

TOWARDS AN ANATOMY OF ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

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What is it about?

Staff from academic development centres in all New Zealand Universities are currently engaged in a project that focuses on the provision of academic development support for teachers of first year courses and its impact on the learning of their students. The academic developers and teachers are working together to develop and implement learning and teaching initiatives that are intended to improve students' learning. The project is based on the assumption that relationships can and do exist between the activities of academic developers and student learning outcomes, and that the most important mediating factor is the nature of the relationship between the academic developer and teacher. The anatomy of that relationship is the focus of this presentation.

Why is it important?

In part, the project is being undertaken because there is a paucity of sound research-based evidence that academic development can lead to enhanced student learning. The dearth of such evidence was confirmed in a study commissioned by the New Zealand Ministry of education (Prebble et. al., 2004). The limitations of existing research, with respect to both quantity and quality, reflect the inherent difficulties of tracing and demonstrating linkages between the activities of academic developers, teachers' thoughts and actions and consequential student learning experiences and outcomes.

In this session, we discuss the approaches we are taking with respect to data and data gathering in our attempt to reveal those linkages. The task is challenging as a result of the number of factors that can potentially help/hinder teacher and student learning, the complexity of interactions between those factors and the uncontrollable nature of many important factors. The latter mean that relationships are probabilistic rather than causal.

The potential benefits of the project are wide-ranging and include a strengthened case for the provision of academic development services, insights into teachers' experience and response to contrastive forms of academic development support and models and guidelines for the future of teaching and learning enhancement initiatives.

How will the session be run?

After some brief scene-setting information about the project, we will describe and illustrate, through text, images and actions, the multiple influences on the thoughts and actions of a teacher (Lindsay) who is committed to improving student experiences and outcomes in a first year Hospitality Management course. The steps we have taken to try to disentangle and differentiate academic developer influences will be described, and be the focus for discussion of the challenges of such research.

References:

Prebble, et. al. (2004). *Academic staff development: A summary of a synthesis of research on the impact of academic staff development programmes on student outcomes in undergraduate tertiary study – Summary Report to the Ministry of Education*, Palmerston North: Massey University.

Unlocking Student Learning: The Impact of Teaching and Learning Enhancement Initiatives (TLEIs) on First Year University Students.

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