

## **Inspiring to inspire: developing teaching in Higher Education**

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## CURRICULUM & TEACHING STUDIES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Inspiring to inspire: Developing teaching in higher education

Louise Williams<sup>1\*</sup>, Sarah Nixon<sup>1</sup>, Claire Hennessy<sup>1</sup>, Elizabeth Mahon<sup>1</sup> and Gill Adams<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** Following a three-year staff development initiative within one faculty in a UK university, the authors reflected on inspiring teaching and the role that staff development can play in enhancing individual practice. Teaching is a core component of Higher Education and is complex and multi-faceted both theoretically and in practice. Through individual reflections to a set of pre-determined questions, a group of Higher Education teachers ( $n = 5$ ) with a responsibility for the development of learning, teaching and assessment, share their thoughts, feelings and beliefs on inspiring teaching. The interpretive analysis of the data shows from a staff perspective that the notion of inspiring teaching has three main components which are all interrelated, those being; the actual teaching and learning experience; the design of the curriculum and the teacher/student relationship. Staff development initiatives were found to help people explore and develop their own teaching philosophy, to develop new practices and to share and learn from others. However, individual's mindset, beliefs and attitudes were found to be a challenge. Teachers can frame their development around the different aspects of inspiring teaching and with support from senior leadership as well as a positive culture, teaching communities can work together towards inspiring teaching.

**Subjects:** Development Studies; Education; Social Sciences

**Keywords:** inspiring teaching; staff development; higher education; communities of practice

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

There has been an increase in research on the value of the student experience and the important role of academic staff within this. The group of staff who have authored this paper are involved in research relating to Higher Education with a focus on developing the student experience and exploring aspects of teaching and learning, including: audio feedback; staff development; curriculum design and peer review. This paper is a culmination of three years progressive staff development activity within one faculty in a UK university which focused on supporting individuals to enhance their own practices and ultimately the student experience. The programme of staff development that the group facilitated was adopted as a model in other parts of the institution and the group received a University Teaching and Learning award for their work.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The student experience is at the heart of any university and is complex and evolutionary in nature. Staff within universities are critical to the quality of the experience that students receive and play a pivotal role in student learning. This reflective paper explores the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of a group of university lecturers who, through their responsibility for teaching and learning developed and delivered a series of events to inspire staff in their teaching. At one point in our lives, most of us will have encountered teachers or individuals that have inspired us. This paper found three key factors as important in inspiring teaching: what happens in the classroom; the design of the curriculum and the teacher/student relationship. Alongside this, staff development was thought to be a way of developing skills, abilities and attitudes that can help develop the notion of inspiring teaching.

## 1. Introduction

Teaching is a core function of Higher Education (HE) (Barnard et al., 2011), which means different things to different people; however, in HE it is often interpreted in a narrow sense of giving lectures to students (Macfarlane, 2004). Teaching can no longer be a repetition of the way that the individual was taught when they were at university (Bourner & Flowers, 1999) and it is unrealistic to expect that the current generation should be taught in this way (Zhu, Wang, Cai, & Engels, 2013). This paper presents ideas around what has been called inspiring teaching and the issues and challenges of developing and building a culture to support teaching that is fit for the twenty-first century. The enhancement of teaching quality has been high on the United Kingdom (UK) and International agenda for the last decade (Report to the European Commission, 2013). In the UK, The Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) comment as part of their principles that enhancement must be a mainstream activity (HEFCE, 2013), and the Report to the European Commission (2013, p. 12) states:

The ambition to greatly increase the numbers who enter and complete higher education only makes sense if it is accompanied by a visible determination to ensure that the teaching and learning experienced in higher education is the best it can possibly be.

The ideas explored in this paper are based upon the work undertaken during a three-year teaching and learning advancement initiative in one faculty in a UK university. The focus being on enhancing teaching and learning practice through both a programme of staff development activities and opportunities for individuals to come together to share practice and discuss issues. A group of teaching and learning co-ordinators had the responsibility for driving this agenda forward and they are the authors of this paper (called respondents throughout). The group set out, over a three-year period, to support the development of their colleagues in what was branded as “developing inspiring teaching”. The focus in this paper is on staff development; it is not the intention to explore links to the student experience. The paper aims to share reflections at the end of the initiative in relation to the overarching research questions which are to explore both the facets of inspiring teaching and the role a faculty-based initiative can play in the development of inspiring teaching. Insights into these areas will add to a body of knowledge around understanding and developing teaching which is an area that has had little research focused on it at a faculty level (De Courcy, 2015). The number of voices in this paper is acknowledged as a limitation; however, the authors spent significant time working with staff from across the faculty which means their reflections are an accumulation of experiences from others and therefore can add a perspective to this field of enquiry.

## 2. Literature review

There are a number of different terms used to describe teaching in the literature which range from good (Watkins & Zhang, 2006) to excellent (Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2004), and although the terms are used interchangeably, the key concepts appear to be the same with inspiring appearing as a desirable characteristic. Devlin and Samarawickrema (2010, p. 112) use the term effective teaching which they believe to be “... teaching that is orientated to and focused on students and their learning”. Teaching, normally an individual activity, is a complex mix of factors both personal, environmental, subject-based and involving students that come together to create a learning opportunity. Even given this complexity the concept of teaching excellence is important as Skelton (2009, p. 107) proposes it “... represents a potent force to drive us forward in our efforts to understand and improve what we do”. There needs however to be commitment from the teacher to personal reflection and to what Devlin and Samarawickrema (2010) call “... the reflexive development of a value-laden and morally defensible practice”. This study explores the ideas of leaders in teaching and learning in one faculty in relation to the role staff development can play in supporting the advancement of individuals in their teaching.

When exploring the ideology of what makes a “good” teacher, distinctions can be made between the more technical and mechanical concepts, such as skills and techniques and the more inherent qualities, which Su and Wood (2012, p. 143) refer to as “virtuous” practice. The more process-driven

measures of teacher effectiveness are recognised by Strong, Gargani, and Hacifazlioglu (2011) through four dimensions, namely; effective teaching practice; assessment of learning; creating a positive learning environment and the personal qualities of the teacher. Indeed, it is the intangible values of fairness and respect, as well as building a positive relationship with students that the top quartile of teachers scored higher in a study by Strong et al. (2011) on the impact of teacher effectiveness in student achievement.

The notion of defining an inspiring teacher appears to have deeper roots than traditional measurable competencies and techniques for example, classroom environment and assessment methods. Su and Wood (2012) argue that “... definitions of teaching excellence cannot be adequately obtained from typologies and descriptions of techniques and skills”, suggesting that deeper understandings of what teaching excellence is can be developed through pedagogy-based conversations with students. In their study of university undergraduate student perceptions of what makes a good university lecturer, Su and Wood (2012) reported that certain key characteristics for example, being a good communicator; having a sense of humour; providing a supportive and safe space and using educational technologies were acknowledged by students as being important. Whilst identifying the technical, more process-driven factors, the more intrinsic, personal values are also indicators that students recognise and relate to what they perceive a good teacher to be. This is one discourse that is discussed in the literature, with the teacher being recognised as a charismatic subject (Moore, 2004) whereby the key to teaching is more aligned to these intrinsic qualities than the education and training of the teacher. In a study of university lecturers, Cotterill (2015) found that inspiring students required more than charisma and personality and there were an array of contributing factors involved. According to Moore (2004, p. 3) “... successful teachers are perceived as not having been made but simply as possessing ‘the right stuff’, the capacity to command enthusiasm, respect and even love through the sheer force of their classroom presence”. The apparent confusion in literature relates to what the unknown quality is that makes a good teacher great, or in the case of this paper, a great teacher, inspiring. Su and Wood (2012) note that great teachers have that extra “something” which they refer to as being un-measurable, whereby “... lists of qualities are inadequate as a method to capture it”.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Participants**

The sample for this small-scale reflective study consisted of the authors of this paper who are five female teaching and learning coordinators from a faculty of education, health and community within a UK university. All are full-time lecturers with over five years teaching experience who had responsibility for enhancing and developing all aspects of teaching and learning across the faculty.

#### **3.2. Ethical considerations**

As a collaborative study, participants were all engaged in the study design, exploring possible ethical issues together prior to commencement and again at data collection and analysis stages. The principles of informed consent and the right to withdraw were central to the study design. The raw data was kept by one member of the group in-line with the regulations. There were no seniority issues within the group in respect of this paper and all participants respected each other’s views and opinions as a good working relationship had been built up over the three years of working together.

#### **3.3. Data collection**

The authors of the paper collectively devised a set of questions that would enable them to reflect on their experiences and knowledge accumulated over the three years of running the faculty initiative on developing inspiring teaching. These were administered through email (Appendix 1) to the group and each member was given two weeks to think about and send in their answers. Jasper (2005, p. 253) recognises how “... narrative and self-reflective written accounts, that are then analysed and interpreted by the researcher, are a well-established data source in qualitative work”. Qualitative research studies are criticised at times due to the lack of generalisation of the findings. However,

Cronbach (1975) argues that social phenomena are too context-specific to permit generalisability and it may not be meaningful when the study is on a particular situation and where this is of interest, no attempt needs to be made to generalise or build theories (Stake, 1995). This type of research is essential in understanding certain phenomena and therefore the individual circumstances are worth exploring in this case around understanding and developing inspiring teaching. Data was only collected at one time period which has limited the information available. In hindsight, data should also have been collected half-way through the initiative to enable any changes in ideas or practice to be also explored.

### 3.4. Data analysis

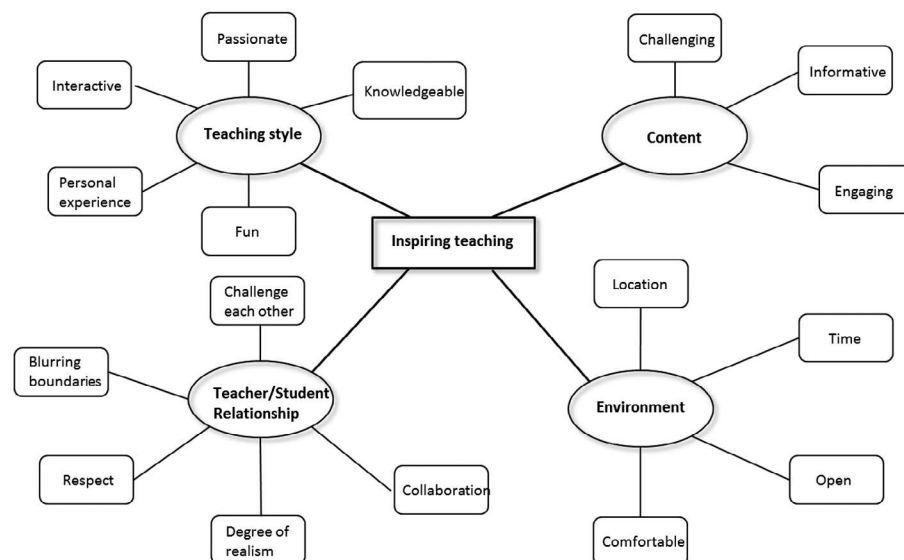
The respondents were asked to either submit a written account or use a Dictaphone to record their personal narratives of the key themes relating to this study. Respondents were guided by a set of open-ended questions (see Appendix 1) and were encouraged to expand in their responses. The questions were based around: staff development; the challenges of developing the notion of inspiring teaching amongst other staff; the initiatives used within the faculty; and thinking differently about personal teaching practice.

The anonymised recordings were transcribed verbatim by an external agency not involved in the project and were thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of analysis: familiarising with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and finally, producing the report. The findings will be explored through the two overarching research aims:

- the facets of inspiring teaching;
- developing inspiring teaching through staff development.

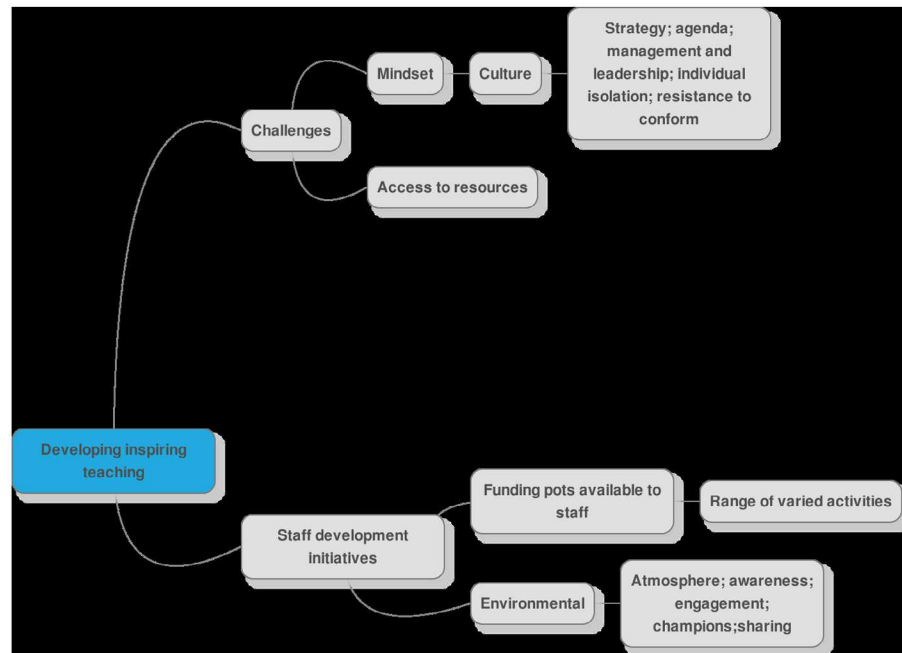
The data was illustrated using thematic networks (web-based illustrations), recognised as being a robust tool for systematically analysing and presenting qualitative data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Thematic networks allow for the extraction of basic themes; organising themes and global themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001) which can be found in Figures 1 and 2 for this paper.

Figure 1. Thematic network for inspiring teaching.



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Figure 2. Thematic network for developing inspiring teaching.



## 4. Findings and analysis

### 4.1. Exploring inspiring teaching

I think that inspiring teaching is about taking risks, trying out new approaches, experimenting with old ones and looking critically at what happens. (R1)

All respondents agreed that inspiring teaching was multi-faceted and it is not down to one attribute but a variety including: content; the teacher/student relationship; curriculum design; teaching style/delivery method and the teaching environment. These characteristics align with Chen, Brown, Hattie, and Millward's (2012) summary of the Western teaching excellence literature which identified similar characteristics, which in their study were linked to student progress. The ideas in Figure 1 are the organising themes in the thematic network for inspiring teaching. The attributes, skills and factors that are mentioned within the literature are all contained within Figure 1. However, in exploring this further, all of the respondents felt it was the relationship between the factors that worked together to create inspiring teaching.

It is about the relationship between the teacher, the learner and the material. The teacher has to be working in a way that suits them ... the material needs to engage the audience. The time of the session and location need to be taken into account to ensure maximum engagement. (R1)

It is about all of them coming together to enable the teacher to be at their best and the students to be at theirs. It's about attitude and wanting to inspire others to learn and it is very hard to measure or even get what it is sometimes that makes the learning work. (R5)

#### 4.1.1. Teaching style/content and environment

The style of an inspiring teacher is a subjective term and means different things to individuals and we need to be wary of attempts to link good teaching with the personal qualities of the teacher (Harvey & Knight, 1996). Unsurprisingly a passion for, and an in-depth knowledge of the material being delivered were highlighted as key qualities of an inspiring teacher, with rapport and mutual respect often mentioned within the data.

Your personal style is of key importance. Factors include; confidence, resilience, professionalism, dedication, enthusiasm, subject knowledge and energy ... if inspiring teaching is about students wanting to use their own minds and engage with a topic, this is most likely to come about by the lecturer showing passion for a topic. (R2)

The curriculum planning and the personality of the deliverer need to match up. Some methods of teaching could only be pulled off by a certain type of person. Everyone can try different methods and everyone can be inspiring but maybe some particular methods are not suitable to some personalities. (R1)

Good teaching depends on academics seeing their role as facilitators of transformational learning, not merely as purveyors of data (Harvey & Knight, 1996). Bain (2004, p. 15) writing in the USA suggests that "... without exception, outstanding teachers know their subjects extremely well". When exploring the respondents' views of the learning content, a number of factors were highlighted which were more to do with the delivery than the subject itself. To be inspiring it was perceived that three factors were necessary: to be informative, engaging and challenging. Subject knowledge was agreed by all to be crucial, but the way that this was portrayed to students was of higher importance.

I believe a lecturer's ability to connect with a student is as, if not more important, than subject knowledge. (R2)

The external environment is to some extent out of the control of the lecturer and there is not a lot of focus on the configuration of learning spaces in the literature (Temple, 2007). Adaptable teaching spaces may lead lecturers to reconsider their practices (Warger & Dobbin, 2009) and it was found in this study to be important in the mix of activities that make up inspiring teaching.

It is important that the environment is comfortable, spacious, correct temperature and lighting so that the students are not pre-occupied with how they are feeling physically, and can instead put all their focus into the session. (R3)

The environment is not necessarily the be all and end all. For example, if you are constantly timetabled in a tiered lecture theatre, this might restrict design but I don't think it means the ideas would not work at all. (R5)

#### 4.1.2. Curriculum design

Curriculum design is one of Kreber and Cranton's (2000) key components of excellence in teaching which sits in their view alongside instructional, which this paper refers to as teaching style. Good teaching has a sense of how the part (the module) fits in with the whole (the programme) (Harvey & Knight, 1996). As a further example of the multi-faceted nature of inspiring teaching, curriculum design does not sit alone and will in some ways be determined by the individual style and preferences of the lecturer, the environment they will be teaching in and what they are aiming to achieve from the sessions.

Inspiring teaching is that which makes students want to use their own minds and fully engage. Whilst a lecturer can achieve this in a one-off session using their personal characteristics and teaching style, a student is more likely to fully engage with the programme if it has been well designed and planned so that it fits together. Without effective curriculum design and planning, this will not be achieved. (R2)

This is crucial for the majority of individuals, there are those rare teachers who can just talk and learning happens, for the rest of us we need to design it in such a way that we play to our strengths as teachers and enable the students to learn in the best way we know how. (R5)

#### 4.1.3. Teacher/student relationship

All of the respondents felt that the teacher/student relationship is fundamental to inspiring teaching. *Challenge* emerged as a strong theme, not just challenging the students with difficult material

but also challenging them to think for themselves. The concept of challenge also arose in relation to the content that was being taught, indicating that the ideas around inspiring teaching are not necessarily about being deemed as “nice and kind” but about pushing boundaries and moving students possibly out of their comfort zones.

Inspiring teaching challenges students to use their own minds, it encourages them to want to fully engage with a topic, to explore and critically analyse all ideas associated with it. (R3)

Investigating the teacher/student relationship further, it was found to also be about encouraging students to challenge the lecturer about a subject; to question, probe and investigate the subject more. This could be out of some teachers’ comfort zones and be dependent upon personal beliefs about the power balance between staff and students. One respondent called this the *blurring of the boundaries* between the teacher and learner.

Trying to balance the teacher’s desire to share knowledge and skills with the learners needs ... blurring the boundaries between teacher and learner so that the teacher is openly a learner and facilitates the learners to take on the role of teacher, to develop authoritative ways of knowing. (R4)

Therefore, an inspiring teacher is perhaps one that is able to facilitate, through their teaching style, content, curriculum design and the relationship they build with students, a desire to want to learn for themselves and develop their own ideas and opinions. Again highlighting how multi-faceted this complex activity is.

If you are inspiring you have made the students want to go and learn more and be more curious about the subject ... this will hinge on the rapport that develops with the students—you want them to challenge you about the subject, to investigate the subject more, but you have to create the environment to allow them to do this. (R5)

A key issue relating to creating an inspiring learning environment was trust and whether or not the relationship between staff and students was strong enough to foster an environment of creative and innovative teaching methods, which may be untried and untested.

If the students trust you with their learning and development then they will be more likely to buy into your vision. If students are drilled to be taught in standard, repetitive methods, and then all of a sudden you try to integrate a variety of new methods of teaching they may be reluctant to trust that this will still help them to achieve their academic targets. (R1)

This is when it really works well and it becomes a two way process between staff and students. It is more difficult to do in large numbers at a personal level, but you can still build the trust if you deliver what you say you will and do it with enthusiasm. (R2)

#### **4.2. Developing inspiring teaching**

The previous discussion around the concept of inspiring teaching highlights the complexity of this as a topic. The difficult task of developing a personal philosophy of teaching is increasingly important in the current climate, as it can provide teachers with “... a moral anchor during times of social change” (Skelton, 2012, p. 257). For new university teachers, this task is often set as part of the Post Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, a qualification which is a requirement in many institutions in the UK. Reconciling these individual values with faculty or institutional cultures and external constraints on teaching can cause conflict, as there is often limited space set aside for staff to engage in developing their own philosophy let alone collectively forging a shared view of inspiring teaching. Skelton (2012, p. 267) explores the conflicts between individual and institutional values experienced by university teachers in his study, arguing that an approach that seeks to explore these conflicts would move these from private conflicts to “... a vibrant and pluralistic higher education community where the discussion of pedagogical values would become an accepted part



of professional life”. This paper will now explore the successes and limitations of developing a community of staff working towards an idea of inspiring teaching.

#### 4.2.1. *Learning, teaching and assessment initiatives in supporting the development of inspiring teaching*

In thematically analysing the views of the respondents, the following emerged as critical factors in developing inspiring teaching (Figure 2).

When asked about the importance of learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) initiatives in supporting staff, the adjectives that were used included, *hugely, critical, crucial* and *vital*. The reason for the importance placed on staff development was that it provided an opportunity for staff to learn and develop, without which all respondents felt practice could not be improved.

Staff development is critical in promoting and developing inspiring teaching. It is important that staff have on-going and regular opportunities to learn from one another. (R3)

It is really important, because without support networks or idea sharing, some people may feel content to just stick at what they have always done. (R5)

It was felt amongst all respondents that LTA initiatives, such as week-long immersive staff development programmes (Hennessy et al., 2014), and weekly “how to” newsletters that share good practice, both aimed at supporting inspiring teaching were a success. The respondents believed they provided a forum for colleagues to share ideas and that people opened up because of the relaxed, informal nature of the sessions.

The atmosphere that was created was important, if people are stuck in their ways they need help to try new things, it would not work in too formal a setting therefore the atmosphere, structure and setting for the activities was crucial. (R5)

The LTA initiatives opened up the faculty, allowing us to see what was happening in different teams, to share ideas and feed off the enthusiasm of like-minded others. (R4)

The notion of learning from others was also highlighted as an important mechanism of engaging more individuals in staff development. However, R1 felt that whilst opportunities were provided, they were unsure as to what level individuals had taken this on board and what it meant personally to them to be an inspiring teacher.

Once colleagues see the methods others are using and the success that has resulted, they too will want to try to use these tools and techniques. The majority of people want to better themselves and be good at the job; the staff development weeks have given staff ideas on how to do this. (R3)

Engagement was higher than I expected, but there are lecturers who are stuck in their ways, in their comfort zones and may never change. (R5)

A key outcome of the staff development programme was that colleagues in the faculty had a heightened awareness of different learning and teaching methods and strategies. This was done in a “how-to” format so staff could actually implement new methods easily, for example, the Technology Enhanced Learning team offered workshops and one to one help. Academic cultures might be perceived as conservative, at least in terms of development of teaching and learning (Roxå, Mårtensson, & Alveteg, 2011) and therefore sharing new ideas and strategies is crucial to enable the development of practice.

The sessions have given staff a new outlook on what can be done beyond traditional methods and ideas. (R5)

We have offered a lot of opportunities on the how to teach and ways to structure learning. (R1)

The respondents believed that staff development is effective in providing a space to get people talking, but further activity is needed. One way this support was given was in the funding for LTA projects, which have given staff a secondary mechanism and incentive to pursue ideas. Engaging everybody is difficult and small step changes are required to help move the values and attitudes of staff towards inspiring teaching.

The LTA initiatives certainly put inspiring teaching on the agenda in the Faculty, stimulating debate there and in the wider university. (R4)

Being recognised by the University for an Excellence in Teaching and Learning award in acknowledgement of the impact our work was having on the faculty and broader university really showed that there is merit and value to the approaches we were taking to staff development. (R2)

One of the key concerns raised by this group was how we encourage staff to want to get involved and develop themselves and their teaching. As commented by R3, those who actively contributed to the design of the staff development sessions probably got more out of them than other colleagues. One respondent, (R1), stated that it is about getting people to want to do it and see it as important. Culture emerged as an issue and this is one of the most difficult elements to change in universities, due in part to the long-standing history and sense of comfort associated with the accepted culture (Kezar, 2001). Culture "... perpetuates and reproduces itself" through socialisation within the organisation (Schein, 1990, p. 115). For staff development changing the culture is important, but also difficult to achieve.

It is good to create an environment where it is normal to be involved in staff development. If you get people to think it is the norm to be involved then this encourages others and creates people who think it is normal to work towards best practice. (R2)

We are not naive to think we can change the world, but we have made positive strides towards cultural change. A key part of this was buy in from senior management and the positive, enthusiastic environment that was created. (R5)

#### 4.2.2. Key challenges for developing inspiring teaching across all staff

When exploring the views about challenges, two themes emerged: *access to resources* and *altering mindsets*. In terms of the former, staff mentioned how time, money and space can be limiting in terms of delivering CPD sessions and getting speakers that are accessible across subject areas. However, whilst these are mentioned, it appears that the majority of respondents felt that the second issue (altering mindsets) is more of a problem and where the real challenge lies.

Fundamentally attitudes are the key challenge. Time, money delivering of CPD sessions can all be done, but if there are staff who won't open their minds to new ideas or at least try something new—then there is a problem. (R5)

Very often negative mind sets are not restricted to one individual member of staff working in a subject team. If a whole team are not willing to change, individuals will not feel safe or supported to try different things. (R2)

Within the theme of altering mindsets, respondents suggested that this not only needs to come from lecturers themselves, but also the faculty leadership. Respondent 3 felt this was crucial as this is where the priorities are driven from and to allow room for all to develop, the idea of inspiring teaching had to become a strategy. They suggested that leadership is the key to providing both access to resources and the opportunity to work at altering mindsets. Whilst the initiatives may not have reached everyone, they were successful in changing the mindsets of those most involved, thus

giving them the confidence to identify weaknesses and seek solutions. When discussing the problem with getting individuals to engage in wanting to improve their practice, respondents commented:

You have to feel quite confident to be able to admit that maybe there are areas for improvement, then you have to know what to do about it and then there has to be the opportunities. (R1)

It was interesting that the teams of people who attended seemed to have a confidence in numbers of trying whole team approaches to developing practice. It was refreshing to see this collegiate approach to it, very much a we succeed together; we fail together mentality. These teams seemed more willing to change. (R3)

In exploring why staff are sometimes unwilling to engage with new methods, develop their teaching or alter their mindset, several ideas emerged. These included: resistance to perceived conformity; student's reluctance to learn in different ways and the potential to feel isolated if working amongst a programme team who place a higher value on other roles such as research.

Teaching does not hold the same esteem factor as research and therefore it is hard to motivate people to develop their practice and put effort into it—"it is OK to be OK at teaching" and "do we really need to be better than that" is something I hear quite often. (R1)

Perhaps this is where management and leadership have to come in and provide more opportunities for staff to speak about their strengths and weaknesses as a lecturer and put in place opportunities for development and improvement. In a study in South Africa, Quinn (2012) explored the resistance by academics to engage in activities aimed at their academic practice and found this to be about multiple factors based on the discipline, the beliefs about students, skills and performativity discourse.

## 5. Conclusion

In setting out to develop inspiring teaching as a faculty priority, a group of teaching and learning co-ordinators facilitated and supported over a three-year period a staff development programme as a mechanism for change. At the end of this experience, the group reflected on their perceptions and experiences in relation to the notion of inspiring teaching. Whilst acknowledging the small-scale nature of this paper, there is strength in the contribution that it adds given the amount of time the authors spent in facilitating staff development and engaging in conversation with colleagues about teaching. This study and the literature (Cotterill, 2015) align on the multi-faceted and complex nature of inspiring teaching. From a staff perspective, this study has found that inspiring teaching had three main components which were all interrelated, those being: the actual teaching and learning experience; the design of the curriculum and the teacher/student relationship. For an individual aiming to develop as a teacher key ideas emerged from this study, which included both the mechanical concepts and the more inherent qualities (Su & Wood, 2012). Informative, engaging and challenging were highlighted as key factors for an individual to consider, alongside utilising the environment as much as possible. Away from the teacher themselves, the design of the curriculum was noted as important and this is highlighted in a study of the components of teaching excellence (Kreber & Cranton, 2000). The relationship between the teacher and the students again brought up the issue of challenge and what one respondent called blurring the boundaries with the teacher and the student taking on different roles to develop the learning. It is recognised that this element may come with experience and this is something that not everybody will be comfortable with.

Alongside the notion of what inspiring teaching may be, the study utilised the staff expertise to explore issues around developing a culture and community to support inspiring teaching. Cotterill (2015) suggested that more research is needed to be undertaken to explore academic staff views on staff development to ensure that universities are delivering what the staff need. This paper suggests that staff development initiatives can help people explore and develop their own teaching philosophy, to develop new practices, to share and learn from others and therefore this approach to staff

development is worthwhile. However, this did not work for all staff and the mindset and attitudes were found to be biggest challenge, with senior leadership needing to support the idea of inspiring teaching as a philosophy. This study may offer teaching staff a frame by which to scaffold both their individual approaches to teaching and support change in the different aspects that make a good learning environment. It may also offer those in development roles evidence that staff development initiatives can, and do, make a difference. Working with students is at the heart of academic community and each individual may want something different from their teacher and each teacher can offer something to inspire the learner going forward.

### 5.1. Directions for future research

Future research is needed to explore the inherent qualities, or what Su and Wood (2012) refer to as “virtuous” practice of teaching to ascertain if and how this can be developed in academic staff. The student perspective of what makes an inspiring teacher needs to be explored further and a suitable study would be one exploring the alignment or misalignment between student and staff perspectives of teaching.

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## Appendix 1

### Open questions used

- (1) What does inspiring teaching mean to you?
- (2) In what ways have the LTA initiatives been effective in supporting an ideology of inspiring teaching across ECL?
- (3) How important do you think staff development is in promoting and developing inspiring teaching?
- (4) What do you see as the key challenges for developing inspiring teaching across all staff?
- (5) In what ways do you think it is important to inspire others in their practice?
- (6) In what ways have the LTA initiatives prompted you to think differently about inspiring teaching in your own practice?



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