Fostering academic identities through PATS: Locating teaching in Academic Practice

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- Priority Focus and explanation of PATS variation

The focus was Quality Improvement. The PATS variation was focused on 10 academics, newly appointed as 'Professors of Practice' (PoP) at the La Trobe Business School, to improve curricula and teaching in selected subjects in the Management, Accounting and Economics undergraduate degrees so that students were 'work ready'. PoPs were appointed to the La Trobe Business School on the basis of their working knowledge of industry and a developing knowledge of academic practice.

Why
The program aimed to expand PoP academics' working knowledge of academic practice, and hence gain stronger knowledge themselves and what it is to be an academic. Partnerships between PoPs and academic peers aimed to inform the establishment of a university-wide process for improving teaching performance in large load-bearing subjects.

People
Peer partnerships were formed between the PoPs and senior academics in each department. They were supported by Educational Developers located in La Trobe Learning and Teaching.

Timeframe
One semester – from July to December 2015.

Scope
Selected subjects in the Management, Accounting and Economics undergraduate degrees.

- Key Outcomes
Partnerships in selected subjects addressed assessing 'work readiness' in formative and summative assessment activities. This was informed by student feedback that the learning experience was not relevant to their immediate or future needs.

System level impacts

Within La Trobe University, this PATS case aimed to have impact at IMPEL levels 1, 2, 3 and 4. It aimed at IMPEL level 4.

1. **Team members:** partnerships fostered a collegial culture amongst academics new to academia.
2. **Immediate students:** peer partnerships focused on engaging students through the idea that 'assessment drives learning', with higher levels of engagement in attendance at seminars in selected subjects.
3. **Spreading the word:** partnerships promoted within Business School raised awareness of value of collegial dialogue across university.
4. **Narrow opportunistic adoption:** as a result of the pilot, a PATS framework for the University has been adopted.

- Learning

1. Barriers and opportunities

Barriers and Opportunities: There was some initial resistance to the idea of individuals needing mentored assistance with their teaching practice or orientating to academic practice in general. This was because the group collectively had a broad range of experience of industry and commerce and some experiences of academia. However the emphasis on identify and 'who you are' provided a focus for discussions that assisted in overcoming resistance once the program commenced and collegial relationships were established

2. What worked well

Self-management of the partnerships by individuals in the group and emergence of a peer network amongst the group as an offshoot from the program. Preliminary student feedback about the value of the curriculum indicates higher levels of satisfaction amongst targeted subjects.

3. What didn't work well

Peer advice was drawn from academic mentor's own experiences and it was reported that both mentors and participants in the partnerships were looking for 'ideas' they could try out and talk about. Educational development support was designed to provide this support but it was not easy to provide it in a timely manner. More support mechanisms were required by those providing advice and assistance about academic work at is relates to teaching.

4. What was learnt

A focus on identity is highly useful in supporting academics to consider change in teaching practice.

5. National System Impact

- IMPEL Level 2: Changes by team members leading *to* changes for students who are directly influenced.
- *Contributing to* IMPEL Level 5: Systemic changes at participating institutions leading to changes for all relevant students.