

Title: Forging a new identity for an educational developer amidst the ‘super-complexity’ (Barnett, 2000; Pilkington, 2016) of HE shifting landscapes

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Session Learning Outcomes

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

- Discuss the relevant literature related to educational developer orientations and super complexity in HE.
- Critique the value of ‘third space’ professionalism and ‘critical professional development’ (Pilkington, 2016) as a response to HE supercomplexity
- Apply a more enabling conceptualization of educational development that adjusts to the ‘slippery terrain’ (Land, 2000) of HE super-complexity.

Session Outline

As educational developers sway between positions of ‘domestication’ and ‘critique’, ‘compliance’ and ‘resistance’ (Land, 2004) we might ponder on the variety of titles used to describe our role, ‘revealing different emphases and fashions’ (Gosling, 2009). If we want to bring educational development to a more productive place, ‘..learning how to be productive even when the space we occupy is troublesome and full of tensions’ (Kensington-Miller et al, 2015), p 288), it is useful to consider the eclecticism of our identities. The possibility of becoming a ‘chameleon on a tartan rug’ (Handal, 2008); of being a ‘species foreign to the academic context’ (Handal, 2008, p 64) seems inevitable if we do not locate a more fruitful identity for ourselves, more akin to the needs of the academy.

This discussion paper uncovers some of the literature on educational developer identities and encourages participants to engage in a dialogue about what sort of professional we are and what sort of professional knowledge equips us to deal with HE super-complexity. Whilst acquiring academic credentials might be useful in terms of credibility, it is clear from research that some educational developer identities are more readily accepted than others (Handal, 2008, p 66) and may depend on the domesticating and emancipatory continuum of organizational culture (Land, 2008). Acquiring an academic identity could also be perceived as a “double-edged sword” as Gibbs (2013) suggests here:

'It is possible to gain high levels of academic credibility, and develop a stellar career, but to have only little useful function as an educational developer. It is also possible to be scholarly, but to write accessibly and for a non-specialist audience.' (Gibbs, 2013, p 13)

Through the discussion, the audience will be encouraged to reflect on which academic developer orientations (Land, 2008) might enable an educational developer 'to continue to thrive in uncertain circumstances' (Rowland, 2010) and which conceptual frames might more usefully promote a way through the supercomplexity of higher education organisational cultures.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The outline of the workshop is as follows;

- What models and frames for professional development most usefully support continuing professional development within HE shifting landscapes? (Locke & Whitchurch, 2016)
- How might these models and frames be best utilized by educational developers to address the challenges of supercomplexity?
- Could 'third space professionalism' (Whitchurch, 2008) be the key to a more situated conceptualization of educational development, where 'more fluid forms of knowledge are constructed via an ongoing process that needs to be worked out again and again in each concrete situation?' (Nowotny et al, 2001:249)

There will be a 15 minute presentation which introduces the audience to a range of literature on educational developer orientations and models for critical professional practice. This will be followed by a 15 minute 'group think' on Land's (2008) 'orientations to academic development' and Whitchurch's (2008) third space professional knowledges and legitimacies. Participants will be encouraged to debate the issues and reflect on the most useful enabling structures to navigate HE supercomplexity and the changing parameters of academic work.

References

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