

INTRODUCTION

Creating change in higher education teaching is a complex problem especially for those responsible for faculty development. Despite a lengthy body of literature on teaching practices and learning theory, an increasing number of teaching centers in colleges and universities, and the emergence of the concept of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), many untrained faculty, or what is referred to as postulant teachers (those who have discipline expertise but little training in teaching methods), still approach their classroom in a fairly traditional manner (Richardson, 1990, 1998; Wisler, 2007; Dueber, 2002). But there are additional reasons for this resistance to change that go beyond lack of training or lack of exposure to alternative methodologies. The problem may exist in the very models of development in place to help faculty change their teaching practice which often lack the characteristics that research outline for how teachers do change. Many faculty development activities are additive and give faculty a new technique or teaching method to try. As we shall examine, the additive model has limited value except to those who are ready to change.

College teachers do not always make systematic change; it may be a more spur of the moment decision based on unwarranted assumptions that have never been examined (Richardson, 1990, 1998; Angelo, 1994). Furthermore, teachers often make changes based on their conception of what a teacher is and their perception of a match between that conception and the offered approach (Trigwell & Prosser, 1996). If this is true, then teaching development and growth is caught in a catch 22 situation. Teacher decision making processes around selecting their method show an orientation toward concrete and procedural rather than abstract and general, this means that what faculty believe they want is the “how to” or the next new technique

or idea; but in reality what they really need is a way to raise their assumptions about teaching and determine the validity of their beliefs before they are given the new pedagogical model, technique, or method (Waugh & Punch, 1987). A study by Paulsen and Feldman (1995) identified eight characteristics that are necessary to support teacher change. Beside the obvious ones of connection to tenure/promotion, commitment from administration, and sufficient resources they also identified such characteristics as shared values among the faculty, a sense of ownership to the change mechanisms, and frequent interaction and collaboration with colleagues. This speaks to the need to change teacher thought processes or schemas (Shulman, 1986) rather than just adding new techniques. The model of cognitive apprenticeship is a strong model to accomplish this (Sunal, Wright, Hodges, & Sunal, 2000) but putting it into practice becomes difficult especially when the first step is sharing beliefs and making them public. The challenge for faculty developers is how to do this in a culture where debate is more valued than discussion and where teaching is often viewed as a skill rather than a scholarly activity. If we believe that “effective teaching involves purposeful, research-informed development” (Sunal, Hodges, Sunal, Whitaker, Freeman, Edwards, Johnston, & Odell, 2001, pg. 246), then we must have a venue which combines the best of the cognitive apprenticeship model with change research in order to create more effective teaching.

This becomes more complicated because changing faculty teaching behavior is also about changing individuals, and anyone who has tried to start exercising or loose weight knows individual change is extremely difficult. Applying this concept to teaching, we are presented the scenario in many institutions where there is often little oversight to assessing classroom teaching beyond student evaluations. If a faculty member is content with their teaching evaluations they have little motivation to do anything differently, even in a university wide supported change.

This paper addresses a faculty development intervention called Dialogue which creates pathways to engage individual faculty in the process of changing their teaching practice utilizing the elements of effective teacher change in a non-judgmental, non-confrontational environment that values hard won expertise and opens the door to exploring the research about effective teaching and learning.

BACKGROUND

Prochaska and DiClemente (1986) and Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross (1992) have proposed a model of individual change in health care that can serve as a conceptual framework to facilitate change in teaching as it identifies the elements necessary to promote and sustain individual change. According to their model, individual change occurs along a continuum (Figure 1) and depending on a one's placement on the continuum (Figure 2) different interventions are needed to create movement toward change (Qualters, Sheahan, & Isaacs, 2005). This is not a revolutionary concept for faculty development; most faculty developers use a multi-pronged approach. However, in looking at accepted faculty development activities, it is clear that the pre-contemplative portion of the change continuum is not well addressed. Pre-contemplation (unawareness) infers a lack of awareness of the need to challenge one's teaching beliefs and practices to determine if a change is necessary. Faculty who have been teaching for many years, with positive to neutral peer and student feedback, are not likely to think about changing. Yet, anyone engaged in faculty development has experienced a faculty member saying "what's going on, I used to have great student evaluations until ...". So this comfortable pre-contemplative state may actually be a dangerous position for faculty because its inherent element of denial can lead to reactive rather than pro-active responses when external factors create a need for change.

It seems ironic that the careful, rigorous and changing methods faculty use in their discipline based research is paradoxical to the often random, static and trial and error approach used when teaching. The reason given for this paradox often involves time constraints, contradictory role expectations, and conflicting priorities of the academy. However, the real reason is usually more complex and often entangled with two elements. First the unawareness that change is needed combined with the disequilibrium that is felt when dealing with a changing situation (Wankat & Orevicz, 1993). Yet the necessity to change in higher education is critical. As everyone in the academy is aware of (or becoming aware of), the “education” component of higher education is coming under close scrutiny, some would say attack. The call for a national accreditation standards by the U.S. Department of Education in what has become known as “the Spelling Report”; the research on the “millennial student” defining them as entitled, technologically savvy and lacking the appropriate skills for college work; and business and industry’s criticism of recent college graduate critical thinking and problem solving skills as being inadequate provide strong motivation to reexamine current forms of teaching and measuring learning (US Department of Education, 2006; Bok, 2006; Howe and Strauss, 2000, 2003). As educational research and theories of discipline based learning are becoming more sophisticated (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking., 1999; Donald, 2002) the opportunity is created to revisit and reexamine the effectiveness of some time honored methods of teaching.

To attract contented teachers to consider change, there must be an appealing format that is not overtly change oriented and respects expertise but does raise the critical awareness that the assumptions framing current teaching practice may need to be reexamined. In other words, finding ways to engage, and then raise and understand the assumptions that drive teaching practice, becomes a key feature of moving pre-contemplative teachers to contemplation and

ultimately to action and change. While admittedly, this type of reflection on practice is inherent in teaching circles, book groups and other faculty development activities, the *overt* recognition and naming of teaching assumptions is missing. Often, assumptions are raised but never identified and examined for validity. Instead, even in collegial development settings, the discussion can become a dialectic pull masked as polite conversations between those with opposing beliefs. To create a different intellectual dynamic there needs to be an intervention that is bold enough to explicitly identify AND challenge unrecognized beliefs yet sets a comfortable climate that is different from the usual academic discourse. Only by doing this will we begin to bring the concept of continuous change into the consciousness of college teachers.

DIALOGUE

An innovative intervention that has potential to engage pre-contemplative faculty and simultaneously sustain them through the phases of change is Dialogue (Isaacs, 1992, 1993; Qualters, 1995, 1998, 2000, 2003). Dialogue creates an environment to *explicitly* identify, state, and explore unexamined assumptions in a non-judgmental, non-threatening manner while allowing participants to also share techniques and ideas in a communal setting. While Dialogue was not originally designed as a faculty development intervention it possesses all the elements for engaging pre-contemplative faculty. An added benefit of Dialogue is that it provides missing pieces often needed by faculty to move through subsequent stages of change (Figure 2).

The concept of dialogue can be difficult because it is often practiced more as debate in higher education. The concept of “Dialogue” used here is a carefully constructed and monitored process where individuals come together to engage in a structured conversation designed to help establish a common language, identify and probe individual practice assumptions, and examine the practice assumptions of participants in a non-confrontational manner that respects believe