



Getting Started on an Educational Development Career: From Faculty to Small College CTL Director

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Faculty members enter Educational Development (ED) from a wide variety of educational, disciplinary, and personal backgrounds, and ED roles can also vary widely by institution and position (Sorcinelli & Austin, 2010). However, recent research suggests that “although there are some exceptions, it is clear that the most common pathway to leadership in faculty development is through a faculty position” (Beach, Sorcinelli, Austin & Rivard, 2016). What draws such a diverse range of people toward such a career, and what are some of the attributes that make for a successful transition from faculty member to educational developer?

Common themes emerge from several studies examining pathways into ED (e.g., Stockley, McDonald, & Hoessler, 2015; Boon, Matthew, & Sheward, 2010; McDonald, 2010; Sorcinelli & Austin, 2010):

1. Although a common pathway to ED, especially for those working in small colleges, is from a faculty role, there is no set path.
“Routes into the profession are anything but linear. What seems universal is that we all begin somewhere else.” (Boon et al., 2010, p.7)
2. Chance often plays a role
“When learning about and entering into the field of faculty development, there was, in most cases, an element of serendipity involved - unanticipated developments or chance events of significance to one’s career.” (Stockley et al., 2015, p.64)
3. Situational and personal factors often play a critical role. Many ED practitioners identify “key individuals (e.g., mentor, colleague, administrator); their own involvement and interest in teaching, learning, and technology initiatives; an educational vocation; accidentally

Jason’s Story

The phrase, “Boiling Frog Syndrome,” comes from the urban legend that if you drop a frog in boiling water, it will jump out, but if you place a frog in tepid water and gradually raise the temperature, then the frog will eventually succumb to the heat as it accommodates to this new stressor. As my own teaching career developed I dabbled in the “shiny things” of podcasting and webcasting and wiki site creation. In a small university, when you do the “shiny things” well, it often attracts attention and it isn’t long before you get asked to hold a session on how to do ____ (fill in the blank). Gradually I was invited to present whatever I wanted to present to the faculty. I was the frog, and I had just been placed in tepid water, and it felt ok.

Another opportunity arose due to a faculty request for information on something I was doing. Turn the temperature up, but only a couple of degrees. The frog remained. More opportunities, slight temperature increase. More opportunities and soon this frog was floating in his own personal hot tub. When my engagement with the faculty had been consistent for a couple of years with 2-3 thirty-minute presentations per year on the “shiny things,” I was invited out to lunch and the big ask was pitched. The frog didn’t jump out of the water this time but embraced it.

stumbling into the profession (e.g., job opportunity); working in an institutional role which necessitated connection with their campus instructional support centre; and being asked to do faculty development work because of the relevance of their discipline training and expertise.” (Stockley et al., 2015, p.64)

Although there is little in the literature focused on why or how faculty move into educational development, personal reflections and conversations with colleagues at POD Network conferences suggest the following possible motivations:

1. Faculty who become educational developers have really just swapped one class of students for another. As a faculty member in ED, we now teach a new class of learners – our faculty colleagues. We have not stopped teaching in our new roles, we have simply changed the audience and content.
2. When we teach a class, we impact a limited number of students at a time. When developers work with a group of faculty, that influence is multiplied to every class those educators teach. Improving teaching will not simply create better learning environments, but will hopefully inspire a new generation to pass on their newly gained knowledge to others.
3. The satisfaction with seeing a colleague learn a new skill is the same as the satisfaction of watching a student gain new insight. Educational development is not just about conveying theory, it is about altering practice.

So What Does it Take to Be an Educational Developer?

Educational development requires more than just being a good teacher. In her 2014 article, Laurie Grupp explains that being a good developer is not about the

Gary's Story

As an incoming tenure-track faculty member at a mid-sized liberal arts college, I became a regular participant in the weekly lunchtime faculty conversation events hosted by our teaching and learning center. The then-director of the teaching and learning center noticed my regular involvement in the center's work and took me under his wing. What followed were opportunities to get more involved in the center through presentations at the faculty lunch programs and new faculty orientation. I was also introduced to the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) – a concept that fit so well with my implicit ideas of what teaching should be like that it went off like a light bulb for me. With support and guidance from the director and center, I found myself starting to publish more in SoTL than in my disciplinary scholarly area.

Then the center director announced his retirement. I learned shortly after from our assistant provost that I had been nominated for the director position. Being nominated, I now actually had to consider whether I wanted to do this, and whether I should keep my hat in the ring. The clincher for me was when I learned that my nominator was the outgoing director – if he had confidence that I could do the job, then just maybe I could... After some soul searching, I decided that I really did want to take on the role, and the more I thought about it, the more confident I became that it was a good fit for me. You probably already guessed how the story ended, and now I was officially an educational developer.

I've also had a second mentor who was instrumental in providing much needed support in my new role. This was a more experienced faculty developer who I first met at POD Network's Institute for New Faculty Developers where he was a presenter. Since then, this mentor and friend has provided a critical sounding board for ideas and has been a continual source of great conversations and advice.

I'm now in the final semester of a six-year term as director, and heading toward my second sabbatical in the fall. While I won't have the official title any more come the end of this semester, ED has become a permanent piece of my professional identity and has forever changed the way I view my job as a faculty member.

knowledge you possess, but really about the care you express. Grupp concludes, "In order to be engaged in and possibly influence campus change, faculty developers need to be poised to participate and help lead that change." Being an educational developer involves more than simply encouraging others to teach better; instead, it is about engaging the systems within our institutions that limit effective teaching and about working with faculty, administrators and students to see those systems changed so that great teaching - and ultimately great learning - can flourish.

Making the shift from faculty to educational developer includes the following:

1. **Acknowledge that you now need to become a subject expert in a new field - educational development.** Depending on your discipline, this may mean learning education theories and expanding your expertise to include research on teaching and learning. These fields offer essential knowledge for us to bring instructional support to our colleagues.
2. **Plan to meet people face to face.** Teddy Roosevelt is credited with the line, "People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care." Engaging with people takes time; however, by spending time with people you will gain their trust and learn about their ideas and concerns.
3. **Be actively involved in the life of your faculty.** This is especially important at smaller institutions where almost everything people do for you may be voluntary, so developing good relationships - professional and personal - is crucial.
4. **Choose low-hanging fruit.** Which common teaching and learning issues at your institution could you possibly address or help solve? Pick the easiest one to make an impact. Being wise in the projects that you begin with will earn you emotional capital that will be beneficial in the long term. When faculty see that you are someone who gets things done and helps to make things work, then when you bring a suggestion for improvements in teaching, they remember the success you have already had and are more likely to join you.
5. **Lead up.** This is essential for success in ED. When you lead up, you help those above you in the organizational chart to understand the value of the things that you are doing and how they will impact the faculty and ultimately the students' learning in the future. Learning to lead up will allow us to engage in conversations that can allow us to steer the direction of our institutions, as it relates to teaching and learning.
6. **Build a network of colleagues and mentors.** Especially at small institutions, ED can feel like a lonely place at times. Surround yourself with supportive colleagues, from within your institution and from organizations like the POD Network. Mentoring can play a critical role for both you and your colleagues. Don't be afraid to reach out to people who can provide you with guidance. You'll find the POD Network to be a community willing and eager to support you. Similarly, consider the role mentoring plays at your institution. Mentoring done well can have enormous positive benefits for your faculty colleagues, and newer faculty in particular.
7. **You can make a difference.** Educational developers are in a unique position to generate and support positive institutional change from the "bottom up" through working with (especially, new) faculty, or "top-down" through providing important input to the administration on issues around teaching and learning.

8. **Prepare to return back to faculty.** For many small colleges, the position of CTL Director rotates or is more temporary. As Gary noted in his story (see above), the role can have long-term positive impacts but this can mean wearing “many hats” to maintain a teaching, scholarly, and service agenda.

For faculty who wish to transition into an educational developer or CTL Director role, the Educational Developer’s Caucus (2016) has developed an excellent resource, which includes self-assessments of key competencies needed for entry-level, mid-career, and director-level educational developers.

Being an educational developer is wonderful job. There is incredible satisfaction in working with colleagues who may have been struggling for whatever reason to suddenly see that transformation in their teaching that brings back the passion that got them into teaching in the first place.

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