From Local

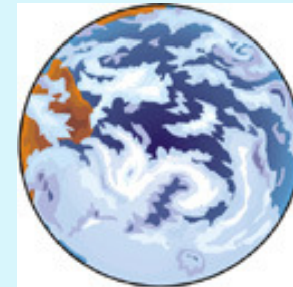**to Institutional**

to Global:

A case study of research-based academic development

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The Case-Study: Origins

Prebble et al (2004) NZ Ministry of Education
*The ultimate purpose of academic development practice is the enhancement of student learning outcomes. Research-based evidence that academic development can contribute to the achievement of that purpose is **limited in both quantity and quality**.*

*… the synthesis highlights **the paucity of New Zealand research in this area**, with only three New Zealand based studies exploring the link between academic staff development and the outcomes for teachers or students and no studies that address Maori or Pasifika contexts.*

Trowler and Bamber (2005)
*There is **little research** which clearly links effective student learning with improvements stemming from lecturer training. What studies there have been are either **inconclusive, making no claims to generalizability or reliability ….or are small scale** ….and make **no attempt to link** apparently positive outcomes for course participants to the learning outcomes of their students*

The Project

Involved: Academic developers (AD), teachers and students in seven NZ Universities.

Focus: Academic development support for teachers - impact on learning of their students in first year courses.

Mode of academic development

• sustained (3 yr), intensive AD – Teacher engagement and dialogue

• intention - development, implementation and evaluation of succession of teaching and learning enhancement initiatives (TLEIs)

= *co-practitioner action research*

The Project

Practice and Research-Related Questions:

What impact do teaching and learning enhancement initiatives (TLEIs) developed by academic developers and teachers have on students' learning experiences and achievement in large first year classes?

How can academic developers and teachers work together to enhance students' learning experiences and achievement?

How can the impact of academic developers on student learning be determined?

The Project: The Conference Theme/Issues

Bamber (2008) – two approaches to evaluating 'lecturer development programmes'.

Smaller-scale, institution-specific evaluations

• aligned with context

• provide rich data - framed within theoretical understandings shared/understood by all involved, avoiding causal simplicity

• informing development over time

• providing insights into longer-term impacts

• can lead to improved relationships between teachers and 'developers'.

The Project: The Conference Theme/Issues

Large-scale, multi-institutional evaluations

• tentative bench-mark data

• links made between participant experiences and theoretical constructs

• broad-brush strokes for key issues

   e.g. academic development $\longrightarrow$ student learning relationship

Our project

- embodied both approaches

- sought all, complementary benefits

Smaller-scale, institution specific: AUT University

Hospitality Fundamentals: large, part one core paper,
teacher *Lindsay*

Focus of TLEIs
- meeting needs of EAL students
- learning outcomes
- learning resources
- assessment tasks
- developing academic literacy skills
- teacher attributes
- teaching skills

Neil, Alison, Lindsay, Lorraine, Jim

What Issues and challenges?

Hoped to:

• relate/apply 'our' findings to

    - other contexts within the school, faculty, university

    - similar contexts in other universities.

In order to:

• address potential time-cost effectiveness constraint of this mode of academic development.

• respond to critique of SoTL re undue pre-occupation with single classroom. Need to 'go meta'.

• make contribution to aggregated, multi-university findings.

By engendering ripple effects

Proactively, strategically - with considerable success

- across Lindsay's other courses

- within Lindsay's School (Hospitality and Tourism)

- within AUT University

- beyond AUT University

(See handout)

Ripples within the School

- new identification and support strategies for linguistically 'at risk' students (Vocabulary Levels Test)
- increasing use of *Vocab Profiler* to assess vocab demands of text
- improved working relationship with staff in other faculties providing service papers for School (e.g. Academic English).
- more attention to programme coherence (outcomes/content)
- more valuing of research as basis for decisions re learning/teaching
  - student, teacher, industry mentor views re graduate attribute profile.
  - Vocab Profiler in 2 programmes
- more interaction between School staff and academic developers.

Engendering ripples

Requires:

- regard for complexity of environments (more than complicated)

- insights – people, cultures, processes (formal/informal), norms etc.

- respectful 'ferreting out' when don't know or unsure

- planning of ripple engendering initiatives (vs serendipity)

- commitment to further research (status of evidence)

- time, perseverance, resilience (some rebuffs likely)

At the multi institutional level: Shared insights and understandings

For teachers:

- *Teacher Guides* from each case study – for other teachers – with caveats/cautions re context (sample)

For academic developers:

Important insights re

- this mode of academic development (resource available)
- across-institution academic development/research initiatives (chapter)

At the multi institutional level: Shared insights and understandings

For researchers:

- reveal personal research paradigms and theoretical lenses that inform decision making – at the outset.
- remain rigorously self-reflexive in the course of such projects – confront issues, misperceptions, uncertainties, mistakes.
- be open to alternative research paradigms and approaches – all the way.

Issue: Closing the Gap – experiential understandings of phenomena (complexity) and perspectives implicit in research designs.

At the multi institutional level: Shared insights and understandings

Our data is saying that it is very difficult to see direct connections ….
We know when things go wrong, but it is not necessarily obvious what
is happening when things go well. Complexity abounds in teaching and
learning situations and it is often a coming together in harmony of
many, many aspects and elements that make up the context that
results in positive learning and experience outcomes. (AD)

At the multi institutional level: Shared insights and understandings

… the intangible nature *of academic development and the difficulties of proving that academic development impacts directly on student learning outcomes. The* interplay of so many factors *relating to students' approaches to learning and staff approaches to facilitating learning are not amenable to easy measurement. Overall we can interrogate student learning outcomes from exam results and their experiences through evaluation questionnaires. However, we cannot quantify academic development and its impact on how staff change their approach to facilitating learning, and we can only quantify changes in student learning outcomes with reservation given* the multi-factorial nature of teaching and learning. *(AD)*

At the multi institutional level: Shared insights and understandings

For researchers:

• Considering complexity theory

    - assists interpretation of such conclusions

    - aids development of reasonable recommendations

    - influences our thoughts about future inquiries

At the multi institutional level: Shared insights and understandings

Complexity Theory Premises – e.g.

Complex systems consist of a large number of interacting elements that are subject to feedback loops, so that the impacts of an element's actions may modify its future behaviour – which means that there may be instability and non-linearity in relationships between elements.

The outcomes of complex systems are always more than the sum of their parts (i.e. their local elements and the uncoordinated interactions between them). Interactions between those parts lead to the emergence of unpredictable phenomena. An analysis of the component elements of the system at one moment in time won't reliably allow prediction of emergence of such outcomes.

Systems are embedded or nested in other systems and co-evolve as adaptation occurs. It is not possible to fully understand one system without reference to others. Similarly, it is not possible to isolate such systems and it is difficult to identify boundaries.

At the multi institutional level: Shared insights and understandings

Complexity Theory – ctd
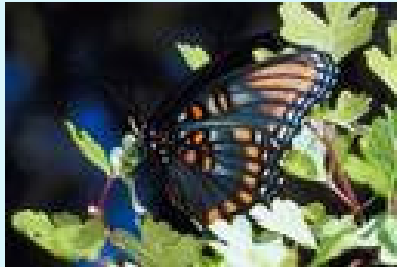
The behaviour of a system is often non-linear and there is a "sensitive dependence on initial conditions" which means that small difference in an initial variable can lead to major unforeseeable outcomes across the entire system (i.e. the butterfly effect). Conversely, a large change in one element may have negligible impact.

Our Experience – Yours?

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The National Research Team

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