

Review of
**Faculty Development in the Age of Evidence:
Current Practices, Future Imperatives (2016)**

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Abstract:

The authors present a comprehensive text about the educational development field. Updating research from a previous study a decade earlier, the authors inform readers about various aspects of the field: who works in it, the goals guiding development center programs, organizational structures, how centers deliver services, assessment, the evolution of the field from the previous study, and what the field's prospects are for the future. Highlighted are notable findings about methods for program delivery, assessment practices, and educational developer demographics. The text's comprehensiveness and applicability to multiple higher education constituents is its greatest strength.

Key Words:

Educational Development, Higher Education, Teaching and Learning, Assessment.

Introduction

Over the course of eight chapters and multiple appendices, readers of *Faculty Development in the Age of Evidence: Current Practices, Future Imperatives* learn about a variety of topics salient to the field of educational development. The book reports comprehensive information about the current trends, organizational structures, and practices in the field. Further, this text updates and expands upon a previous work on this topic: *Creating the Future of Faculty Development: Learning from the Past, Understanding the Present* (Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, & Beach, 2006). As such, the authors of this updated work track changes in educational development over the past decade and relay empirically-based projections for how the field might continue to change years from now.

What follows is an examination of the study design of the scholarship leading to this text, discussion of key findings both researchers and educational development

practitioners will find notable, and an overall evaluation. To summarize, the findings highlighted in this essay are below:

- Educational development centers often do not use approaches to programming that help faculty make sustained, positive changes to their teaching.
- Development centers do not always conduct the types of assessments they want faculty to conduct with their students.
- Demographically, the field of educational development lacks diversity.

Research Design and Notable Findings

The centerpiece of the research design was a web-based survey instrument with 48 questions divided into ten sections. Almost all questions were multiple choice, though a few at the end of the survey were open-ended (Appendix A contains the instrument). The authors e-mailed the survey to the entire Professional Organizational Development Network (POD) mailing list, as well as to members of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Faculty Development Network and Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE); all three are organizations dedicated to the educational development profession. Overall, the survey reached over 1,300 educational developers, with 385 complete responses tallied (28%). To garner more details about “signature programs” (i.e., what center directors consider their most valued programs) from respondents, the authors conducted phone interviews with those willing to participate. Lastly, those who identified as directors of development centers answered a special set of administrative questions not offered to the other respondents.

Several notable findings emerged from this research project. For example, development centers only sparsely-to-moderately implement approaches research suggests help assist faculty in making long-term, positive changes to their instruction. These approaches include faculty learning communities, rigorous institutes, and workshop series. Connected to this finding is a different result indicating the three primary ways of delivering services are through short workshops, consultations, and web-based resources. The authors state these delivery methods, though efficient to accommodate busy faculty, are not as effective in supporting faculty as they work to change their approaches to teaching. In examining why centers do not employ the more effective approaches more frequently, the authors assert such approaches are time intensive and may be challenging for centers, especially those with smaller staffs, to execute. They also note that centers, “may also feel pressure to measure success by generating greater numbers of events rather than fewer activities of potentially higher impact” (p. 90). Another significant finding showed that, although development centers track participation in programming and collect self-reported surveys from participants, they are not conducting the kinds of assessments they teach to faculty as best practice. Further exploration into this phenomenon shows center directors know they ought to be conducting more complex assessments (i.e., teaching observations, collection and analysis of work samples that demonstrate learning, scholarship of teaching and learning projects) accounting for participant learning, but do not always have the time/resources to do so. A third key finding noted that, demographically, educational developers at all ranks and throughout all institutional types are predominantly White and female. Those identifying as Black or African American are primarily affiliated with

HBCUs (see Chapter One). Regarding why the demographics of educational development are set this way, the authors offer their speculations. For the overrepresentation of women, they suggest educational development positions provide women with a distinct, but similar career pathway to that of the professoriate; since the professoriate historically presented women with fewer career opportunities compared to men, more women entered educational development. For people of color, the authors write, “individuals from a range of different racial and ethnic groups may not have considered a career path in faculty development as sufficiently welcoming and receptive, particularly at predominately White institutions” (p. 126). To alleviate the lack of diversity in educational development, the authors call for more research on this topic and for continued efforts to diversify the field.

Evaluation

There are few, if any, significant flaws in *Faculty Development in the Age of Evidence*. Methodologically, something noteworthy is the choice to not record and transcribe follow-up phone interviews. The authors explain their rationale: “We took notes throughout the interviews, rather than recording and transcribing them, so we could focus on the details of the programs” (p. 26). Yet, recording and transcribing interviews would not only provide program details, but also ensure greater accuracy of information about programs and prevent the loss of any valuable content (Weiss, 1994). Additionally, it is unclear how many of the 120 respondents contacted ultimately provided interviews. In terms of how the authors use interview data, they state they weave together “narrative profiles from the interview responses” (p. 26). However, these profiles read more like descriptions of signature programs from institutions and do not include many “narrative” aspects such as participant storytelling or description of experiences (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Tallman and Smith (2014) employed first-person narratives in their work highlighting how, among other things, through planned conversations between graduate students and the development center director (who happens to be Smith), they learned of the need to create a graduate teaching assistant community of practice on their campus. For the authors of *Faculty Development*, using their interview data to convey the narratives of participants and their stories about or experiences with development programming as did Tallman and Smith, would have lent greater insight into the rich processes of how such programming begins or functions. Regarding writing clarity, it is occasionally challenging to differentiate between when the authors are describing results and perspectives of center directors or other educational developers (i.e., associate/assistant directors, non-director faculty members, instructional designers). Particularly in Chapter Six, when the authors discuss directors’ and other developers’ thoughts on the future of educational development, it is difficult to keep track of whom of the two they are discussing, as the writing sometimes abruptly switches between the two.

A strength of this text is the perspectives of the expert authors, who are both educational development researchers and practitioners, lending readers their expertise to promote future, research-based approaches to educational development practice. Such recommendations and questions for consideration are especially present in Chapter Eight. Another strength is the formatting of the book, particularly the bulleted highlights at the end of each chapter. They assist readers in understanding summaries

of chapters effectively. The appendices disseminating the research instrument and detailed results are also visually pleasing, informative, and provide access to the broad results of the research guiding this book; the tables throughout the text are similarly useful. Lastly, the greatest strength of this book is its comprehensiveness; academic affairs administrators, development center directors, new educational development professionals, and post-secondary scholars will likely all learn something new, and find something familiar, about educational development by reading this book. It addresses in great detail who works in the field, the goals of educational development programs, organizational structures, how centers carry out services, assessment, recent changes in the field, and where practitioners think the field is going. There are few other texts about educational development currently available that offer the strong research design and comprehensiveness featured in *Faculty Development in the Age of Evidence*.

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