Title: Developing a cross-disciplinary community of learning within a professional doctorate programme

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Abstract:

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

- Understand the challenges of developing doctoral-level learning within a multi-disciplinary professional doctorate scheme
- Discuss how professionals from different backgrounds and different contexts can approach a shared learning task
- Explore the potential for the Professional Doctorate to develop cross-disciplinary learning
- Reflect upon the way in which professionals learn within a workplace context
- Discuss different models of reflective learning

Session Outline

The "Professional" Doctorate (Powell and Long, 2005; Maxwell, 2003) offers opportunities for the development of work-based skills which transcend professional boundaries. This session will discuss an attempt to use a Professional Doctoral framework to develop a community of learning of individuals from multiple professions (Wenger,2007). We will reflect upon our experiences of a cross-University Doctoral programme which draws from several professions, and challenge participants to discuss how a Doctoral programme might be structured to best support inter-professional learning.

The students we are working with come from a variety of professional backgrounds. They include: pharmacists, managers from local colleges, town planners, internal university staff from a variety of roles, engineering and computing staff, and managers from business.

The concept of the cross-professional cohort has been integral to the operation of the programme. The programme aims to:
- develop students as reflective practitioners (Schön, 1987) to enhance their professional practice and enable them to innovate, and make informed judgements,
- develop within students the ability to synthesise concepts from their profession with theoretical frameworks to innovate and make a difference within their workplace.

This session will explore the approaches which we have taken to encourage and support this cross-disciplinary community of learning. Our experience is that the mixed nature of the cohort offers a great opportunity for students to learn from each others. Although these

experiences are diverse, they share common themes upon which the students soon begin to base challenging discussions.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The session will challenge participants to discuss how a Doctoral programme might be structured to best support inter-professional learning. This will be framed around the following issues / questions:

- Can individuals from diverse professional backgrounds and who are undertaking very different doctoral projects, share a common community of learning?
- Can professionals from different backgrounds learn from the diverse experiences of others and form a community of learning around this?
- What sort of tasks are best suited to generate rich discussions around common themes within a diverse community?

A short presentation will be made first to highlight the issues. Participants will then be asked to work in two groups and take part in a card sort exercise. One group will be asked to write down the attributes of a Professional Doctorate programme. The Other Group will be asked to write down the important concepts in inter-professional learning. Each of the two groups will be supported by a facilitator who will be one of the three presenters named above. The final part of the session will compare the results of the two card sort exercises and a brief discussion to draw conclusions.

Timings will be (approx.):

- Introduction to the Issues: 15 minutes
- Card sort exercise: 15 Minutes
- Discussion and conclusions: 15 Minutes

References

Maxwell T (2003) From first to second generation professional doctorate Studies in Higher Education 28, 3, 279-291.

Powell S and Long E (2005) Professional Doctorate Awards in the UK, UKCGE.

Schön D (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Wenger E (2007) Communities of practice: a brief introduction.
http://www.ewenger.com/theory/