background.* Monash University (http://www.monash.edu.au) is Australia’s largest university, with over 50,000 students and 5,000 staff, spread over eight campuses on three continents, and with a strong history of both face-
to-face and distance education. During 2001-2002, Monash adopted WebCT as its centrally supported Learning Management System (LMS). One faculty had previously been using WebCT, but other faculties had used little online teaching. Monash did not pursue an institutional policy of compulsory online learning component for every unit taught, although this strategy was implemented in some schools within the University. Rather, it was left to individual academic teachers to choose whether to implement e-learning for all or part of their teaching. The original hope was that student demand would drive the uptake of online teaching.

The Centre for Learning and Teaching Support (CeLTS) was given the brief of developing and providing support for both staff and students across the institution. This included provision of staff training and professional development, education design services, and a fully staffed helpdesk.

**Model of professional development.** Staff training was deliberately located in the Higher Education Development Unit (the Academic Development unit within CeLTS), so as to embed the pedagogy within the technical training, and training was delivered by academic staff, to add credibility to the pedagogical advice. The PD program was developed as an optional program of up to six face-to-face workshops in a computer laboratory, supplemented by printed and online resources (Weaver, 2006). Academic developers offered follow-up consultations or project involvement to small groups across the institution, and provided one-on-one consultations to many staff in areas where no additional local support was available. The academic developers also sought membership of faculty and school e-Learning committees, in order to provide input to policy decisions in this area.

The Higher Education Development Unit also delivered a Graduate Certificate in Higher Education, compulsory for all academic teaching staff at Monash, but this program focused on on-campus teaching, so did not include off-campus (distance education) or online teaching.

**Challenges arising from the professional development strategy.** As inclusion of online learning components was optional for most teaching staff, attendance at face-to-face training was also optional, even for those staff who did choose to implement an online component. The implications of this were that, generally, only those genuinely interested in online teaching attended the full training program, so the workshops themselves included much discussion of pedagogical issues and were highly engaging for the participants. The academic developers themselves were perceived as knowledge experts in the area of online teaching, and advice was frequently sought on educational strategies and for assistance with innovative projects. However, since many teaching staff chose not to attend the training program, relying instead on discovering how to use the technology by themselves or,
more often, leaving the development to administrative or local technical staff, it soon became apparent that there were large variations in the quality of the design and level of engagement in the online sites developed (Weaver, Nair, & Spratt, 2005). No systematic evaluation of the quality of online sites has been implemented across the entire institution, and although this has been attempted within some faculties and schools, the evaluation frequently focuses on technical issues and student satisfaction ratings, rather than education strategies or learning outcomes.

Subsequent developments. During 2005, a change in senior management and subsequent restructure resulted in the closure of CeLTS, and the delegation to faculties of most support associated with teaching. A replacement but much smaller Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT) will continue to deliver the Graduate Certificate in Higher Education, and to provide on ongoing staff and student helpdesk for online learning. All academic support for online teaching, including PD, has been devolved to faculties, but with no additional funding to support this.

Deakin University

Background. Deakin University (http://www.deakin.edu.au) is one of Australia's largest universities, with more than 32,000 students and over 2,500 staff, spread across five campuses (two in metropolitan Melbourne and three in Victorian country areas), and more than 12,000 students studying externally.

In 2002 WebCT Vista was selected for use across the entire institution, with a pilot study undertaken in 2003. Previously a range of online learning systems and delivery options had been in use in different faculties and schools, including earlier versions of WebCT, other LMS products, and standard web delivery. With the implementation of WebCT Vista, Deakin also launched Deakin Studies Online (DSO) as the central online learning and teaching environment. DSO uses a range of additional technologies to support all online teaching and learning.

During planning for the implementation of WebCT Vista and DSO, it was decided that all units would have at least a basic online presence. Three levels of online teaching were identified, to assist teaching staff in developing their units:

- basic (administrative support for unit) – including information about the unit (unit guide), a discussion forum for queries, a facility to post announcements, and a statement of expectations regarding communication between students and staff;
- extended (at least one component of teaching in the unit occurs online) – all the elements of a Basic online presence together with one or more of the major teaching activities of the unit occurring online and provision of a site map indicating location of unit resources; and
• wholly online (all of the teaching of a unit occurs online) – including all teaching and administrative support, resources provided online or on CD or DVD, and unit designed to build skills in communicating and collaborating online.

An additional policy requirement was that all students would complete at least one wholly online unit during the course of their study, irrespective of their mode of enrolment (although this policy directive has since been scaled back in response to student feedback, Holt & Challis, 2007).

The full roll-out of WebCT Vista was originally planned to take place over a two-year period (over 2004-2005), however a change in policy in mid-2003 required every undergraduate unit taught at Deakin to have at least a Basic online presence by the start of the 2004 teaching year. This required a rapid uptake by staff, with only six months available to train 1500 staff and develop 2700 online units. A mammoth effort achieved this target, with over 60% of units achieving an Extended Online presence. There has since been ongoing growth in the number of units with Extended and Wholly Online presences, as well as increased adoption of individual online approaches and tools, as staff have become more familiar with the online environment and aware of the features they can use.

Model of professional development. A staff training program was mostly provided centrally by Education Developers from the Teaching and Learning Support Unit (now the Institute of Teaching and Learning). Some faculties also provided additional or complementary training to staff. The central support group was also responsible for Help Desk and development of support resources.

During the implementation and migration of units in 2003, introductory half-day workshops, customised for each faculty, were provided, along with a limited number of specialist workshops, designed to assist with migration from other systems and focusing on the key tasks of communicating and managing online content. Because the move to online teaching was mandated, attendance at the workshops was often seen as “required” rather than “desired” by the participants. There was a perception that the focus on the steps required to use the system was “technical” training rather than academic professional development, despite attempts to embed pedagogy with the practical “how to”.

In late 2003 and 2004 a generic workshop program covering seven topics in two-hour face-to-face workshops was offered. These were run as part of a scheduled program of Academic Professional Development, but were also packaged for particular faculty, school or program groups. The topics covered included communication and collaboration, online assessment, and effective class management. These workshops were run in conjunction with the wider Academic Professional Development program, including a Grad-
Graduate Certificate in Higher Education, an Online Teaching and Learning Fellowship program, and an annual Deakin Teaching and Learning Conference. Complementary strategies to support online teaching were also implemented, including additional support for redeveloping units, funding for development of wholly online units, production of an exemplar site, and establishment of forums focusing on uses of DSO and local users’ groups.

Early feedback from students collected during the first year of implementation (Deakin University, 2004) indicated that students valued the flexibility and ease of use of the online mode of delivery, the consistency of unit design, the ability to submit work online, and the feedback from, and availability of, teaching staff online. Staff responses commonly requested more local on call, one-to-one support, and more support resources available (many staff were unaware of existing resources).

**Challenges arising from the professional development strategy.** Two major issues arose during the early implementation of the professional development program. First, participation in staff training was compulsory (as was the implementation of online teaching), rather than a choice made by the academic teaching staff. Many were unprepared for this move, and consequently disgruntled about being forced into a teaching mode in which they didn’t feel comfortable.

Secondly, the workshop facilitators from the Teaching and Learning Support Unit were not employed as academic staff (although all did have academic degrees), so there was a perception among some staff that they weren’t qualified to provide advice on teaching matters. The workshops were seen as primarily “technical” training; instead of a professional development program. This concept was reinforced by the content of the early workshops which focused on technical knowledge.

These two factors, together with the short time-frame of implementation (due to a policy change by senior management) resulted in highly negative feelings sometimes being articulated during face-to-face workshops, and contributed to increasing the already-high stress levels of the facilitators.

In addition, the usual pressures of finding convenient times to suit academic staff and expecting all staff to fit into a generic workshop model also existed. The short timeframes meant that there was little time for providing one-on-one support, and there was no time or resources to develop a more flexible professional development program to suit a range of learning styles.

These issues have been addressed in subsequent programs. However, as these programs aren’t compulsory, many of the staff who participated in the early professional development program may not have participated in any of these programs and may not be aware of the change in emphasis.

This became apparent when more recent workshops were conducted to introduce the features of a new version of WebCT (Vista 4) to Deakin staff.
in late 2006 and early 2007. Many staff attended these workshops who had previously attended an introductory workshop in 2003. In the ensuing three years they had not extended their skills but were keen to learn more about what they could do in line with the upgrade to the new version.

**Swinburne University**

**Background.** Swinburne University of Technology (http://www.swinburne.edu.au) is a multi-sectoral university (covering both higher education and technical education) with six campuses in eastern and outer eastern Melbourne and one campus in Sarawak Malaysia.

In 1999, a central Learning and Teaching Support (LTS, since renamed Academic Development & Support) unit was established with a team of academics, developers, and production staff in response to the university-wide higher education division’s Flexible Learning and Teaching Strategic Development Plan of 2000-2003, which required implementation of flexible and learner-centered educational choices. Six education development advisors (EDAs) were appointed as academic staff to LTS during 2000 and 2001, with their role to provide educational advice to enable pedagogical change in teaching and learning across the higher education division.

The Blackboard LMS was selected in July 2001 as the sole Swinburne platform. Sites were automatically created for every subject with an enrollment of 10 or more students (whether these would be utilised or not). The EDAs provided the technical skills training and PD for academic staff while the Help Desk provided staff and student technical support.

**Model of professional development.** During the first two to three years, extensive training workshops were provided at all campuses as both university-wide generic workshops and also as customised campus or faculty-based workshops. These were mainly hands-on training sessions in computer laboratories, and required staff to use the LMS tools and be able immediately to commence development in their subjects. Further sessions on the communications and assessment tools or other advanced features were offered during semester, alongside PD workshops focused on pedagogically sound practice in the implementation of technology in teaching.

Participation in skills training and PD workshops was not compulsory and, unless it was actively promoted by the faculty, sessions were often poorly attended. Customised faculty-based PD that was strongly promoted within the faculty was better attended and encouraged all academic teachers, including sessional staff, to become active online teachers.

Other formal PD options included the Graduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (introduced in 2003) and faculty-based Learning and Teaching Projects involving the development of innovative learning and teaching practices. More formal PD was offered in a variety of
modes including face-to-face, online and videoconference, supplemented by online and printed resources.

**Challenges arising from the professional development strategy.** Throughout the initial implementation, feedback from staff was predominately negative, revealing dissatisfaction in academic staff PD (mainly due to the top-down approach applied to the implementation of the LMS), the focus, timing, and method of PD offered centrally, major ongoing technological problems and system failures, and the continual need to learn new LMS features due to system upgrades. Other issues included fears of technology, additional workload, time commitment, and administrative and organisational roles required in the online environment as well as understanding pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning online. The EDAs became the main conduit between the LMS administration and the faculty, and as such, took responsibility for and accepted some of the burden experienced by the teaching staff. While this did not directly affect the working relationships, it was imperative that positive relationship building was paramount and placed pressure on these people to address issues, modify approaches, and provide a range of PD opportunities to meet the various needs of staff.

As the stability of the LMS improved, more focus could be applied to discipline-specific pedagogical change involving curriculum renewal and development. EDAs become more involved in faculty learning and teaching committees and were able to encourage improvement in the quality of design, development, and online delivery. Student feedback assisted in guiding PD opportunities within faculties. Academic staff were surveyed for the first time in 2005 on their use, needs, and expectations of the LMS. There has been no formal review of the quality of online learning and use of Blackboard subjects for teaching and learning.

Since 2005, the LTS unit has taken on a more integrated and coordinated approach to PD, which aims to better assist in advising and supporting academics improve the quality of their online learning and teaching environments. In the last two years there has been a strategic and obvious shift in EDA roles away from technical training to pedagogical enhancement.

**DISCUSSION**

Based on their personal experiences “at the coal-face” of developing and delivering professional development (PD) in online teaching, the authors suggest there are three key elements to a successful institution-wide implementation of a PD:

- full support of the institution/senior management, at the policy level;
- PD is delivered by staff with recognised expertise and credibility in online teaching (preferably appointed as academic staff members), and
• a wide-ranging professional development program (including flexibility and transferability in timing of PD, type of PD, resources, etc).

We do not claim that these are the only elements of a successful PD implementation – this area is in a phase of such rapid change that new needs and opportunities are arising faster than higher education institutions can identify and develop means to address them. However, we believe that these three key areas are broad enough to address the challenges we have witnessed arising within our own institutions. Each of these elements is discussed next with reference to the experiences at the authors’ institutions.

**Institutional Support**

Top priority is the full and ongoing support of senior management. If the senior management doesn’t fully back online teaching, then neither will Deans or Heads of schools, and only those academic staff with an intrinsic interest in innovative use of educational technology will be motivated enough to adopt this. There is a danger that early adopters may become marginalised or isolated within their discipline areas, or may find they are under pressure to take on more of their colleagues’ online teaching.

Similarly if changes in senior management result in changes in policy (as happened at both Monash and Deakin, albeit in different policy directions), carefully planned implementation and professional development programs are not able to be delivered, or existing programs and staff expertise are lost to the institution. Both can result in highly negative feelings amongst the academic staff.

Full support by senior management means that proficiency in online teaching (indeed, in all teaching) is a desired attribute of all academic teaching staff, and hence becomes part of the performance management and academic promotion processes.

Should online teaching (or at least a component of teaching online) be compulsory? The authors believe the three-tier system developed by Deakin (Holt & Challis, 2007) to be a sound one, where every unit taught is required to include at least a basic component of online teaching, with strong encouragement (including support and incentives) to develop this further. If an online component is mandated, we also recommend that some form of professional achievement should be demonstrated by academic staff prior to commencing their online teaching – this might include completion of a face-to-face workshop program, but should not be limited to this. Many early adopters are self-taught (Wilson & Stacey, 2004), and should be provided with the opportunity to demonstrate that their existing proficiency is sufficient, rather than forcing attendance at an unnecessary program. Similarly, completion of online tutorials, or participation in an ongoing professional development program (whether face-to-face or online) should also suffice.

The challenge in this model is ensuring that academic staff with little
expertise in online teaching are encouraged, rather than forced, to undertake some form of professional development (Weaver, 2006). This raises the issue of who has responsibility for ensuring appropriate PD is completed. While it is easy to suggest the responsibility for seeking professional development should lie with the individual academic, this is impractical for new staff members, who may be struggling just to get access to essential services, and presupposes forward planning of allocating teaching responsibilities. However, despite the best intentions of Department and School heads, the situation often arises that teaching staff are appointed or given additional teaching responsibilities after the beginning of the teaching year, meaning that prior PD is impossible. In any case, some staff will always need additional support, regardless of the level of professional development required by the institution. We recommend that responsibility should lie with the Course Coordinator (or similar role) within the Department or School, who is in a position of assessing the level of PD required, ensuring adequate PD is available at suitable times, and that this is then completed by the individual staff member.

**Professional Development Staff**

All three institutions discussed in this article implemented different models of staffing their PD programs for online teaching, although each institution ended up developing and delivering similar programs. The experience of the authors suggests that it is imperative for the staff developers to be perceived and respected as knowledge experts in their discipline. It is very difficult to achieve this without appointing these staff members as full academic staff – despite this meaning little to the actual skills and expertise of the staff members involved. The perception of these developers by the teaching academic staff can have a major impact on how the advice and support offered is viewed, and whether any of this advice is actually implemented.

We have all experienced examples of academic staff expressing disdain for others telling them how to teach their own discipline, not surprisingly given the tradition of higher education teaching being a solitary and noncollaborative exercise (Kandlbinder, 2000). Similar experiences have been reported by Gray and Radlof (2006):

> Relationships with our stakeholders have been varied and often ambivalent with regard to the focus and value of our work. Sometimes we were expected to take leadership and responsibility for the quality of student learning. At other times, we were sought out as consultants and advisors. And at other times again, we were ignored and bypassed, and our contributions were rendered invisible. (p. 87)

This is partly alleviated if the skills and expertise of the staff developer are seen to be valued by the institution. Strong public support by the institu-

Designing a Professional Development Program for Online Teaching 769
tion is an essential component of a successful PD program, especially when this is embedded at the policy level.

The Professional Development Program

The experience of all three institutions (and others nationally – see O’Reilly, Ellis & Newton, 2000, and internationally – see Sorcinelli et al, 2006 and Land 2004) in designing a professional development program in online teaching has been similar, in that no one program will suit everyone. Our target audience (i.e., academic staff) come from a wide range of disciplines, are at different stages in their careers, and like all learners, employ a range of learning styles and strategies.

Accordingly, each institution has, over time, found it necessary to develop a range of professional development choices for their staff, including some or all of the components listed in Table 1. In this table, PD components are roughly categorized according to their applicability to different staff cohorts, rather than prioritised for the general university audience.

Our common experiences are that the wide range of PD components is necessary to not only provide appropriate PD for our diverse range of teaching academics (no one model will suit everyone; Wilson & Stacey, 2004), but is also necessary to provide different opportunities for building relationships between the academic developer and the teaching staff. These personal relationships allow the academic developer to be viewed as a trusted colleague and associate, working towards a common goal, rather than perceived as an external influence or the promulgator of institutional mandates or an “institutional change agent.” This facilitates opportunities for informal staff development (in the form of corridor conversations, chats over coffee, etc.), which can be more effective in achieving transformation of teaching philosophies than more formal events.

How does an academic developer become a trusted colleague? No one strategy will suit all situations, and will depend on the personality and work circumstances of both the academic developer and the individual teaching staff. We have found the most successful strategies include (but are not limited to):

- acknowledging the discipline knowledge of the academic;
- acknowledging and understanding the stress of the working environment;
- encouraging (but not being evangelical about) the uptake of educational technology;
- being diplomatic when suggesting possible changes or improvements;
- encouraging “baby-steps” (i.e., adopt online teaching in stages, allowing for familiarization of the technology & challenges at each stage);
- encouraging evaluation of changes made and recognition of achievements; and
• encouraging the promotion of staff teaching innovations.

Above all, academic developers need to actively promote themselves as possessing these traits, as well as credible experts in the online teaching, and available as empathetic, trustworthy, non-judgmental partners in collaborative ventures.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR THE INSTITUTION**

The authors’ experiences suggest that institutions need to consider their approach to supporting online teaching carefully if they hope to achieve the best practice teaching standards to which they all claim to aspire. Continual changes in policy directions and in provision (or otherwise) of centralised
support structures are impeding the achievement of best practice, by isolating the innovators, and frustrating all online teachers.

If institutions do decide to fully support online education, then they must convey this support to staff (in the form of recognising online teaching as an innovative and rewarding practice) and in providing flexible and academically-rigorous professional development delivered by experienced and empathetic academic developers.

We agree with Hannan (2005), “…innovating can be a rewarding experience, but that this is unlikely to be so unless the institutions concerned make such efforts to enhance the learning of their students a high priority and back this in practice as well as in their rhetoric” (p. 984).

**CONCLUSION**

The authors have drawn from their personal experience in designing and delivering PD during the implementation phases of an institution-wide Learning Management System to present a practitioner’s model for professional development in online teaching. Three critical components for a successful institution-wide professional development (PD) program are identified:

- full and open support of the institution;
- PD is delivered by supportive staff with recognised expertise and credibility in online teaching; and
- a flexible and varied PD program.

As most other institutions have also found, a flexible PD program is necessary to accommodate the widely differing needs of our academic staff population, requiring adequate resourcing for the development and delivery of the different components. But, no one model will fit all situations: “Academic development should be contextualized not only as a university-wide process, but also as a local practice and as a process of peer learning in the workplace” (Boud, 1999, p. 3).

It is vital that the leaders in institution-wide areas of academic or policy development complement each other in the promotion of initiatives and directions. Continual changes in policy and direction seem to be endemic in the modern higher education institution. Local changes (for example, changes in senior management or changes in the strategic directions of the institution), or the implementation of national initiatives (for example, the implementation of the Carrick Institute in Australia, designed to promote and fund teaching improvements, has led to competition both between institutions but also within institutions) resulting in instability and anxiety for all members of the institution, but particularly for those who are perceived as the conduits between the strategic directions of the institution and the teaching academics who are required to implement these. The academic staff developers
must be adaptive and receptive to change in order to help successfully implement policies with colleagues. It is crucial that the expertise of these staff is recognised and they are seen to be strongly supported by the institution.

While valued individually through their relationships with academics, often the role of academic developer is perceived to be more about achieving strategic policy goals than improving teaching practice. In 2001, Gosling affirmed that, “Educational development is recognized as having a significant impact on achieving organizational change to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing HE environment, especially in evaluating and developing the use of IT in learning and teaching” (p. 88).

However, as educational developers, the authors acknowledge that, although there are significant issues surrounding their role, their primary goal is to continue to promote and encourage professional development as an intrinsic part of academic work.

References


Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge the contribution of Alice King (formerly of Deakin University, Australia) for advice and consultation.