

Chapter 17

Demonstrating Positive, Learner–Centred Assessment Practice in Professional Development Programmes

Patrick Baughan
City University London, UK

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the role that professional development programmes for higher education lecturers and teachers can play in promoting positive, learner-centred assessment practice. Whilst they vary in their coverage, these programmes address a broad range of teaching, learning and other pedagogical issues, and almost all include assessment and good assessment practice as a key component of their curriculum. Therefore, this chapter is used to explain and argue that professional development programmes can and should have a key and distinctive role in developing and sharing innovative assessment practice. The argument is supported by drawing on series of seven principles and ideas, as well as a single-institution case study. Points and arguments are also supported with a range of theory, literature and examples, as well as the experience of the author in working on one programme of this type.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

This chapter examines the role that professional development programmes for higher education lecturers and teachers can play in promoting and sharing positive, learner-centred assessment practice. Significant attention has been given to the importance of assessment as a key issue in the student learning process (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; The Higher Education Academy, 2012; Sambell, McDowell & Montgomery, 2013) and it is in this capacity that these programmes can play a major role. They also provide an excellent opportunity to distil the considerable and bewildering literature and advice on good assessment

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practice to lecturers and teachers who may themselves be early in their careers and lack experience of what good assessment 'is' or who devise assessments on the basis of their earlier experiences of *being* assessed. By introducing participants to assessment issues in professional development programmes, they are more likely to take greater account of them in undertaking their own teaching, assessment and course design, and therefore, devise better assessment tasks for their own learners.

In this chapter, the author will present a number of guiding principles about learner-centred assessment practice for inclusion in professional development programmes, followed by a single-institution case study. The chapter will draw on a mixture of theory, literature and case study examples, will offer guidelines to a range of practitioners, and will show how the use of good assessment procedures and methods can make genuine and deep contributions to the student learning process. The central discussion will be supported through a 'multi-tier' approach: first, by way of a discussion of selected literature about assessment and assessment practice; second, through an examination of a number of key assessment principles which, it is argued, could form a valuable part of teaching *about* assessment; and, third, by reference to the author's experience of teaching and facilitating discussion and innovation about assessment issues as part of one professional development programme. It should be pointed out that although the author works in a UK university, the themes and arguments in this piece are aimed towards an international audience.

First, however, some more detailed background about professional development programmes will be offered.

In general, these are postgraduate programmes provided primarily for higher education staff in lecturing or teaching roles, or who are about to begin work in such a role; put more simply, they are programmes for staff involved in the teaching or facilitation of other students. They attract participants from many different backgrounds (Butcher & Stoncel, 2012) and are focused on teaching and good academic practice in higher education, sometimes addressing more general issues about the study of higher education. Although their curricula vary, they tend to encompass a broad range of teaching, learning and other pedagogical issues such as curriculum design, assessment and feedback, student support and technology enhanced learning. Some include research-based content, enabling learners to undertake small-scale academic practice or higher education research themselves; some introduce newer or more 'niche' areas such as sustainability in the curriculum. Programmes are normally module based and undertaken part-time, and comprise coursework or other assessments leading to a qualification similar to 'conventional' or student-based programmes of study. Conventionally, participants may choose one from a number of qualifications depending on the modules and credits they undertake. For example, qualifications may be awarded at the levels of postgraduate certificate, postgraduate diploma and, at some institutions (such as the author's home institution), at MA level. In recent years, programmes of this type have become more popular around the world (Trigwell, Rodriguez and Han 2012) and are a feature of many, though not all, higher education systems.

Professional development programmes are often managed and run by educational development staff. Educational development (sometimes referred to as academic development or faculty development in different contexts) '...focuses on enhancing teaching and learning, promoting high quality teaching through academic programmes and seminars, and supporting staff in areas of pedagogy' (Baughan, 2015, p. 3). However, in some institutions they may be coordinated through different departments or sections, or other members of faculty might also be involved in programme management or teaching. For instance, teaching may be undertaken by lecturers based in other organisations or departments (Cilliers

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