Title: **Inducting staff into teaching across disciplines and departments: an activity theory approach**

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Session Learning Outcomes

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

- Understand the key contextual factors shaping the induction of staff into teaching and supporting learning
- Understand the key issues emerging from research undertaken across 6 disciplines at a post 92 university
- Map the 'activity system' for the induction of staff into teaching for their discipline/department
- Understand similarities and differences in the activity systems supporting the induction of staff into teaching across disciplines and institutions
- Reflect on the key contradictions within disciplinary/departmental Activity Systems for the induction of staff into teaching and supporting learning, and the impact of this on how academics learn to become effective teachers

Session Outline

This SEDA funded project brings together academics responsible for staff development of teaching across 6 departments of a Post-92 university, to map the activity system for teaching and supporting learning across these contexts. Activity Theory focuses on socially situated learning through engaging in everyday tasks, in this case how academics learn to teach in disciplines and departments. Activity Theory was chosen because of its potential for promoting 'expansive learning' and change through engaging participants in reflection on contradictions within activity systems (Blackler 1995, Engestrom 2001). Activity theory has been used as a tool for the professional development of teaching in HE through engaging academics in reflection on contradictions (Englund and Price 2018). It thus serves a dual role, as a research tool, and a tool for staff development for academics involved in the project.

The researchers first engaged in collaborative mapping of the activity system, followed by individual departmental vignettes. These were analysed using the 6 elements of Activity Theory:

- **The Subject**: academics new to departments
- **The Object**: induction into teaching
- **The Community**: where located, significance for learning about teaching
- **Tools and Resources** for induction into teaching
- **Rules** governing induction: workload, probationary requirements
- **Division of labour**: between teaching and research, hidden workloads

The focus was on surfacing contradictions within Activity Systems, and between the Activity System for induction of staff into teaching, and other Activity Systems within departments and across the University.

Interviews were undertaken with two academics in each department, developing on the analysis of the vignettes.

The research has deepened our collective understanding of the experience of academics of their induction into teaching, and the contradictions they face in engaging with teaching.

This workshop uses our experience as a starting point to promote learning and exchange across institutions about the experience of becoming a teacher in contemporary HE.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

- Introduction to the research approach and to the research (15 mins).
- Small group activity mapping of Activity Systems for induction into teaching and supporting learning in disciplines and departments. Participants of the workshop will work on pre-prepared newsprint diagrams identifying elements of the Activity System for induction of academics into teaching in disciplines and departments (see six points above). They will identify key issues surfacing in their disciplines, with a particular focus on contradictions within the Activity System, and with other Activity Systems impacting on induction into teaching (20 mins).
- Each group will report back on issues and contradictions in their Activity Systems (20 mins)
- There will be a presentation from the research project of key issues and contradictions in activity systems that were identified through the research project, with reflection on how this overlaps with what has surfaced from workshop discussions (15 mins)
- There will be a discussion of the value of Activity Theory, and this tool in particular, for bringing about reflection and change in approaches to staff development for learning and teaching, highlighting any limitations (15 mins).
- Close: drawing together discussions and synthesis of key points (5 mins)

Preparation before session

Please reflect on this question: How do academics learn how to become teachers and supporters of learning in your department? What are the key strengths and challenges faced?

References

Blackler, F. (1995). Knowledge, Knowledge Work and Organisations: An Overview and Interpretation. Organization Studies (Issue 6):1021-1046.

Engestrom, Y. (2001). Expansive Learning at Work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. Journal of Education and Work, 14(1):133-156.

Englund, C. & Price, L. (2018) Facilitating agency: the change laboratory as an intervention for collaborative sustainable development in higher education, International Journal for Academic Development, 23:3, 192-205, DOI: 10.1080/1360144X.2018.1478837