

Educational Developers Caucus Grant – Spring 2017 Proposal

Title: Using Professional Learning Communities to foster scholarly practices of teaching: How Centres for Teaching and Learning can support faculty in collective capacity building as scholars of teaching and learning.

Contact Information:

Principal Investigator:

Robyne Hanley-Dafoe (EDC member)
Educational Developer, Centre for Teaching and Learning
Instructor: School of Education and Department of Psychology
Trent University
robrynehanley@trentu.ca 1.705.748.1011 Ex. 7240

Co-Investigators:

Dr. Cathy Bruce
Dean of Education & Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning
Trent University
cathybruce@trentu.ca 1.705.748.1011 Ex. 5000

Project Mini-Description:

This project will investigate, document and report on the results of the use of a professional learning community (PLC) model focused on supporting newly appointed faculty engaged in a cycle of scholarship on teaching and learning (SoTL).

Full Project Description:

Introduction

Centres for Teaching and Learning provincially and nationally are continually adapting to the ever growing scope of services offered to their respective institutions (STLHE). Educational Developers can play a critical role in supporting system improvements through collective capacity building initiatives (Dawson, Britnell & Hitchcock, 2009; Harris, 2011). For the purpose of this project, we are interested in investigating how PLCs can be facilitated through a Centre for Teaching and Learning to support faculty conducting research on a specific aspect of their teaching such as course design renewal, pedagogical shifts or assessment practices. Trent University has recently developed new teaching emphasis positions known as senior lecturers which have SoTL as part of their portfolio and as such, we are interested in working with this group to foster and develop their capacity for SoTL in partnership with the Centre for Teaching and Learning, and led by our Educational Developer. We want to explore the effectiveness of using a professional learning community (Trent Scholars Circle) to facilitate collaborative discussions and peer learning as a venue for initiating research opportunities. We intend to measure faculty's experiences and teaching efficacy from participating in one round of the teaching scholarship PLC.

Rationale

For the past two years, the CTL has been working on an inter-disciplinary collaborative study: *1st Year Academic Experience Project*. This project is led by our Educational Developer and the design was developed in consultation with faculty and members of the Retention Committee. The goal of the project was to conduct a '360 degree' scan of the first year learning experience from three perspectives

(instructors, staff supports and students) as well as to conduct a syllabus environmental scan in order to better understand the complexities and varied perspectives of the experiences of first year students. The final report carried a series of recommendations, including developing PLCs to address some of the challenges with 1st year course design, particularly how faculty can conduct research on their pedagogical approaches and assessment and evaluation practices. Faculty have since expressed a need for support for conducting research on their teaching practices. Although many faculty conduct subject specific research, there has been an identified gap in SoTL. For the purpose of this study, we want to investigate if a CTL formed and facilitated PLC focused on developing capacity for SoTL for faculty is effective. We believe that developing, documenting and studying a program such as this will be helpful to other Centres and Educational Developers.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

Over the past two decades, educational literature has devoted significant attention to the topic of professional learning communities and how they can be successfully incorporated into faculty development at the tertiary level. The underlying philosophy of PLCs is anchored in the belief of improving student learning by improving teaching practice (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2007). Research provides convincing evidence of the benefits of PLCs such as improving the teaching culture of an organization (Vescio, 2007), increased student achievement (Lomos et al. 2011), reduced teacher isolation, increased peer learning, increased knowledge of effective teaching strategies, and greater job satisfaction (Annenberg Ins., 2004). Cox (2012) recommends that PLCs need to be specifically structured, yearlong academic process with shared goals of: building a teaching community; engaging in scholarly (evidenced-based) teaching practices; and studying the effects of the interventions or shifts in practice.

Project Plan/Timeline

- Trent Ethics Review Board approval – Summer 2017
- Trent Scholars Circle established – August 2017
- CTL actively recruits faculty from each decanal unit
- Monthly 2-hour meetings will be hosted by the CTL over the Fall 2017 term
 - This program aims to take the faculty member through each step of their research from design to publication submission
 - Facilitated meetings will map out how faculty can conduct a basic research study in their course – this will be a step by step process with support
 - Each meeting will have an area of focus pertaining to SoTL work
 - CTL will conduct pre/post questionnaires on efficacy as researchers to address the question of whether this type of PLC was effective for improving faculty confidence in, and knowledge of, conducting SoTL on their practice
 - Initial meeting
 - Efficacy questionnaire
 - Post-meeting #3
 - Mid-point interviews with faculty
 - Final meeting
 - Efficacy questionnaire
- Summer 2018 – Trent Scholars Circle SoTL presentations of research day hosted by CTL.
- Educational Developer will present findings at EDC and STHLE conferences 2018

Members of the Trent Scholars Circle will be invited and supported to submit their work to teaching conferences in 2018.*ethod*

A mixed-method case study design will be used to investigate the effectiveness of using the professional learning community framework for building capacity of faculty conducting research on teaching and

learning. The case study design will include qualitative analysis of narrative interviews, quantitative analysis of teacher efficacy questionnaires, and discourse analysis of deep-dive discussions (Gall et al., 2010).

Fit for Trent and connection to EDC Living Plan Priorities (2016)

Trent holds a reputation for personalized learning, teaching excellence and community engagement. This quality is ever present, however the university has grown in size over 50 years with approximately 8000 students studying at Trent presently. Faculty continue to be invested in the student experience and make meaningful connections to their students however faculty note that it is becoming increasingly more challenging to determine which teaching practices are most effective and beneficial to the students, and why. We believe that Trent faculty and our CTL are not alone in their observations. Faculty and CTLs across the university and college sectors may be in similar situations of wanting to do research on their teaching practices, but perhaps not knowing where to begin or how to make time for research in their work flow. Investigating the benefits and challenges of a professional learning community specifically focused on teaching scholarship, and its outcomes has the potential to support other CTL staff and faculty provincially and nationally. We hope to provide evidence of whether this is a sound approach for increasing capacity for SoTL that can be rooted in and led by Centres for Teaching and Learning.

We believe that this project embodies the EDC grant mandate in the following ways:

- 1) Provides the opportunity for faculty to build capacity as scholars of teaching and learning
- 2) Collaborative work with members of different academic units to build broad and sustainable research practices
- 3) Support, enhancement and advocacy for quality teaching practices by engaging in rich discussions, reflective practices, and peer-to-peer feedback with the end goal of contributing to the field of SoTL in various disciplines
- 4) Provides the opportunity for faculty to build capacity within their own teaching practice and to foster deeper understanding of teaching and more profound relationships with the Centre for Teaching and Learning
- 5) Provides the Educational Developers Caucus and community with a resource on how to create a Scholars Circle at their institution

Outcomes/Deliverables

- 1) CTL will build its capacity to support inter-disciplinary faculty development initiatives through Professional Learning Communities and share this with the EDC
- 2) CTL and the ED will contribute to the SoTL through co-authoring of peer reviewed publications
- 3) Raise the profile of the CTL & ED within and beyond our institution
- 4) Co-authoring of EDC and STLHE presentation proposals for 2018 conferences

Budget

We are proposing an EDC grant to partially subsidize the expenses involved in conducting our study and creating the Community of Practice.

Item Description	Amount
Salary: Graduate Student – Educational Developer Associate (EDA) 85 hours at \$20 per hour – selective literature review, data collection, transcription, planning support for summer research day (Trent Funding model) + 4% + benefits	1,700.00 100.00
Summer Trent Scholars Circle Presentation & Community Knowledge Forum – invite members of both Trent & Fleming Refreshments and meal Promotional materials and resources for attendees	850.00 250.00
In kind contributions from Trent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational Developer .5 day per week for 15 weeks • Research experts from Trent • All printing costs 	0.00
Total amount requested from EDC Grant Program	2,900.00

Agreements

I/We agree to provide the EDC community, who funds this grant, with access to resulting information and resources for which the copyright remains with the author(s).

I/We acknowledge that I/we will submit an interim report and a final deliverable (as described below)

References

- Annenberg Institute. (2004). Professional Learning Communities: Professional Development Strategies That Improve Instruction.
- Cox, M. D., Richlin, L. & Essington, A. (2012). Faculty Learning Community Planning Guide. Los Angeles, CA: Alliance Publishers.
- Dawson, D., Britnell, J., and Hitchcock, A. (2009). Developing Competency Models of Faculty Developers. Using World Café to Foster Dialogue. To Improve the Academy: Resources for faculty, instructional and organizational development, 28, 3-24.
- Gall, M., Gall, J., & Borg, W. (2010). *Applying educational research* (6th ed). Boston: Pearson.
- Harris, A. (2011) System improvements through collective capacity building. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 49(6), 624-636.
- Lomos C, Hofman R, & Bosker, R. (2011) Professional communities and student achievement: a meta-analysis. *School of Effectiveness and School Improvements*, 22(2), 121–148.
- Society of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE). (2017, April). Retrieved from: <https://www.stlhe.ca/affiliated-groups/educational-developers-caucus>
- Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008) A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24, 80-91.