Teaching Induction Program: Framework, Design and Delivery

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Abstract

Professional development is a key factor in ensuring teaching staff are confident in the delivery of quality teaching. Professional development is especially relevant for staff who are new to teaching and are required to teach in the context of the large and increasingly diverse student cohorts, prevalent in the Faculty of Business and Economics. The Teaching Induction Program (TIP) addresses this need by modelling best practice in tertiary learning and teaching, delivered in a blended mode. The foundation of TIP is a series of videos, using the student voice, and this feedback is the lens through which knowledge and skills in learning and teaching are developed. During the program, participants build community around their experiences of implementing the teaching skills they have developed, and thereby reflect upon their efficacy for students' learning. Participant feedback is used to inform the development of following iterations of TIP and this has led to two additional programs being planned, using the voices of new teachers or tutors as well as experienced teachers.

1. Introduction

In this paper we describe a teaching induction program (TIP) designed and delivered by the Faculty of Business and Economics (FBE) in conjunction with the Learning and Teaching Centre at Macquarie University. Firstly, we explain the rationale for the development of the program, generally, and more specifically within the context of FBE. Secondly, we will describe the program itself and the development of additional programs, highlighting how the program closes the loop between student expectations of teaching and teaching practice. Thirdly, we will detail the response to the program, particularly from the participants, but also from other faculties and universities.

2. Rationale

We argue that effective teaching and effective learning are linked and that targeted professional development will lead to more effective teaching. We have applied a professional development framework (Brown et al, 2010) derived from the United Kingdom higher education standards (Higher Education Academy, 2006) to develop a Teaching Induction Program (TIP) for university teachers.

The professional development framework takes the UK standards and translates these into a framework for professional development for different roles in teaching in higher education. These are:

Level 1: Teaching classes – applies to all teaching staff and emphasises the skills needed in student management and learning

Level 2: Coordinating units – applies those coordinating subjects

Level 3: Leading programs – applies to those who are managing groups of units such as heads of department/school

In Australia, this broadly corresponds to the roles of tutor, lecturer and head of department (or program leader) though many of us take multiple roles. The main benefit of using the framework is that the professional development can be planned as needed while still covering all the required elements. As teaching staff become more experienced and take on more comprehensive roles, the professional development can move through the framework in supporting them in their expanded roles. A group of lecturers from the Australian Mathematical Society has used the framework to develop a discipline-specific professional development program covering level 1 and 2 requirements for teaching staff in the quantitative sciences (http://www.austms.org.au/Professional+Development+Unit).

At Macquarie University, we have three programs covering parts of the framework. TIP 1 and TIP 2 cover level 1 skills and TIP 3 covers some level 2 skills. The level 3 skills are needed only for program leaders and are run sporadically as the need arises.

TIP is drawn from the philosophy that academic induction should:

• encourage reflective and collaborative learning environments through online media (Kandlbinder, 2003);

• stimulate exchange of teaching ideas born from both theory and personal experience (Trowler & Knight, 2000; Simpson, Cockburn-Wootten & Spiller, 2005);

• advocate induction within a disciplinary context (Clark, Healey, Jenkins, Wareham, Chalkley, Blumhof, Gravestock, Honeybone, King & Thomas, 2002);

• foster a student-centred approach to learning and teaching (Biggs, 2003);

• create a culture of research-led teaching across the Faculty (Dearn, Fraser & Ryan, 2002).

3. The Teaching Induction Program (TIP)

The Teaching Induction Program (TIP) in the Faculty of Business and Economics (FBE) of Macquarie University introduces new staff to the principles of tertiary learning and teaching and provides ongoing support on a Faculty basis. In 2010 the program was granted a Vice-Chancellor Award for Programs that Enhance Learning at Macquarie University. The TIP website is located at http://bewiki.ltc.mq.edu.au/TutorTraining.

The Faculty of Business and Economics has a large and ever growing undergraduate and postgraduate student population (16,000). Many subjects consist of large cohorts (>500), resulting in a large number of tutorials and corresponding number of tutors as the standard weekly delivery of a subject is a (whole cohort) lecture followed by a smaller (20-30 person) tutorial session. There is also a high proportion of international students (60%) in the Faculty, mainly from Asia but also from Europe and South America, who bring a diverse set of languages and cultural expectations to the learning environment. Add to this, the diverse academic workforce comprising around 50% sessional staff. Sessional staff are contract staff who are paid on an hourly basis for their teaching. Many are PhD students. In North America these staff would be called teaching assistants. There is an apparent need for a program that is both targeted and that can be offered more flexibly.

The rationale for developing TIP grew from the need to address the academic development needs of this diverse Faculty. An initial appraisal was carried out including a sessional staff survey, interviews with Heads of Department (HOD) and a Faculty wide professional learning survey. Informed by this organic data and combined with both qualitative and quantitative data from Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) past reports, the program was developed (Handal & Huber, in press).

3.1 Cross-University Collaboration

The program is coordinated and administered by the TIP team which comprises the Faculty Director of Learning and Teaching along with an Educational Developer or Designer (ED). Macquarie University has a central learning and teaching centre (LTC) which supports the faculties with educational and academic development services such as curriculum design and integration of learning technologies. Co-opting an ED from the LTC further ensures alignment and coherence with University Learning and Teaching Policies, strategic plans (eg

learning and teaching) and visioning documents (eg MQ@50). The program is widely advertised via the Faculty email lists and the Learning and Teaching Centre and is shared with the Associate Deans and Directors of Learning & Teaching in the other three Macquarie faculties. Participants receive a certificate upon completion of the program, endorsed by the Dean of FBE as well as remuneration for their time. The total time commitment to the program required by participants is 9 hours, which includes both in-class and online aspects as described below. This demonstrates the Faculty's emphasis and commitment to professional development in learning and teaching.

3.2 Program Design – Overview

A Faculty based professional development program provides staff with a range of pedagogical tools aimed at enriching the student experience within their discipline area. In induction programs new staff are introduced to the Faculty culture and available resources, allowing them to grow confidently and professionally in their roles. Initially, TIP was designed to accommodate the large number of 'new' (to teaching) staff working in the Faculty. However, not all teaching staff are new and there is also a perceived need for a professional development program to meet the needs of more experienced teachers, tutors and academics who can bring skills to the collaborative learning environment. Therefore TIP 2 and TIP 3 were conceived as a further development, once TIP 1 (the student-centred design) was embedded into the Faculty. TIP 2 would also offer a next step for the TIP 1 graduates and similarly for TIP 3. Confirmation of this need was also harnessed during participant feedback from TIP 1 deliveries; for example, this comment "I'd like to actually see some experienced - maybe some first year lecturers who've just come out. Not just the 23-year-olds but maybe the 47-year-olds or the 57-year-olds who are just coming into teaching now and their experience - then maybe someone who's been 10, 15 years in the job too and their experience."

TIP 2 is currently being designed and will commence in Semester 1, 2012. It will use similar learning design to TIP 1 (see structure and delivery section below), but the videos which are the central underpinning to the program and which use the student voice in TIP 1, will be designed and constructed through the voice of the tutor in TIP 2. TIP 3 will further extend the 'experience' approach to curriculum development by using the voice of the lecturer. In this way, the spectrum of academic experience from novice to expert will be covered by the TIP program in a three-stage model (see Figure 1.) This model also acts as a quality enhancement cycle whereby the loop is closed between the lens or voice informing professional development, which in-turn informs teaching practice which in-turn informs the lens or voice (see Figure 2.)

3.3 Content of TIP 1

The main resources of TIP 1 are designed around the set of student-centred videos, themselves designed from extensive research into the experiences of our students. The work for producing the TIP student-centred online videos for academic development began in 2008. In that year, a series of interviews aimed at capturing students' expectations of quality teaching was carried out in FBE. The methodology followed a body of research on students' perceptions of good teaching, revealing that these perceptions are relevant to the design of teacher professional learning programs (Abrami, D'Apollonia & Rosenfeld, 1997; Sorensen & Cox, 2004). The interviews involved twenty-three students from three faculties of business and economics in the Sydney Metropolitan area (Handal, Wood & Muchatuta, 2011). Responses revealed that students held clear perceptions of quality teaching and learning, corroborating previous research (Jahangiri & Mucciolo, 2008; Okpala & Ellis, 2005).

These videos then formed the basis of the ten online modules: at the first lecture or tutorial, delivering and presenting, questioning and answering, balance between theory and practice, encouraging student participation, interactive tutorials, providing feedback, working in groups, online tools and language barriers.

Each video is accompanied by reflection questions designed to promote critical understanding on a variety of teaching and learning issues in tutorials and lectures. The reflection questions are thought provoking and draw upon teachers' prior knowledge and practical experience. The reflection questions are also aimed at assisting teachers to become more reflective of their own practice and to develop a broader repertoire of instructional interventions. Questions are grouped into two categories: basic and advanced. Each video is also accompanied by a set of online reading materials to provide further understanding of each module theme.

3.4 Structure and Delivery of TIP 1

The first program (TIP 1) consists of three components:

1.   an introductory face-to-face session of three hours;

participants who are new to teaching at Macquarie University receive an explanation as to how the program fits into other professional learning pathways available to them. For example, participants are informed of the Foundations in Learning and Teaching (FILT) program offered by Macquarie's central Learning and Teaching Centre as well as our Postgraduate in Higher Education programs. The session focuses primarily on presentation skills practice, an area identified by many staff from the original needs analysis surveys as the most important practical skill for a new teacher. The session also gives an overview of the remainder of the program and prepares for the online segments which will follow.

2.   three online modules;

these are selected for both synchronous and asynchronous online delivery and interaction where participants discuss the chosen topics and foster a community of experience and questioning. Different tools have been trialled for delivery of the online modules. The Faculty wiki is used to deliver the online resources for the program as this allows easy access for continuous improvement and ongoing updates. It also provides an easily accessible platform for participants (no logins required for viewing). Furthermore, by using this emerging read/write web technology, participants are exposed to new ways of learning and teaching as well as its limitations and are able to consider the impact of these technologies on their own teaching techniques. Thus the program acts as model of strategically aligned good practice in the use of technology.

3.   a final three hour face-to-face session;

the modules selected for this session depend on the needs of the cohort, but cover various practical approaches to learning and teaching.

The program is offered throughout the year to cater for the schedules of sessional staff, including Saturdays.

3.5 Resources

Participants in the program can access the remaining optional modules anytime as they are hosted via the Faculty wiki. They are also supplied with additional support resources covering inclusive practice, discussions, writing examinations, feedback and peer observation. These are also available at http://www.mq.edu.au/ltc/resources/FBE_resources.htm

3.6 TIP Continuous Improvement and Development Model

The TIP team use a number of evaluation instruments to continually improve the program. These improvements can then be communicated to the participants, thereby modelling best practice of quality enhancement in learning and teaching. A second survey is administered at the end of the program. This invites participants to reflect on their students' learning and consider what impact the program has had on their (the students') learning experience. Along with the convenors' reflections, all of this data is recorded and reviewed and ideas are fed back into the design of the next offering, following an action research cycle for professional development (McNiff, 2010). For example, feedback from participants relating to timing and length of the online interactions has led to their reorganisation, and this section now comprises both asynchronous discussion forums and synchronous (live) discussion sessions offered via webinar software.

4. Response to the program

4.1 Participants

Since the program commenced in 2010, 120 staff have completed the program, over 13 cohorts. The majority of the participants have been sessional staff. The participants come from all four departments in the Faculty (Accounting and Corporate Governance, Applied Finance and Actuarial Studies, Economics and Marketing and Management) and all cohorts have consisted of students from more that one department. There have also been a small number of participants from other Faculties. The participants are also diverse in terms of their cultural and linguistic background and their age and life experience. The program has also been delivered to academics from the Faculty of Banking & Finance, National Economics University, Vietnam to provide professional development support as part of a World Bank project for teaching and research capacity building.

Participants valued the use of online media which enabled them to engage in reflective collaboration to actively construct knowledge (Kandlbinder, 2003). For example, one participant said of the online discussion forum: *"It was a good way of raising a discussion point and following through, people adding their input, providing evidence and suggestions from their own class"*. Further, the participants were quick to adopt practices of reflective and collaborative online learning environments (Kandlbinder, 2003) modelled in the program in their own teaching: *"TIP is also a good example for us to see the techniques we can use to teach students ... the*

delivery of TIP has allowed me to explore the different ways/mediums I can use to transfer my knowledge to students."

Responses from participants also showed how much they appreciated the collegial networks the program enabled them to develop. These networks allowed participants to exchange teaching ideas from their own experiences and relate and develop these ideas in relation to the theory delivered in the program (Trowler & Knight, 2000; Simpson, Cockburn-Wootten & Spiller, 2005) *"I have found the TIP useful and a great forum to learn from other members of staff and their experience.*" Again, there is specific evidence that the program has influenced teaching practice: *"It is good to see that other teachers are having the same experience ... Most definitely this will make a difference to my teaching!"*

The participants valued the use of the student voice. It made them aware of the issues facing students and led the participants to develop reflective teaching practices driven by the needs of the students (Biggs, 2003). As one participant said: *"[The videos] were thought provoking ... they touched on areas that I hadn't considered. They gave real-life examples rather than just a didactic version of learning."*

Feedback from another participant provides clear evidence that the program successful closes the loop between students articulating their needs and influencing teaching practice to meet those needs: *"When first tutoring ... the night before - I checked out the video and I watched the video about what you should do in your first tutorial."* and *"The effect [of TIP] was quite evident as these students tend to attend class more often and performed better in class tests after I carried out these changes."*

For many participants the program was the first introduction to the scholarship of learning and teaching. Participants were quick to respond positively to this introduction and understand the relevance of theory to their practices: *"I never realised that there were studies and stuff done on all of that, so it made me a lot more aware of how to set questions".* Furthermore, having been introduced to the concept of research-led (Dearn, Fraser & Ryan, 2002) student-centred (Biggs, 2003) learning and teaching, participants have carried our their own research to further develop their teaching. According to two participants, *"I organised my [online discussions] and I asked them to write whatever they think about the tutor and what they want to do in the tutorials";* and *"[I sought] feedback about my own – how they feel about my teaching and the tutorial. I used those ideas as well, which one of them was they want to work in groups and try to do the exercises in groups".* Thus, the program was effective in creating a culture of research-led teaching across the Faculty (Dearn, Fraser & Ryan, 2002).

4.2 Other responses to the program

The TIP program has been accessed by other faculties and universities. The Faculty of Arts has been using the resources in face-to-face induction sessions. The Newcastle Business School, University of Newcastle and the School of Mathematics and Applied Statistics at the University of Wollongong (UoW) are intending to use TIP resources for induction of sessional academics. Overwhelmingly, there has been an extremely positive response to the use of the student voice to make the needs and expectations of students explicit and to provide the stimulus for reflective collaborative learning environments, in which staff develop student-centred approaches to teaching.

4.3 Acting on responses - Closing the response loop

As well as responses such as those above which indicate the effectiveness of the program, we have also received feedback from participants, Macquarie staff and academics from other universities identifying where the program can be improved. As result of this feedback we have refined the structure and delivery of the program and added additional resources to the wiki. In additional, we are in the process of incorporating additional flexibility in the delivery of the program to further meet the needs of future participants. In this way, we are closing the loop between the feedback we receive on the program and implementing this to deliver improvements in the program to future cohorts of participants.

5. Conclusion

Given the time constraints of teaching staff, the TIP program delivers effective professional development based on a strong professional development framework and grounded in the voice of the participants – students and teachers. Feedback from participants shows that they can translate the learning in the program directly into their classes and that they notice an increase in student engagement. Tutors are finding their student ratings have improved.

We continue to develop the programs and to close the loop by monitoring the outcomes in terms of student learning and teacher confidence. We measure this through the use of student experience surveys, peer

observation and teacher reviews. The use of communication technology in the delivery of TIP assists with the use of best practice in learning and teaching and affords the participants more flexible options for completion.

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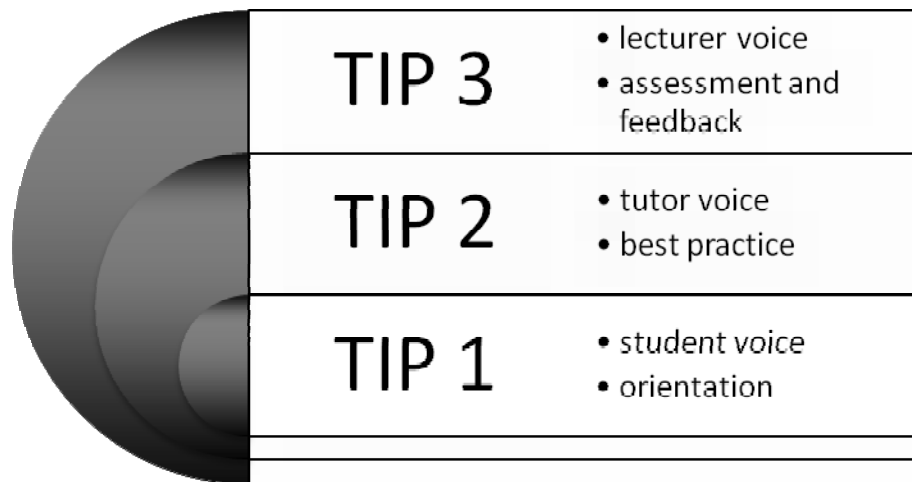
Figure 1. The TIP program overview

Diagram showing summary of content of each TIP and how it includes the voice of the previous TIP.
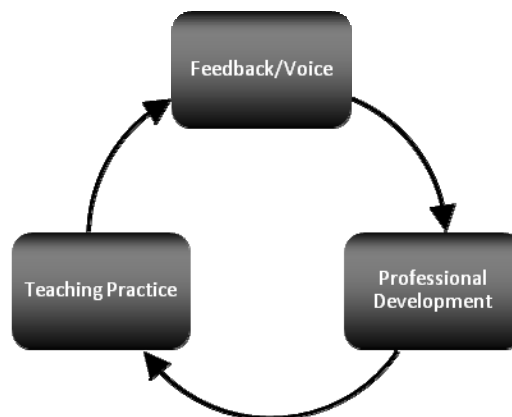
Figure 2. TIP - Closing the loop

Cyclic process of TIP, voice informs professional development informs teaching practice informs voice.