

Chapter 12

Teaching and Learning Professional Development for International Graduate Students: The Role of Teaching and Learning Centres

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, Bakhtin's metatheoretical framework of dialogism is offered as a frame in which to consider the work of Centres for Teaching and Learning (CTLs) on university campuses. Dialogism keeps front and centre the co-construction of student learning and teaching and the ways in which international graduate students' knowledges and experiences enhance and inform university teaching and learning. The chapter outlines CTL professional development activities that support the scholarship of international teaching assistants (ITAs). A discussion of the differences and tensions between learning a language and using language to learn is offered. CTLs are often seen as sites for instrumental and pragmatic instructional purposes, rather than the sites where ITAs are invited into the teaching and learning scholarly community; this later idea will be highlighted throughout.

INTRODUCTION

Centres for Teaching and Learning (CTLs) are positioned to support campus members in their teaching and learning outcomes. Most broadly, the mandate of teaching and learning centres is the support and advancement of teaching and learning. For graduate students (GS), more generally, inviting them into this scholarly teaching community, supports their own professional development and advances teaching and learning. The discussions that take place in one-on-one consultations between instructors/GSs and CTL staff might focus on instructional strategies, online course design, or assessment rubrics.

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Often the roles of CTLs are seen as pragmatic and instrumental in that they transmit current standards for instructional strategies and better practices or support the use of Learning Management Systems (Schroeder, 2011). CTLs' involvement in numerous university committees, for example, teaching and learning policy, academic integrity, or the Faculty of Graduate Studies, is not always visible. CTL staff engage with various partners at the university to inform teaching practice, which can include a focus on classroom and campus climate to support student learning and, by extension, student retention. Also, CTLs foster the investigation of ways to support student learning through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), typically engaging in and supporting faculty members' investigations of student learning and teaching practice.

Welcoming graduate students, both local and international, into the scholarly community and the practice of teaching and learning is an important goal of CTLs. The role of CTLs in supporting International Graduate Students as they embark on and progress through their academic and professional journey is multi-faceted and of particular interest. This chapter will outline the kinds of professional development and programming offered by CTLs that support the teaching and learning of international students who are engaged in teaching and will discuss methods of general and target teaching and learning supports in this context. Bakhtin's metatheoretical framework of *dialogism* operates as a socio-cultural backdrop to this exploration of teaching and learning. Framing teaching and learning through dialogism keeps front and centre the importance of the co-construction of knowledge, thereby problematizing colonial practices and interrupting perceptions of CTLs as instrumental sites of pedagogical strategy transmission. The particular use of language in academic settings is central to this discussion. After outlining the more generic types of professional development offered to graduate students working as teaching assistants, this chapter will focus on how this work supports international teaching assistants (ITAs).

REFLECTION AS METHOD

This chapter takes the form of a critical practitioner reflection. It addresses the themes that emerge from my work as an educational developer for the past decade, which includes working with international graduate students. Up until recently, the CTL at Brock University has been a small centre, with less than 8 individuals, whose work, for example, focuses on instruction, curriculum, and educational technologies. The context of the work of educational development is the support and advancement of teaching and learning at the: university; national (e.g., Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education); and international (e.g., International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) level. When teaching is:

defined as scholarship... teaching both educates and entices future scholars . . . Teaching is also a dynamic endeavor involving all the analogies, metaphors, and images that build bridges between the teacher's understanding and the student's learning. Pedagogical procedures must be carefully planned, continuously examined and relate directly to the subject taught . . . knowing and learning are communal acts...teachers encourage students to be critical, creative thinkers, with the capacity to go on learning after their college days are over. Further, good teaching means that faculty, as scholars, are also learners. (Boyer, 1990, pp. 23-24)

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