Saggi e ricerche

The evaluation of faculty development programs in the United States. A fifty-year retrospective (1970s-2020)

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Abstract
This article provides a chronological review of models and studies on the evaluation of faculty development programs in the United States. The article is organized by decades, from the pre-1970s to 2020. The scope of the review, by design, is limited to a sampling of influential work, both classic and recent literature. An emergent theme from the review is that we now have robust models, criteria, and examples of how to better assess the quality, outcomes, and impact of faculty development programs. At the same time, what often is lacking are staff, time, skills, or resources to do so. This gap serves to highlight important questions for future research and practice.

Key Words: evaluation, impact, faculty development, literature review.

Introduction

Calls for more accountability for colleges and universities are, of course, nothing new. What is different over the last decade is the laser focus on measuring student learning outcomes and success. Student development and learning, however, do not occur in isolation. Faculty members play a critical role in student success through the quality of their teaching. Students are more engaged, learn more, persist in their studies, and graduate in stronger numbers when instructors teach well (Struthers, MacCormack, & Taylor, 2018). Investing in faculty professional learning, then, is essential; faculty members deserve the on-going support needed to provide every student with a quality education.

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Faculty development, referred to by several other terms, including educational development, staff development, and professional learning, emerged in the United States during the 1970s. It was a response to calls for improvements in faculty members' performance, particularly in their role as instructors. As the field matured, many institutions sought to cultivate teaching development by establishing a committee, appointing a faculty member or administrator, or creating a formal, centralized unit charged with the administration of faculty development programs (Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy & Beach, 2006).

The field has always been guided by a core principle that sees professional learning at the heart of faculty, student, and institutional growth. At the same time, the goals, structures, services, and evaluation of faculty development programs have evolved over time. The intent of this literature review is to provide a chronological examination of the earliest models and studies on the evaluation of faculty development programs, identifying a clear path of the advance in research and practice. As such, it is organized over some six decades, from the pre-1970s to 2020. The scope of the review, by design, is limited to important and influential work, sampling both classic and recent literature in the field, and providing some considerations for the conduct of future research.

Researchers have captured the evolution of the field of faculty development in six ages: Age of the Scholar, Age of the Teacher, Age of the Developer, Age of the Learner, Age of the Network, and the Age of Evidence (Beach, Sorcinelli, Austin, & Rivard, 2016; Sorcinelli et al., 2006). They note that all six ages primarily describe the progression of faculty development in the U.S.; however, faculty development programs are burgeoning worldwide, and it will be essential to frame future ages with recognition of this global context. In this review, I examine the literature on faculty development program evaluation in each of these six sequential decades yet acknowledge the interdependence among the decades. All six "Ages" underpin and inform each other.

1. The Age of the Scholar: Pre-1970s

Prior to the 1970's, the need to evaluate faculty development programs was barely noted. This was, in part, because during the 1950s and 1960s, faculty development efforts were directed almost entirely toward improving and advancing scholarly and disciplinary competence. Early appraisals of the effectiveness of faculty development focused almost exclusively on traditional measures of enhanced scholarly productivity: a completed degree, an increase in scholarly presentations, books, or articles, or the winning of external grants

or fellowships. Very few colleges and universities had anything that resembled a formal program and there were virtually no measures of outcomes; benefits such as increased student learning and more effective teaching were assumed rather than measured (Eble & McKeachie, 1985; Sorcinelli et al., 2006).

2. The Age of the Teacher: 1970s

From the beginning of formalized faculty development, the literature acknowledged the need for program evaluation. Early scholars in the field (Bergquist & Phillips, 1975; Gaff, 1975; Hoyt & Howard, 1978; Toombs, 1975) created the initial frameworks, models, and components of effective faculty development programs, identifying several key dimensions: organizational, instructional, curricular, and personal or faculty development. They also recognized the inherent difficulty in producing convincing evidence of the impact of faculty development activities. Bergquist and Phillips (1975) suggested that programs would need to focus on collecting data that could measure individual faculty growth and/or student learning outcomes. Hoyt and Howard (1978) noted that the literature pertaining to faculty development evaluation was "*extremely sparse*" and "*uncommonly simplistic*" (Hoyt & Howard, 1978, p. 27). In response, the authors offered a three-dimensional model for collecting data on faculty development programs that advocated measurement of participant satisfaction, behavioral change, and evidence of improvement in teaching effectiveness (p. 26).

The first large-scale study of faculty development, and the first to query about program evaluation, was conducted by Centra in 1976, in a survey to which 756 US colleges and universities responded. His goals were to identify faculty development activities, evaluate their effectiveness, determine their funding sources, and characterize their organizational structures. Responses to Centra's question about the extent of faculty development program evaluation indicated that nearly half (48%) of respondents reported that faculty development programs were not assessed, 33% said some fraction of programs were assessed, and only 14% indicated that their programs were evaluated. Suggested reasons for not documenting faculty development outcomes included limitations in staff, funding, and knowledge of assessment practices (Centra, 1976).

3. The Age of the Developer: 1980s

By the early 1980s, as the field of faculty development began to flourish,

more researchers began to direct their attention away from creating faculty development models to considering program evaluation methodologies (Blackburn, 1980; Eble & McKeachie, 1985; Ferren & Mussell, 1987; Menges & Svinicki, 1989). A measurement baseline for many researchers was the number or percentage of clientele reached. They also encouraged program evaluations that used structured surveys of participant gains in satisfaction, knowledge, and skills, ideally in concert with other data sources such as qualitative interviews and case study analysis of documents (e.g., program materials, participation statistics, individual program evaluations). A fourth evaluation method, the quasi-experimental model, was the least suggested, probably reflecting the challenge of identifying comparison groups that were as similar as possible to the treatment groups in terms of baseline (pre-intervention) characteristics.

The decade opened with two studies of faculty development programs – one a mailed questionnaire to faculty members and program administrators at twenty-five institutions (Blackburn, Pellino, Boberg, & O'Connell, 1980) and one an evaluation team's site visits and interviews at twenty-five liberal arts institutions (Nelsen & Siegel, 1980). Results of both evaluations suggested that the most frequent and successful activities, as viewed by participants, involved individual professional development options such as study leaves, sabbaticals, and support for attendance at professional meetings. Projects that focused on instructional development efforts were greeted with less enthusiasm unless they provided specific, usable skills (e.g., grading practices). While both studies provided evidence of effective faculty development activities and program leadership, the proof rested primarily on respondents' self-reports of satisfaction.

Eble and McKeachie (1985) conducted arguably the most robust study in the Age of the Developer. They analyzed a wide variety of faculty development programs in some 24 different institutions – public and private, from small liberal arts colleges to research universities. They employed three primary sources of evidence: evaluations by the institutions, site visits to campuses, and questionnaires to faculty. They described evaluations conducted by the institutions to be largely unhelpful, with few exceptions. Campus evaluations relied primarily on the judgement of an outside consultant or the immediate reactions of participants. In some cases, evaluation plans simply were not being fully implemented. The authors concluded that those directing the programs either lacked assessment expertise or saw little value in evaluation. At the same time, the authors' own study was impressive. It used multiple sources of information and different procedures for collecting data, ultimately concluding that "*evaluation of faculty development programs is difficult*" (Eble & McKeachie, 1985, p.177) but that "*faculty development programs can be*

evaluated and can make a difference at the individual faculty and institutional levels" (p. 205).

The steady rise in faculty development programs prompted Erickson (1986) to conduct a survey of faculty development practices, adapted from Centra's (1976) survey a decade earlier. Erickson received responses from some 800 faculty development coordinators, directors, committee chairs, or administrators. He found that "*50% or more of four-year colleges and universities offer some formal faculty development, instructional development, or teaching improvement services*" (Erickson, 1986, p. 196), up from about 40% a decade earlier. Like preceding studies, Erickson's found that traditional practices like grants, leaves, and exchanges were still the most frequently offered services but that there was growing interest in curricular change and teaching development programs. Unlike Centra's (1976) or Eble and McKeachie's (1985) studies, Erickson's did not ask for estimates of the extent of participation or the extent to which faculty development programs assessed their effectivenes.

It is worth noting that during this decade, researchers in medical education used multiple assessment practices to measure the impact of specific faculty development programs. Sheets and Henry (1984; 1988), for example, evaluated faculty development programs designed to improve the teaching skills of physicians. The authors developed three measures for assessing program results over time: cognitive outcomes by a pretest and posttest, behavioral outcomes by ratings of videotaped teaching simulations, and affective outcomes by written and verbal responses to program content. Results indicated that the participants learned new content and applied knowledge and skills acquired during the program. Participants, their supervisors, and program directors reported positive impact on their residency programs or departments, corroborating Eble & McKeachie's finding that faculty development could benefit institutional culture.

4. The Age of the Learner: 1990s

During the Age of the Learner, there were no large-scale studies of the field of faculty development to directly follow up on the research of Centra (1976) and Erickson (1986). There was new interest, however, in faculty professional development as key to not only quality teaching but also student learning. Even so, measuring pedagogical knowledge, skills and attitudes, curricular change, or student learning remained difficult. For example, Jennings, Barlar and Bartling (1991) reported that half of the faculty development programs in their

national survey were regularly evaluated, but the thoroughness with which those programs evaluated their services remained a question.

Two notable studies sought to answer this question. Rubino (1994) and Chism and Szabo (1997) each surveyed a random sample of some 200 institutions. Rubino's findings indicated that evaluation of faculty development practices was most often based on participant satisfaction and evaluation was usually done at the end of the faculty development activity or program. Similarly, Chism and Szabo concluded that while a substantial amount of evaluation activity occurred across faculty development programs, most measured satisfaction by users (most often with questionnaires) rather than the impact on teaching or the learning of students. Like so many earlier studies, respondents reported challenges to robust evaluation such as lack of time, expertise, methodological issues, and resource gaps.

Again, medical educators led the use of multiple evaluation methods in studying faculty development program outcomes. Elliot, Skeff, and Stratos (1999) conducted a longitudinal study of a program designed to firmly establish new teaching skills. They assessed program outcomes using attendance, self-reported teaching behaviors, perceived program usefulness, educational administrative responsibilities, and qualitative analysis of audiotapes and session notes. Nasmith, Saroyan, Steinert, Daigle, and Franco (1997) studied the long-term impact of faculty development workshops using three distinct instruments – an observation grid, scenarios, and a structured questionnaire. Both studies offered creative strategies for measuring a specific faculty development approach (i.e., workshops) rather than a comprehensive evaluation of a teaching and learning center.

5. The Age of the Network: 2000s

The first decade of the twenty-first century only accelerated changes in higher education that affected faculty and their work and, thus, the field of faculty development. The number of formal, centralized faculty development centers continued to rise; however, their capacity to measure the impact of their programs through an intentional, informative assessment lens was still emergent. Recognizing this continuing need, Plank, Kalish, Rohdieck, and Harper (2004) argued that what were now increasingly called "centers for teaching and learning (CTLs) needed practical strategies for integrating assessment into their daily work to help generate information that accurately measured their impact. They recommended CTLs create an integrated data system to measure, track, and report work for both summative and formative purposes.

Such data collection and evaluation efforts, however, remained a challenge for many institutions. For example, Murray (2002) reviewed faculty development literature in community colleges, turning up few national or regional studies and finding some serious methodological questions in many of the single-institution studies. He concluded that few programs evaluated their work. Frantz, Beebe, Horvath, Canales, and Swee (2005) conducted two electronic surveys on the roles of teaching and learning centers, surveying previous presidents and opinion leaders in higher education and directors of CTLs. Both studies reported that CTLs found it challenging to measure the effectiveness of their programs, be it due to lack of time, staff, money, or motivation.

In the largest-scale study of the decade, Sorcinelli et al. (2006) surveyed nearly 500 faculty developers in teaching and learning centers at all institutional types, forming the basis of a book, Creating the Future of Faculty Development. The authors explored the evolution of the field of faculty development, goals guiding faculty development practice, faculty development structures, staffing, services, and future priorities for the field. Faculty developers identified assessment of student learning and teaching as top challenges facing faculty and institutions – and key priorities for faculty development in the future. In open ended comments, developers raised essential questions about collecting data on Center outcomes and impact; however, the study did not specifically ask respondents about their Center's program evaluation practices.

6. The Age of Evidence: 2010s

Given the increasing interest among faculty developers and their institutions in assessing the outcomes of faculty development, and the gap in their 2006 study regarding faculty development evaluation practices, Beach, Sorcinelli, Austin and Rivard (2016) decided to examine more deeply to what extent and in what ways faculty developers were assessing the impact of their programs on teaching, student learning, and other key outcomes. In fact, assessment and accountability emerged as predominant and pervasive themes throughout the study, resulting in Faculty Development in the Age of Evidence (Beach et al., 2016).

In preparation for their study, the authors reviewed databases, journals, and individual works published after their original study (2006) to see how program evaluation was reflected in the work of faculty development. They found a sharpening focus on faculty development program evaluation. For example, Hines (2009; 2011) conducted two studies investigating faculty development program evaluation practices. The 2009 study of 20 teaching and learning

centers with part-time staff and limited funding found that program assessment was predominately focused on superficial measures. In contrast, the 2011 study investigated evaluation practices at thirty-three established, centralized, university funded CTLs. This study revealed that established centralized CTLs had significantly stronger practices for evaluating their services.

Stes, Min-Leliveld, Gijbels, and Van Petegem (2010) conducted an extensive review of research on the impact of instructional development in higher education, concluding that more attention should be given to studies measuring actual changes in teaching performance, and capturing the effects at an institutional or student level. Kucsera and Svinicki (2010) reviewed nine leading faculty development publications and found only a limited number of studies assessing teaching development programs met best practice standards. Chism, Holley and Harris (2012) reviewed 138 studies on the impact of educational development practices including research on workshops, formal courses, communities of practice, consultation, mentoring, and awards and grants programs. They concluded that "*although the studies varied in quality, the sheer volume of results offered guidance for development practice*" (Chism, Holley, & Harris, 2012, p. 145).

Beach et al. (2016) surveyed faculty developers on a range of topics; most significantly eliciting information on ways faculty developers assessed the impact of their programs. Findings indicated that as the complexity of the evaluation approach increased (e.g., measuring the change in teaching practice or student learning), the percentage of use declined. For example, overall, centers collected data by tracking participation numbers and participant self-report satisfaction at a greater extent; collected data on an increase in the knowledge or skills of participants or a change in the practice at a moderate extent; and, collected data on student learning or changes in the institution's culture of teaching at only a slight extent. A membership survey of faculty developers corroborated this finding, reporting that the impact of teaching center services were primarily measured by self-reports of satisfaction or learning after use of the unit's services (The 2016 POD Network Membership Survey, 2016).

On a decidedly affirmative note, during the Age of Evidence researchers, practitioners in the field, and professional associations in faculty development and higher education have created new resources and guides for measuring a faculty development program or a teaching and learning center's effectiveness. There are several comprehensive models and innovative assessment approaches for designing, implementing, and using a faculty development evaluation system to measure and document a distinct program or a teaching center's holistic effectiveness (Fink, 2013; Hines, 2017; Kalish & Plank, 2010; MacCormack, Snow, Gyurko, & Sekel, 2018; POD Network in Higher

Education, 2018; Wright, 2011; Wright, Horii, Felten, Sorcinelli, & Kaplan, 2018). Developed by faculty developers and educators, the program evaluation models and approaches are relatively straightforward for use by teaching center staff and for communication with stakeholders on campus or beyond.

There also are new frameworks for goal setting, strategic planning or benchmarking a faculty development program. The American Council on Education (ACE) and The POD Network collaborated on a publication on assessing the impact of faculty development (Haras, Taylor, Sorcinelli & von Hoene, 2017) as well as on a complementary research and evidence-based tool, A Center for Teaching and Learning Matrix (Collins Brown et al., 2018). The matrix offers a set of evaluation criteria, quality definitions for those criteria at three levels of a teaching center's development, and a scoring strategy. The Learning Compact (Bass, Eynon & Gambino, 2019) builds on this work, offering a conceptual framework and resource for professional learning and educational change that includes core values, core principles, questions for self-assessment and planning, and guidelines for implementation and evaluation.

Until the Age of Evidence there also was little rigorous research on whether instruction and/or faculty development programs have an impact on students' learning. Now scholars have examined the scholarship of evidence-based teaching practices and student outcomes and drawn a linkage between them (Janknowski, 2017). Results of a multi-year, multi-method study undertaken to assess how students' learning is affected by faculty members' efforts to become better teachers concluded that faculty participation in professional development activities, done well, positively affects classroom pedagogy, student learning, and the overall culture of teaching and learning in a college or university (Condon, Iverson, Manduca, Rutz, & Willett, 2016). Most recently, an independent assessment of ten rigorous impact studies reinforced the link between faculty development, teaching improvement, and student learning (Allen, McPherson, Nilson & Sorcinelli, 2019).

7. Conclusion

The overall message of this literature review is a positive one. As Eble and McKeachie (1985) posited, the evaluation of faculty development programs is challenging, but they can be evaluated. Over the decades, studies have built an evidence base about core goals and guiding principles of CTLs, effective structures, services that participants find to be of most value, and faculty development approaches that "work." Developing this evidence base has been like building a mosaic: each individual piece does not make the picture, but bit by bit a picture becomes clearer and clearer. While no one measure or study

may be convincing, the convergence of evidence from many sources increases confidence that faculty development is indeed impactful. Most exciting is the growing body of evidence that demonstrates the influence of faculty professional learning on pedagogical improvement, student learning and success, and institutional culture change.

One reoccurring theme throughout the literature is that faculty developers are intensely interested in evaluating their programs and in finding ways to enhance their assessment of outcomes and impact. Regardless of size and staffing, nearly all centers are actively engaged in tracking participation in and satisfaction with their programs, and some are assessing impact on instructional practice, student learning, and culture change (Beach et al., 2016). Faculty developers now have the evaluation models, criteria, and examples of how to better assess the quality, outcomes, and impact of their faculty development programs. What they often do not have is the staff, time, skills, or resources to do so.

One solution is to understand that resource allocation for many centers involves weighing a difficult balance between doing and evaluating their work. Scholars suggest that documenting the number of program participants and measuring their satisfaction are valuable metrics of engagement and influence of services. They also suggest that CTLs reserve their resources by studying a select project or signature initiative and by relying on the literature for what we already know "works (Chism & Szabo, 1997; Wright, et al., 2018).

Another option is to take this opportunity to add new pieces to the mosaic of program evaluation research and practice. How might the field deepen the program evaluation expertise of faculty developers? Might there be more fruitful collaborations with campus units such as an office of assessment or institutional research? Might centers draw on the expertise of faculty or graduate students in an educational measurement degree program? How might teaching centers cultivate high expectations, support, and resources for program assessment from their institutions? Might there be fruitful linkages with external stakeholders such as external scholars or higher education professional associations with expertise in quality enhancement and improvement? A further exploration of creative ways to advance faculty development program evaluation practice would promise benefits for the field and all of higher education.

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