Chapter 1
Perceptions and Approaches to Teaching of Award-Winning Teachers at Research Intensive Universities Internationally

Diane J. Salter
Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Canada

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter provides an overview of a research project conducted with award-winning teachers at research-intensive universities to investigate a number of areas including approaches to teaching and learning and the use of technology in teaching, as well as views on staff development to enhance teaching quality and the recognition of teaching in promotion and tenure. In an analysis of data, the predominant approach taken by the award-winning teachers in this study was an approach that has been described as a conceptual change/student-focused approach to teaching versus an information transmission/teacher-focused approach. The former approach is consistent with students taking a deeper approach to learning. It was also found that the use of technology in teaching in this group of award-winning teachers extended beyond content delivery to provide opportunities for active pre, post, and in class learning. Examples of how technology affordances were used is provided. In addition, their views and suggestions on staff development programs and the research/teaching nexus are discussed.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-3661-3.ch001

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Academic Beliefs about, and Approaches to, Learning and Teaching

Many studies have explored how teachers' practice is influenced by their beliefs about teaching. Dunkin and Precians conducted one of the earliest studies about the beliefs of award-winning teachers (Dunkin & Precians, 1992) at the University of Sydney. In this study, award-winning teachers were interviewed to tap into their conceptual repertoires regarding teaching effectiveness and evaluation of teaching. Other studies related to examining good teaching practice have explored issues such as teachers' experiences of academic leadership and their approaches to teaching (Ramsden, et al., 2007) and academics' conceptions of science learning and teaching (Prosser, et al., 1994). A review of 13 articles about the conceptions of teaching of university academics argued that conceptions of teaching and teaching approaches are strongly influenced by the teacher's underlying beliefs, and that these beliefs must be taken into account if measures to enhance the quality of teaching are to be effective (Kember, 1998). Award-winning teachers' beliefs about teaching and their strategies for teaching were investigated further through eighteen interviews with award-winning teachers at the Chinese University of Hong Kong that explored beliefs about excellent teaching as well as the rationales given by award-winning teachers for their choice of instructional strategies (Kember, et al., 2006).

The current study built upon existing literature to explore cross-disciplinary and international differences in beliefs and approaches to teaching in general as well as to specifically investigate how technology was used in the learning environment. In previous studies of approaches to teaching, two qualitatively different approaches have been identified that may be categorized as being either 'student focused' (focused on changing students conceptions of the material being studied or 'teacher-focused' (focused on the content of the material to be learned and subsequent transmission of information) (Trigwell et al., 1994). Adoption of a more student-focused approach to teaching has been linked to the improvement of students' learning outcomes (Hanbury et al., 2008). The student-centred approach has been described as one that fosters meaningful learning rather than learning for replication of information. However, the nature of some disciplines may lend themselves to more of a 'transmission of information/content focused' approach and yet still result in success in attaining learning outcomes. The model of teaching and learning developed by Michael Prosser and Keith Trigwell, and consistent with the student-centred/conceptual change model, is described in chapter 2.