Title: Criteria for Effective Development of Academic Staff Through Practitioner Research

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- understand a range of models of support for practitioner research
- apply this knowledge to their own institution context
- determine whether the criteria for effective models are appropriate to their own institution.

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

Practitioner research is now increasingly prevalent within higher education institutions. This development is underpinned by a desire to bring together the teaching and research missions (Brew 2006) and by a recognition that action research can offer an attractive entry point for teachers into research (Gray et al 2007, Kember 2002, Morris and Fry 2006). Since 2005, four Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) at the Open University UK, have been supporting the work of nearly 300 practitioner researchers, drawn from fulltime and part-time teaching staff, in investigating innovative methods in teaching and learning within particular subjects or areas of student support. Within each CETL, individual practitioner researchers work on projects of their own choosing and of relevance to their own teaching practice and personal academic development. They are also expected to contribute to particular themes relevant to the broader aims of each CETL including the development of practitioner communities (Warhurst 2006). This joint focus on individual academic and institutional development brings with it a certain number of questions. In particular:

- How is practitioner research to be supported within the institution?
- How can practitioner research contribute to the academic development of the individual researcher?
- What role can community play in supporting individual practitioner research, and how is this best achieved?
- What implications are there for broader changes to teaching and learning within the institution?
- What methods can be used to promote and implement these changes?

The position of the Open University in having four CETLs has enabled a comparison of how practitioner research is supported within the different CETLs, and the effectiveness of each model. Data has been drawn from observations and interviews with practitioner researchers, as well as the outputs and effects of the individual research projects. This session will, on the basis of this data and in response to the questions raised above, suggest the criteria that must be met in effective models of support for practitioner research. These criteria must take into account the role, capabilities and academic development requirements of the individual, the nature of the project and its potential to have a broader impact on the institution, as well as the institutional context.
Session Activities and Approximate Timings

- Overview of the Open University CETLs, how each operates and the type of practitioner research supported – 5 minutes
- Method of data collection and analysis and findings – 10 minutes
- Implications and development of model criteria – 10 minutes

Discussion questions:
- How does the experience of the Open University CETLS relate to the context of other institutions?
- Are the criteria developed within the Open University of broader relevance?
- How might they be adapted to suit the nature of practitioner research supported in other institutions?

References


