



Case Study B: First Steps: Exploring CPD Together

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Pilot Group: **HECA Teachers**

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Professional Identity Group & Context

HECA (Higher Education College's Association) comprises of fifteen private, independent, higher education providers, offering programmes at all levels of the National Framework of Qualifications, up to and including Level 10. Programmes include business, arts, law, healthcare, computing, education and more.

There were eight participants from across six HECA colleges:

- St. Nicholas Montessori: Jill McLoughlin
- Griffith College: Ciaran Ferrie
- College of Computing Technology: Charlie Dayman, Daven Dunlea, Tom Wall
- Institute of Integrative Counselling & Psychotherapy: Clair Breen
- Dublin Business School: Francesca Farina
- SQT Training: Aisling Keogh

Participants came from a range of disciplines – architecture, computer & business training, Montessori teaching, counselling & psychotherapy, industry specific training, and science. The level of experience of participants in teaching in higher education ranged from the relative novice to the expert practitioner. None of the participants had formal qualifications in Teaching & Learning.

Approach taken by professional identity group to support the implementation of the PDF

Main needs of the group

The primary needs of the group were to gain an understanding of: the Professional Development Framework; what was required of them; and most importantly how much time they were expected to dedicate to this activity. All participants felt that time was a serious concern. Some participants lectured in more than one institution. Some worked as full-time professional practitioners while teaching part-time.

Motivation of participants

Participants were highly motivated. While they were excited about being involved in the pilot study, their primary focus was to be up-to-date with what was happening in the Teaching & Learning profession and to feel confident in their teaching practice. All participants quickly realised that they enjoyed working together - sharing their experiences and learning new skills.

Support sessions

At the first meeting, two issues of concern surfaced. There was a lot of confusion about what was expected and some anxiety about how they would manage time. At that point I decided that individual hour-long meetings would be beneficial. The focus of the meetings was on gaining an understanding of the participants' work context and how they manage their professional development, explaining how



the Professional Development Framework could help them and assuring them that time spent on this pilot would be entirely their decision.

There was agreement that face to face meetings were preferable.

Meetings occurred monthly for one and a half to two hours. Between meetings, participants communicated directly with each other and I was available to answer queries through phone or email.

How/whether support changed over the duration of the pilot study

Additional support was provided by HECA Librarians who facilitated participants set up their ePortfolio in a way that was aligned with the five domains of the Professional Development Framework.

Preferred facilitation style

I recommended activities such as readings and reflection, in advance of our meetings and then facilitated participants share their findings/learning and engage in discussion. New activities were agreed in preparation for the following session. I also encouraged participants to identify resources that might be readily available to them within their own institutions. For example, support for developing an ePortfolio.

Participants' experience of the process

Attendance was very good throughout. All participants completed the assigned activities and were happy to share and learn from each other. They greatly valued the group process and felt that it was a very positive and nurturing environment where they felt safe enough to share negative as well as positive experiences. The initial sense of 'not knowing' and discomfort dissipated as time progressed.

Online media/tools used to support the group

I used the newly published HECA Handbook and Toolkit for Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Independent Higher Education Institutions in Ireland as a resource.

As participants decided to focus on Domain 1, The Self, I directed them towards Chapter 3 of the Handbook – Personal Philosophy of Teaching. Group discussion centred around topics such as reflective practice; identifying own values around what good teaching is; what might evidence of good practice look like; etc.

As participants wished to explore what an ePortfolio might look like, I recommended chapter 1 – What is a teaching Portfolio? Activities included exploring the ePortfolio hub - <http://eportfoliohub.ie> and deciding which platform they would like to use. While it was suggested that participants might use a folder or box file if they didn't feel confident about building a digital portfolio, all decided to pursue this more challenging approach, which proved frustrating and very time-consuming.

Key enablers to the approach

While apprehensive about change, knowing that they were part of a nurturing environment, created by the National Forum, helped participants feel positive. Collaborative group-work set the scene for fruitful participation. Support in developing basic skills in reflective practice enabled deeper exploration and discussion.

The HECA Handbook and Toolkit provided information, useful links and activities to trigger reflection.

Finally, the support of the HECA Librarian Group in developing an ePortfolio was greatly appreciated by participants.



Key challenges to the approach

Participants' time was a challenge. Initially participants were overwhelmed when faced with gaining an understanding of what the domains meant, choosing what to focus on, and the time-frame for completing the portfolio. The area appeared vast and participants needed to be guided until they developed confidence. Scaffolding was essential.

Suggestions for others embarking on supporting and/or undertaking the PDF

In deciding the time-frame for supporting participants engage in the PD framework, facilitators might take into consideration pressure points such as end-of-term exams. Participants needed clarity as to what was expected and took some time to become comfortable with the idea that it was their decision. Because they were novices in this area, they needed to be treated as novices with clear direction provided. Once they become confident they can then move to the next level of the advanced beginner.

Perceived impact of PDF

I feel that the potential impact on staff and institutions is enormous. There is now a far greater awareness of the importance of continuing professional development for all who teach in higher education. The conversation amongst teachers has begun and with institutional support has the potential to grow and develop. Sustainability can be achieved through communities of practice.

I do have a concern about how communities of practice (and the individual teachers within them) will be supported. Time must be created for these communities to develop and they must be funded. The teacher/practitioner (part-time teacher) could be in a vulnerable position.

I also have some concern that the basic knowledge and skills inherent in teaching and learning may not be prioritised such as – student-centred learning, how people learn, how to write learning outcomes, constructive alignment, how to devise a class plan, how to use student feedback to enhance own teaching and support student learning, and more.

Plans for continuing to support staff with the PDF

As Chair of the HECA Teaching & Learning Committee, whose mission is to promote the enhancement of teaching and learning, the plan is to support our colleagues implement the Professional Development Framework. Personally, I would like to begin by offering a National Forum Digital Badge on Reflective Practice to the HECA community.

References

Whitaker, T. (2017) A Handbook and Toolkit for Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Independent Higher Education Institutions in Ireland. Dublin: Higher Education Colleges Association. Available at: <http://www.heca.ie/conferences-resources/> (Accessed: 18/10/2017).