Mirrors, models, and merits: educational developers' credibility and leadership (0177)

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OUTLINE

Educational development in higher education around the world seeks to improve 'both educational processes and the practice of educators' (Stefani, 2003, p. 9). It demands a nuanced understanding of the academic workplace and the ability to lead highly educated colleagues to transform their own practices. In effect, it is a form of change management in a sector sometimes seen as obdurate in the face of changing demands. To enact this change, educational developers depend on positive and productive interactions between themselves and 'regular' academics. So how do developers position themselves such that these positive interactions can occur? How, that is, do developers establish credibility, or what factors contribute to their being *perceived* as credible by fellow academics? Among others, possibilities include disciplinary expertise, the credential of a terminal degree, and/or mirroring and modeling the practices of 'regular' academics. In this session, we examine how educational developers establish credibility with their academic colleagues, based on both the literature and on our data.

Through a survey of over 1,000 developers in 38 countries, we explored credibility, both through credentials and academic 'currency.' The study looks at developers' credentials, including the apparent value placed on terminal degrees and contract types, and subsequently analyses open-text comments that mention being able to 'pass' as a regular academic, mostly through use of audience-appropriate academic language and the perception of shared perspectives or shared dispositions. We also examine developers' current practices in terms of teaching and research in light of the literature on transformational leadership.

In their discussion of transformational leadership, Brown and Moshavi (2002) argue that academic leadership in higher education settings differs from that in other organizations and requires a slightly different approach for leaders to be able to succeed. They focus on heads of department, as contingent leaders with limited control over academics' work situations,

promotions, or salaries, who often have at their disposal only indirect mechanisms to create change. Educational developers similarly have only indirect influence over the work of academics and yet their task is to transform educational practices on their campuses. Relevant here, Brown and Moshavi (2002) examined which factors of transformational leadership are most important for department chairs to facilitate change in their areas. They found the most vital aspect to be 'idealized influence,' a factor that greatly relies on leaders modeling productive practices – embodying the principles and values they seek to infuse in their areas in a way that aligns with the highest level of Krathwohl et al (1964) taxonomy of the affective domain, 'characterization by value.'

Consistent with this transformational leadership research, although using a different framework, Blackmore and Blackwell (2006) argue that modeling may be most influential in transforming others' practice and that to be seen as trustworthy and credible, developers need to take a 'holistic academic practice approach' (p. 380), in effect mirroring the work of our clientele. Though they admit the need for some variability in both the faculty and developer career, they argue developers need to 'have a *real* appreciation of all the aspects of faculty roles' (emphasis ours), in other words, that we should have a demonstrated competence and understanding of teaching, as well as research, administration, and the connections between those facets of the academic role. This means that developers' approaches to supporting academics will necessarily bear in mind the competing priorities that academics have to juggle, rather than, say, only supporting learning and teaching, and therefore being less credible for not viewing the academic role holistically. Without this holistic view, developers run the risk of treating academics as if their work were 'unbundled' (Macfarlane, 2011) – as if teaching were their only concern and job requirement.

If we hold these arguments to be true, then educational developers will be more effective in their roles by mirroring the work of regular academics. From our survey of over 1,000 developers, we can establish what percentage of developers are engaged in teaching at all levels (undergraduate, postgraduate, and teaching of academics or teaching assistants), as well as those engaged in research, whether as a formalized part of their job or in addition to their work duties. We will also report on the kinds of research being conducted: research into educational development,

higher education, or respondents' prior disciplines. Additionally, we will report on national differences in this area for the 11 countries with 25 or more respondents.

As a separate layer to this topic, we consider how social identity theory adds to our understanding of developers' credibility, particularly in relation to prototypicality: being 'standard' or an exemplar in a particular field. Hogg's (2001) social identity research implies that the more prototypical developers appear – for example, through their academic credentials – the more persuasive they might be. (A comparison may be drawn here with the principle of 'homophily' in sociological research. See, for instance, McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001.) This credibility is important for the primary work that educational developers do: influencing academic practice and transforming education.

Little and Green (2012) report that developers see themselves as 'passing' in different workplace situations, whether as administrators or as regular academics, and that adopting particular roles enables them to be more effective in their work. One feature that renders passing among academics smoother is the credential of a terminal degree – a badge, so to speak, of belonging in the academy. With that badge come certain additional skills, attributes, and habits – using audience-appropriate language, following research methods and evidentiary standards of particular academic fields, and so on – that provide developers access to, and credibility in front of, their academic colleagues.

From our quantitative data, we present respondents' highest qualifications and disciplinary backgrounds, revealing, for instance, that two-thirds of developers come from fields outside education. From qualitative responses, we explore the extent to which developers claim those credentials – and the disciplines of those credentials – aid their credibility in front of the cross-disciplinary audiences with whom most developers work.

Ultimately, we investigate whether developers' credibility – through the mirroring and modeling of practice and through the merit of credentials – positions them for transformational leadership.

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