

Opening up spaces for collegial, situated academic development practice within a strategic, centrally coordinated, team-based support model

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Academic development units do not always determine the orientation of their professional activity. This paper showcases an initiative to implement an institution-wide strategic, project and team-based, faculty support model in a regional, Australian university. The institution wished to broaden the impact of the academic development unit across five faculties and address growing staff need related to e-learning. Learning Innovation Teaching Enhancement (LITE) teams include academic developers, librarians, e-learning support and others. They work with faculty colleagues on learning and teaching projects, targeting improvement at the degree and discipline level. This study uses a participatory action research, mixed-methods approach to evaluate both the effectiveness of our centrally coordinated model, and our capacity to retain successful aspects of our previous practice, such as situatedness and collegiality. This stage of the evaluation locates our support model within existing academic development practice and assesses its alignment with good practice principles outlined in relevant literature. Based on a preliminary analysis of group reflection, faculty uptake, success of project outcomes and survey data I conclude that LITE team projects can be an effective model for academic development. This initial evaluation also suggests that individual team projects tend to open up more collegial academic development spaces under the following conditions: where there is faculty ownership of project aims; where there is a faculty leader within the project team; where there is horizontal interaction between faculty participants, and between faculty and support team participants; and, where the academic developer can leverage existing relationships and collegial networks to generate a more collegial environment.