

How do you know I've changed? Assessing changes in thinking

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It is often difficult to assess the change in thinking that comes about through the completion of a study program. This applies as much to academic development programs as it does to university courses. Once participants (whether academics or students) have completed a program, filled out the inevitable evaluation survey and left the communal space (whether physical or virtual), how does the teacher know what changes have occurred in the participants' individual practice and learning behaviour? This workshop addresses the conference theme of 'assessment for sustainable learning within and beyond the course', as the nature of change desired of academics after an academic development program strongly resembles that desired of students over their program of study. The aim of an academic development program is to bring about a change in the way teaching is conceived (which resembles the desired change in the way learning is perceived). This develops participants' ways of behaving and thinking to become more considered, reflective and thoughtful than they were before the intervention – thereby promoting continued or lifelong learning. This approach attempts to move the centre of attention away from "the assessors" and into "the hands of the learners" (Boud, 2000, p. 151). In this workshop, the facilitator offers various activities and provocations that challenge participants to question their conceptions of learning and teaching. Examples of reflections that attempt to measure and assess the degree to which this type of activity improves teaching and learning outcomes will be provided. A range of activities including self-appraisal, peer assessment processes and collegial exercises will be discussed and exemplified. Participants will be welcome to share their experiences and benefit from the synergy between the use of these activities with academic staff and their use with students.

Keywords: academic development; impact; reflection; sustainable learning

Theme: assessment for sustainable learning within and beyond the course

Objective

This workshop will engage participants in group activities and provocations that demonstrate how changes in thinking can be assessed.

It is often difficult to assess the change in thinking that comes about through the completion of a study program. Once participants – whether academic staff or students – have completed a program and the inevitable evaluation survey and left the communal space (whether a physical or virtual location), how do you know what changes have occurred in their individual practice or considerations of teaching, or to what degree they might enhance student learning?

This significant struggle to identify and measure the impact of academic development programs has been addressed recently in the Preparing Academics to Teach in Higher Education project funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (Luzecy & Badger, 2009) and commented on in the literature review for that project. Research studies on the outcomes of academic development programs (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Ho et al., 2001; Stes et al., 2007) have asserted that there can be improvements in teaching practice and student learning. However, these investigations offer the best indication when they take place over a period of time (of at least a year) and examine multiple variables – changes in student learning outcomes, teaching conceptions of teaching and improvements in teachers' skills.

Workshop format

This workshop will address the conference theme of assessment for sustainable learning with respect to the nature of change being sought in a participating academic after an academic development program, which strongly resembles the nature of change in learning desired of students over their program of study. The aim is to bring about a change in the way teaching is conceived (which resembles the desired change in how learning is perceived), and therefore to develop the individual's ways of behaving and thinking to become more considered, reflective and thoughtful than they were before the intervention. This attempts to move the centre of attention away from "the assessors" and into "the hands of the learners" (Boud, 2000, p. 151).

These conceptual and behavioural changes begin with the various activities that are experienced in the academic development program (or in the initial interactions with students). The challenge for both academic developers and academics is to recognise and track these changes to determine whether they are relayed into practice in the context of everyday learning/teaching beyond the program. A further challenge is to determine whether these changes are incorporated as an integral part of the individual academics' (or learners') ongoing learning/improvement cycle.

This puts the focus clearly on longer-term investigation, the need to follow up participants (both academics and students) and obtain their view of what was useful or valuable in changing their conceptions and in motivating them to put new ideas and considerations into practice.

In this workshop we will offer various provocations that challenge academics to question their conceptions of teaching/learning and examples of reflections that attempt to measure/assess the degree to which this type of activity improves teaching and learning outcomes. This workshop format, consisting of an introductory section and three related activities, has been successfully conducted with 40 higher degree students who are currently teaching as sessional academics. There is similarity between the intended outcomes for the participants, whether academics or students, to realise their own shortcomings and develop the awareness and ability to plan how to overcome these through specific action plans.

Workshop participants at the conference will be facilitated through a series of activities, including self-appraisal, peer-assessment processes and collegial exercises. The series includes:

- a self-appraisal exercise of approximately 10 minutes
- a peer-review exercise of approximately 10 minutes
- a small-group 'cube' exercise of approximately 15 minutes.

Participants will be welcome to share their experiences and benefit from the synergy between the use of these activities with academic staff and with students.

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