

Chapter 101

An Intramuscular Approach to Teacher Development in International Collaborative Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at a practical example of staff development and considers how professional development of teachers should be an essential component of enhancing provision within higher educational institutions not just in terms of pedagogy but also in respect of developing programmes and marketing those programmes. Set within the specific context of English Language teaching for international students, the research is based on a case study of two trainee teachers on a DELTA programme (Diploma in English Language Teaching for Adults). These teachers have been interviewed at two different stages of their development, firstly whilst doing the DELTA course, and then one year later, by which time they have completed the course. Through analysing their responses in a qualitative fashion, the author examines whether teacher development has a positive impact on the higher educational institution as a whole, and whether it leads to an improved student experience or a heightened consciousness of that student experience on the part of teachers. At the heart of this chapter, there is a metaphor taken from Medical Science to define the best approach to teacher education and development, namely, what the author labels an intramuscular approach. The author takes this term from a medical process of giving injections that are placed deep within muscles so that the particular drug or medicine is released slowly over a period of time rather than in a standard one-shot manner. There is no quick fix solution to teacher development, and having a long-term vision contributes far more to organisations in terms of the ultimate student experience.

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INTRODUCTION

In the medical world, there are two different common forms of injection; subcutaneous and intramuscular, with the latter being one that is “given directly into the central area of a specific muscle” (www.enotes.com) so that after injection “the excretion is much slower” (www.lexic.us). This means that the fluid substance of the injection is released over time rather than immediately as a one-shot solution. As such, it is a form of treatment particularly suited to patients getting some form of long-term treatment such as gene therapy or hormone replacement. The medicine, within the muscle, is released over a period of months rather than in a single dose, meaning that it offers long rather than short term forms of treatment.

In the medical literature, numerous papers have described ways in which this form of treatment has been used in the battle against particular ailments. However, it also serves as a useful analogy for the best practices of contemporary teacher education. Long-term approaches to development have taken on greater significance because of the increasing emphasis upon the student experience, particularly in the context of United Kingdom higher education. If students are to have a good experience, they need good and experienced teachers who understand their individual needs and how to address those needs.

BACKGROUND

The Student Experience

Much has been written about the student experience in terms of what it entails, how it should be defined, and how it can be measured (Cook & Leckey, 1999; Lowe & Cook, 2003; Bryson & Hand, 2007). At the heart of this is a sense of engagement with learning which goes back as far as Astin (1984) and Chickering and Gamson

(1987); leading to further exploration in the work of Kuh (2001; and 2006), and the more socio-constructivist theories espoused by writers such as Weber (2004). Socio-constructivism in this instance means that participants are actively engaged in defining and understanding the world on their own terms.

It is therefore ‘engagement’ which essentially defines the student experience. Trowler (2010), in a substantive literature review on student engagement, states that “a sound body of literature has established robust correlations between student involvement in a subset of ‘educationally purposive activities’, and positive outcomes of student success and development, including satisfaction, persistence, academic achievement and social engagement” (p.2). This has led to a greater emphasis on students being given a voice and a sense of partnership in higher education.

Less has been written about how this relates to teaching and the role that teachers play in being at the interface of this student experience. Ramsden (2009, p. 2) outlines how the nature of higher educational study in the United Kingdom has changed over the past couple of decades, but argues that “the quality of teaching” and particularly the focus on “personal attention to students and on the achievement of high level learning outcomes, has been sustained in the face of sizeable pressure on resources” (ibid). Therefore, using another biological analogy, engagement has become the sinew holding together the learning process, within which teachers have a vital role to play through being at its interface.

This need for quality teaching, according to Ramsden, has developed a culture of professionalism within UK Higher Educational teaching (2009, p. 4). One outcome of this has been the creation of ‘The UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education’. This framework, launched in 2006, and reproduced in 2011, uses a descriptor based approach to professional standards and

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