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What is the Teaching for Learning Network?

Background

The Teaching for Learning Network (TfLN) has grown out of pedagogical development activities funded by the CambridgeMIT Institute (CMI), a collaboration between the University of Cambridge and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. TfLN has been established in order to extend and expand these activities, providing support for faculties, departments and other groups undertaking research and development projects with a specific focus of improving teaching and learning.

Since its establishment, the TfLN has also acted as a brokerage network where research and development activity in each department can be discussed, analysed and reframed for use in new contexts. Departmental education research initiatives typically involve collaboration between groups of staff and students, a team of education researchers based at CARET, and other departmental members of the TfLN. The work has included the development of research designs and instruments, collection and co-interpretation of data and the facilitation of user engagement and dissemination activities.

There is also emphasis on 'capacity building', with each participant being encouraged to submit their work to conferences and journals, and offering the opportunity to gain both theoretical and practical knowledge about pedagogical practices and the institutional conditions that promote their use in support of student learning.



Activities and Methods

Members of the Network meet once a week to review ongoing work, discuss research designs and share findings. This ensures that the work of the TfLN is:

Responsive: projects are developed in consultation with participants, who contribute to the establishment of a research agenda and specific priorities.

Participatory: the distinction between 'researchers' and 'participants' is often blurred, with TfLN providing 'critical support' to practitioner-researchers.

Developmental: research findings are used to inform interventions and innovations, which in turn are evaluated.

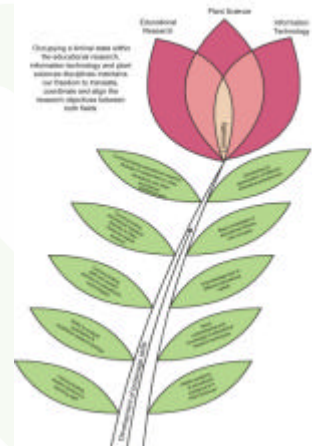
Warranted: approaches and models used are warranted in research literature and evidence. Emerging approaches and findings from TfLN activities are subjected to critical scrutiny and peer review.

TfLN projects also characteristically employ multiple research methods to gather data and analyse the results. Within the group, methods used by one participating department may be discussed, reviewed and reframed for use in another department; the Practice-Value Gap survey is a good example of this process.

Other research methods used by the TfLN have included:

- Self-efficacy surveys
- Focus groups
- Semi-structured interviews
- Learning environment observations
- Video analysis of lectures and small-group supervisions
- Seminars, workshops and 'change laboratories'
- Reflective diaries and research logs

Using liminality to your advantage: The role of mediator between educational research academics and other domain specific academics in higher education



Participants in the Network

Faculties, departments and groups of teaching staff and students are involved in the TfLN using a wide spectrum of activities. Examples of current TfLN participant activities include:

The Department of Plant Sciences at the University of Cambridge has used the findings of research with both staff and students to inform development of their 2nd Year Undergraduate course, which is now supported by rich online environments for staff and students. They are currently engaged in evaluation of usage of these resources.

The Department of Engineering at the University of Cambridge is currently reviewing their undergraduate practical work programme to integrate it closely with lectures and to maximise their student learning outcomes

The Faculty of Classics at the University of Cambridge has begun work analysing how students learn ancient languages and how best to effect a balance between grammar and vocabulary teaching to support the development of students as 'confident readers'.

And at MIT:

At MIT, faculty members in two engineering departments have collaborated in a systematic process to improve foundation courses. This process asks faculty to identify measurable learning objectives, and to use them to make decisions about course content, organisation, assignments, and educational technology. This same process is being used by two interdisciplinary faculty groups - one in engineering and one in the humanities - to develop experimental courses in project-based learning and interdisciplinary studies.

To find out more about the Teaching for Learning Network and its activities, you can:

visit the Network website:

<http://www.tfln.org>

email us:

tfln@caret.cam.ac.uk

What has TfLN achieved?

- Efficient processes for translating research into practice
- Applicability to a wide range of disciplines
- Participatory approaches which engage practitioners
- Development of a community of practice
- Capacity building for educational research
- Engagement with HEA Subject Centres
- Presentations at National and International Conferences
- Conference Papers, Book Chapters and Articles

Some of our recent conference papers

- **Sakai 2007** 'Student Interaction with a Sakai VLE In Plant Sciences'
- **Solstice 2007** 'Using the wiki 'the wrong way': a case study in Plant Sciences'
- **Blu 2007** 'Using an evidence-informed approach to create online learning resources'
- **EARLI 2007** 'Developing a Research Community in Higher Education as 'Co-Configuration'
- **BERA 2007** 'The Teaching for Learning Network: a Research and Development Initiative in Higher Education'
- **BERA 2007** 'Using liminality to your advantage: The role of mediator between educational research academics and other domain specific academics in higher education'