Title: **Exploring the tensions and challenges in creating a community researching our practice**

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Abstract:

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

- Discuss in an informed way the challenges and tensions confronting practitioners when building a community of educational researchers
- Engage in and inform their own institutional debates about the challenges and tensions of promoting and setting up a community of educational research practitioners
- Contribute to the wider HE sector discussions related to the promotion of evidence-based educational practices and the need to systematically explore research-informed teaching, learning and assessment
- Conceptions around the primacy of discipline only research

Session Outline

In January 2009, a number of Senior Teaching Fellows from across Edinburgh Napier University and a member from Academic Development met to discuss how we could develop a high quality institution-wide platform for the promotion and conduct of educational research. At this meeting we proposed the creation of a Hub for Educational Research at Edinburgh Napier (HEREn). HEREn provides an embedded hub and spoke model designed to harness the critical mass of existing expertise to enhance capacity and capability. In terms of the Hub and spokes model, it was envisaged that Faculties and relevant Professional Services as being the spokes.

The remit of HEREn has nine objectives and includes, for example:
  a) provide a mutually supportive network for educational research providing a 'joined-up' approach;
  b) provide leadership in educational research related to the design, conduct and/or analysis;
  c) provide academic mentorship, support and advice to colleagues and novice researchers (this should also build up a cadre of staff able to supervise PGR students undertaking educational research projects);
  d) provide a locus for research students undertaking educational research, providing support and supervision as appropriate;
  e) provide a framework for bidding for and undertaking collaborative educational research projects;

f) engage in working / steering groups to provide advice and guidance;

In short, we are in the process of developing a community or educational research practitioners and our intention is to share our experiences (lessons learned and challenges faced) of doing this and to learn from practitioners in other HEIs about their experiences. Our current focus is in helping ourselves (both as individuals and a group) in becoming active participants in the practices of an 'educational research' social community, and in the construction of our identities as educational researchers through these communities (Wenger et. al 2002). This development is not new and builds on our previous attempts to build a community of educational research practitioners in 2004.

Key issues to be addressed are:

- Background to the development of a community of education researchers at Edinburgh Napier University
- Sharing experiences of setting up a community of education researchers at Edinburgh Napier University - lessons learned
- Exploration of challenges challenges, tensions and potential solutions (OECD, 2003)
- Discussion with session participants about their experiences of similar ventures within the HE sector

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

It is our intention to make this session as active as possible for those taking part. We will undertake various activities before the conference that will act as triggers to promote discussion and for sharing of good practice. There will be no PowerPoint presentation. The session will comprise:

- Introduction
  (15 minutes)
- Small group work triggered by a number of short video flip casts
  (25 minutes)
- Dialogue sheet with key issues / questions as triggers for sharing and discussion
  (25 minutes)
- Wrap around discussion and future directions
  (25 minutes)

Prior to the conference the workshop organisers plan to record video tapes of stakeholders involved in role-playing issues surrounding developing, supporting and promoting education research in at Edinburgh Napier University as well as from like-minded individuals from a range of Higher Education Institutions. These sessions will be recorded at two meetings to be held in September and November – the meeting in September is an Edinburgh Napier in-house meeting for those interested in conducting or being involved with education research, and the event in November is a joint Edinburgh Napier University/HEA Scotland symposium on promoting and supporting the developing of education research in Scotland and further afield. The recordings will akin to the 'talking heads' sessions as seen on TV and they will see education researchers/interested individuals talking about their experiences and perceptions related to setting up a community of education researchers.

The 'talking heads' excerpts are intended to be used as triggers to small group discussions around concepts and ideas related to promoting education research and to garner the shared experiences of the wider group in a bigger discussion at the end of the session.

A second activity will see the small groups working with dialogue sheets. The dialogue sheets will also contain prompts i.e. key questions / areas for discussion and for these to be recorded on the dialogue sheets to be shared with the wider group. It is hoped that the outcomes of the discussions triggered by the 'talking heads' and dialogue sheets will contribute to a shared understanding of some of the key issues, problems, potential ways forward to setting up a community of education researchers. This is in addition to creating a space and opportunity to challenge misconceptions about the nature and type of education research that could and should be supported as well as producing and analysis and synthesis of the arguments surrounding the tensions and challenges

References

Lave, Jean; Wenger, Etienne (1991). Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

OECD (2003) New Challenges for Educational Research, Paris, OECD Publishing

Wenger, Etienne; McDermott, Richard; Snyder, William M. (2002). Cultivating Communities of Practice (Hardcover). Harvard Business Press; 1 edition.