

Centre for Bioscience

Pedagogic Research in the Biosciences, University of Leicester, March 24th 2009

Facilitated discussion: Key aspects

Suggestions/Tips

Ask an [educational] expert, preferably before you start. This will help with the subject and language of the new discipline; usual practices and knowing the field for potential publication.

Learn from school education

Discussions

The notion of communities and the opportunity to share ideas. Recognition that a range of activities go on, a continuum from tutors to educational departments and the two extremes seem very distant. Does the wealth of Ped R literature influence practice? Rarely. It is the tutors who make the changes, yet these tend to be on individual units limiting the impact.

Role for the Centre in continuing to share practice to impact learning environments within universities.

Publishing and where to publish came up. A general feeling of 'if it is worth doing, it's worth publishing' and that there are a range of opportunities: blogs, tweets, in-house journals and peer-reviewed journals. More difficult is the lack of institutional or career recognition for these activities. Perversely the 'less valued' activities often have a real potential to change local (and bioscience) practice. Even publishing in peer-reviewed [educational] journals is not without its problems; these often have low impact factors (compared to science journals) and are not recognised by progress panels or the recent RAE.

Following the meeting David Adams met with other Subject Centre directors and the issues above chimed with the experience of directors in other disciplines. On behalf of SC directors David has written to Paul Ramsden (as Chief Executive of HEA and a member of the RAE Education panel) to address these issues and find a acceptable and consistent approach.

In light of the above 'Has anything changed in the last 10 years?'. There were a range of views and comments reflecting the diversity in the audience. The consensus was that any change has been slow. Institutions now have learning and teaching policies, people are in jobs that didn't exist 10 years ago, career progression and reward and recognition polices are in place but there are still issues in how these translate down to day-to-day reality:

- Lack of RAE and institutional recognition for (some) ped r activity
- Survey of one department showed 90+% of assessment in 4 main formats (ie same as 10 years ago)

- Learning and teaching committees talk about forms, quality and not learning
- The less experience (new staff) are given the teaching topics that are the most difficult (i.e. that nobody else wants)

General Comments/Observations

Staff are often involved in encouraging students to engage with PDP and hence reflection – an activity that most staff don't do!

In medical research the placebo group invariably does/feels better than the general population i.e. there is some benefit from feeling wanted/cared for/focus of attention. Maybe we need to factor this into our ethical considerations in ped r design

Staff and Educational Development Units often provide excellent training, sadly only to those interested. Credibility is often an issue and examples from the disciplines would help our SED colleagues

Student involvement. The student voice is largely absent from the educational literature. There is scope for increased student involvement in our own research and practice (e.g. showing students the results of research findings to help them understand [their] learning). External examples are the SCOT project (<http://learninglab.lincoln.ac.uk/blogs/scots/>) and Student Networks (www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/network/studentnet.aspx) as part of the Scottish Enhancement themes