



Pedagogic Research (PedR) model

A 'how to' guide on developing, promoting and celebrating pedagogic research activities, with a view to supporting the student experience.

Introduction

Institutions across higher education often grapple with challenges of tackling quality issues that are informed by the literature and exemplars of good practice. The following PedR community model was developed to address these challenges as part of a QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project. This project aimed to unpick these challenges and created this model approach which both higher education (HE) and further education (FE) can adapt to promote a culture of a scholarly informed approach to their own institutional decision-making processes. The model was developed from documenting existing practice across the sector and by project members, and from feedback from a community conference across HE and FE. The model outlines key factors involved in developing, supporting and promoting a positive culture around pedagogic research, including support and recognition for staff. It also outlines practical suggestions about how to develop and support a PedR culture and utilise communities to contribute to teaching and learning related decision-making bodies.

Executive summary

The core objective of this project was to address the challenge of how institutions can take decisions on matters of quality which are informed by the literature and sector-wide good practice. The project involved contributors from across HE and FE, who were able to share their experiences, examples of practice and culture around quality processes. Findings from the project found evidence that there was a mixed culture around awareness, engagement and promotion of pedagogic research. A clear barrier to development of quality processes therefore revolves around the development of promoting and developing a positive culture around PedR.

There was lots of good practice unearthed to demonstrate that PedR is active across institutions, and how this is informing the development of quality processes. By linking these activities together it is possible to develop a coherent approach to supporting the development of a PedR culture across an institution. The project was able to collate these practices and develop a model of good practice that institutions can use and adapt for their own contexts.

The following PedR model describes five core factors that can contribute to the development of a positive culture around pedagogic research and general scholarly activity. The ultimate goal of this model is to develop and promote an environment and culture of literature-informed practice that feeds into supporting and developing the student experience. This culture evolves from introducing PedR communities, activities and expectations that form a key part of decision-making processes within an institution.

The PedR model below describes how a positive culture can be developed around pedagogic research and drawing on the experience and expertise of those involved. This can be achieved by actively creating and promoting scholarly communities, providing a supportive environment for their activities and promoting its success through recognition and celebration. Colleagues, networks and key stakeholders in these communities can then provide a rich source of knowledge and experience as part of an institution's decision-making processes. Having developed a model to promote a coordinated approach to scholarly activities, the longer term impact will hopefully see institutions adopt their own approach and ensure greater prominence is given to the role pedagogic research can play in informing matters of quality.

Key elements for promoting a pedagogic research culture

Develop a pedagogic research environment

- Create a central focus for PedR
- Support and nurture PedR communities
- Promote benefits of engaging with PedR

To create the right environment to foster pedagogic research, there should be a central focal point of contact for practitioners to network with. There should be formal endorsement and support to help promote the development of PedR networks. This will help create a positive environment where staff will feel empowered to engage in scholarly practice and understand the benefits of engaging with PedR.

Provide support for scholarly research

- Link and promote PedR to probation and early career development
- Provide resources to support skills development
- Promote funding opportunities

The benefits of PedR should be promoted early on, highlighting engagement for early career staff and probationers in particular. This can include advocacy in teaching related CPD courses and providing links to resources to raise awareness of, and to develop skills for engaging in PedR. Project funding schemes can be highlighted, such as internal teaching and learning funds and opportunities to work with colleagues on collaborative projects.

Promote a positive culture

- Celebrate practice
- Promote alongside discipline research
- Develop governance for establishing baseline of support and activities

Management at all levels can foster a positive culture around PedR by encouraging colleagues to reflect on their teaching practices and encourage them to write about their work by promoting the value of PedR to support the student experience. This includes supporting colleagues to celebrate their work at local and national conferences, publish (even internal blogs or local journals) and promote alongside discipline research (e.g. highlights in departmental newsletters). A positive culture can also be developed through agreement of a governance around core activities such as common practices and celebrations across different units and departments.

Recognise the achievements of PedR

- Recognise opportunities to record PedR achievements
- Develop career development pathways for scholarly activities
- Encourage senior management to endorse PedR

Institutions should aim to align internal celebratory schemes with recognition of PedR achievements. This can include direct reference to PedR accomplishments in teaching and learning awards, FHEA applications and other activities that help promote awareness for PedR practitioners. This can include promoting a PedR recognition pathway from novice to experienced practitioner (e.g. writing a first conference paper to full journal publication). This can be achieved in part, through endorsement and support from senior management to ensure there are formal recognition routes for PedR.

Engage with key PedR stakeholders

- Recognise and collaborate with PedR stakeholder groups
- Include stakeholder groups in teaching and learning planning activities
- Encourage involvement of PedR groups on key committees

Institutions should develop relationships with key stakeholder groups, such as NTFs, Principal and Senior Fellows and successful teaching and learning award recipients winners. Alongside other PedR networks these stakeholders are a valuable resource which can be tapped into for current knowledge and experience promoting good teaching and learning practice. Engagement and consultancy opportunities can benefit further with the inclusion of such stakeholders on various teaching and learning committees and decision-making bodies.

Addressing matters of quality through pedagogic research

Institutions across higher education often grapple with challenges of tackling quality issues that are informed by the literature and exemplars of good practice. This is even more exacerbated in further education, who often have fewer resources and staff with the capacity, skills or experience to take scholarly informed approaches to quality matters. A few institutions across the sector and internationally have created pedagogic research centres to address this, often at the cost of significant investment but most in HE and FE lack this capacity. So how can we create an environment to foster pedagogic research informed decision making on quality matters that is self-sustaining? This project aimed to unpick these challenges and create a model approach with exemplars which both HE and FE can adapt to promote a culture of a scholarly informed approach to their own institutional decision-making processes.

This model was developed with funding from the QAA as a Collaborative Enhancement Project as a means to enhance the quality of the student learning experience. The project set about raising the profile of pedagogic research and scholarly activity to address matters of quality around the student experience and support the development of quality processes. This PedR model is designed to provide guidance, ideas and examples of good practice for developing and promoting a positive culture for HE and FE providers and practitioners to take an evidence-informed approach to their practice. By developing a culture of pedagogic research this encourages collaboration and discussion on matters of quality and associated quality processes to support the student experience.

Develop a pedagogic research environment

To develop a PedR environment there has to be central driver to create the conditions to support any momentum. To create the right environment there should be a central focal point of contact for practitioners to network through. Given the nature of their remit, the involvement of central teaching and learning units are well placed to act as facilitators or champions of this work. There is sometimes limited capacity for such units to lead on the promotion of a pedagogic research environment, but they can perhaps help influence other stakeholders and often help facilitate others to lead, such as supporting the development of Special Interest Groups and providing some coordination support.

Teaching and learning units will also often be tuned into local, regional and national networks so can help raise awareness of what additional support and networking might be available. Alternatively, some communities evolve locally within departments or Faculties with local 'champions' and a central focal point of contact may simply help coordinate communication between different groups. Therefore, whether centrally coordinated or facilitated, the recognition of champions to spearhead activities, provides that focal point required to draw attention to a PedR network.

Examples of practice

- Get institutional buy-in with public support from senior management for scholarly activities
- Encourage central teaching and learning units to promote the benefits of PedR
- Embed principles of pedagogic research into central teaching related CPD courses
- Appoint champions to network with key stakeholders

Provide support for scholarly research

To raise awareness and provide support for pedagogic research, the benefits of engaging in scholarly practice should be promoted widely, particularly highlighting the benefits to early career staff. This can include advocacy in teaching related CPD courses to demonstrate how engagement with scholarly practice helps inform teaching practice and supports the student learning experience. Contributors to this awareness raising and support can include teaching related CPD course alumni, teaching and learning award recipients, National Teaching Fellows, or other related experienced practitioners. One of the benefits of this approach is that it can showcase a diversity of practice and link up colleagues with similar interests.

As well as raising awareness it is important to provide appropriate resources to support staff in developing their knowledge of PedR. Staff may not be familiar with the literature in their field or not be familiar with certain skills needed to engage in PedR. If there is no capacity to develop home-grown resources there are other resources available across the sector which can be collated for local use. There is also often local knowledge or expertise available from regional or national networks that can be drawn from too. A central access point should be created for these resources to act as a 'one-stop shop' for people to browse and explore.

A key support opportunity for scholarly research is to help raise staff awareness of funding opportunities and how to apply for funding. It is helpful to highlight project funding opportunities such as internal funding schemes or funding available through national bodies. This information could be collated online, and additional support could be provided by previous project winners. Experienced project leads could provide 'critical friend' advice on how to apply for funding and manage scholarly-based projects.

Examples of practice

- Develop cross-institutional networks for resource sharing and skills development support
- Promote community activities – regular internal programme of activities for networking and knowledge sharing
- Collate and showcase resources to support pedagogic research, such as training resources, key literature, journal services, funding opportunities.
- Share good practice across the sector and fostering new communities
- Promote training opportunities available from organisations such as the QAA and Advance HE

Promote a positive culture

Promotion of a positive culture can be fostered by management at all levels by encouraging colleagues to reflect on their teaching practices and share with colleagues. Institutions/departments should celebrate the scholarly practice of their staff by highlighting innovative and excellent practice, for example showcasing staff highlights in newsletters or running 'spotlight' features on staff members. This can also be collated and used as positive evidence of supporting the student learning experience and provides examples of a positive teaching and learning culture for students. Other forms of celebration, recognition and reward can be developed, that empower staff to engage in PedR and feel valued. Senior leaders can support the development of a positive culture by making explicit mention of the value of an approach underpinned by PedR in institutional education strategies.

As a means of valuing staff for engaging in scholarly activities, staff can be encouraged to celebrate their work at local and national conferences, publish (even through internal blogs or local journals) and promote alongside discipline research. Staff at all levels, from early career, professional service colleagues involved in teaching or mid-career practitioners can be encouraged to share their scholarly activities. Furthermore, this culture can be embedded through agreement of a governance around core activities such as common practices and celebrations across different units and departments. This can include teaching and learning celebration events/days, including promotion of good practice (e.g. open days) and through teaching awards.

Examples of practice

- Develop a sense of identity by branding the work of scholarly practice – such as developing a branded community, newsletter promoting good practice, create podcast/blog series etc.
- Encourage staff to engage with external networks
- Introduce/develop internal events to promote pedagogic research activities such as ‘show and tell’ type community events

Recognise the achievements of PedR

Institutions should aim to align internal celebratory schemes with recognition of PedR achievements. This can include direct reference to PedR accomplishments (e.g. teaching and learning awards, internal news/publications/FHEA award notifications) and other activities that help promote awareness for PedR practitioners. There are often internal teaching and learning conferences and events that rightly focus on celebrating good teaching practice and such events can include specific reference to PedR work. Examples may include running sessions on how to undertake PedR, how to publish, or spotlight on active research projects. Raising the profile of PedR through various internal activities will help change culture and recognise the prominence of PedR.

Another opportunity to recognise the achievements of PedR is through development and promotion of a career development pathway. The obvious approach for this is to directly link PedR and teaching excellence accomplishments to formal promotion procedures, allowing promotion candidates to use their PedR achievements as evidence for promotion. Alongside this option, it is also possible to define a PedR career development pathway on the basis of Continual Professional Development. This can include promoting a PedR recognition pathway from novice to experienced practitioner (e.g. writing a first conference paper to full journal publication). It can also be linked to professional recognition schemes (e.g. Fellowship of the HEA (FHEA), Fellowship of SEDA (FSEDA), Certified Leading Practitioner (CeLP) of ALDinHE) and more disciplinary focused recognition (e.g. Certified Member of ALT (CMALT), Member of CILIP (MCILIP), Royal Society of Chemistry Excellence in Education awards). This can be achieved in part, through endorsement and support from senior management to ensure there are routes to recognise PedR achievements.

Examples of practice

- Celebrate outcomes and impact of PedR activities and projects at internal events
- Promote the benefits of Fellowship recognition with Advance HE
- Make explicit reference to engagement with scholarly practice as part of promotion criteria

Engage with key PedR stakeholders

Institutions should develop relationships with key stakeholder groups, such as NTFs, Principal and Senior Fellows and teaching and learning award winners. Alongside other PedR networks and communities of practice, these stakeholders are a valuable resource which can be tapped into for

current knowledge and experience on supporting the student learning experience. There should also be involvement of early career staff (e.g. probationers) to include their perspective on how strategic decisions impact on their scholarly practice and engagement with their students. Having a link with key stakeholder groups helps develop a collegiate approach and collective ownership around decision-making that impacts on teaching and learning.

Engagement and consultancy opportunities on teaching and learning matters can benefit further with the inclusion of such stakeholders on various teaching and learning committees and decision-making bodies. Internal committee structures are typically constituted from members with expertise and experience on the committee theme. On matters directly related to strategic discussions around the student experience it is appropriate that PedR stakeholder groups can provide valuable input into strategic thinking and policy development on such committees. Institutions should therefore engage with key PedR stakeholders as key contributors on matters of quality relating to the student experience.

Examples of practice

- Create formal networking links between senior management and key stakeholder groups such as hosting regular (e.g. quarterly) meetings to discuss and review current research and practice on teaching and learning matters
- Make a commitment to taking evidence-informed strategy decisions by expecting committees to routinely ask how the literature informs our quality processes
- Provide accountability for literature informed quality decisions by identifying key roles for scholarly practitioners to feed into committee structures. This can include membership of committees or a commitment to consult key stakeholder groups.

Summary

The core objective of this project was to address the challenge of how institutions can take decisions on matters of quality which are informed by the literature and sector-wide good practice. Many or most institutions across HE and FE do not have the capacity to fully engage with the literature due to a lack of resources and staff with the capacity, skills or experience to undertake pedagogic research. This does not mean quality decisions on teaching and learning matters are taken in isolation, more that these processes may happen more informally without an agreed strategic focus. This project therefore aimed to better understand the factors involved in supporting a literature informed approach on matters of quality.

This project involved contributors from across HE and FE, who were able to share their experiences, examples of practice and culture around quality processes. Further insight into practice across the sector came from a community conference. Findings from the project found evidence that there was a mixed culture around awareness, engagement and promotion of pedagogic research. Decision making processes could therefore not tap into local sources of knowledge and expertise if the culture and infrastructure did not exist to consult. A clear barrier to development of quality processes therefore revolves around the development of promoting and developing a positive culture around pedagogic research.

There was lots of good practice unearthed to demonstrate that PedR is active across institutions, and how this is informing the development of quality processes. Practice was mixed however and sometimes not coordinated centrally as part of an institution-wide approach. Examples of this practice are noted in the PedR model, as a set of factors that can act as enablers for supporting

PedR. By linking these activities together it is possible to develop a coherent approach to supporting the development of a PedR culture across an institution.

During this project it was possible to identify the challenges of taking a literature informed approach around quality matters due to a mixed approach of supporting and developing a positive culture around PedR. There is lots of good practice across the sector and within institutions, but sometimes these practices are not joined up into a coherent approach. This project was able to collate these practices and develop a model of good practice that institutions can use and adapt for their own contexts. Having developed a model to promote a coordinated approach to scholarly activities, the longer term impact will hopefully see institutions adopt their own approach and ensure greater prominence is given to the role PedR can play in informing matters of quality.

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