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A CLASS Act: The teaching team approach to subject coordination

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Abstract

Advancing the development of good practice around the teaching team has been the focus of a recently completed, nationally funded Australian grant entitled Coordinators Leading Advancement of Sessional Staff (CLASS). The project focused on developing leadership capacity of subject coordinators to provide supportive contexts for sessional staff to enhance their knowledge of teaching practice and contribute to subject improvement through a team approach. An action learning approach and notions of distributed leadership underpinned the activities of the teaching teams in the program.

This paper provides an overview of a practical approach, led by the subject coordinator, to engaging sessional staff through the facilitation of a supportive network within the teaching team. It addresses some of the gaps identified in the recent literature which includes lack of role clarity for all members of the team and provides some examples of initiatives that teams engaged with to address some of the challenges identified. Resources to support this approach were developed and are shared though the project website. Recommendations for future direction include improved policy and practice at the institutional level, better recognition and reward for subject coordinators and resourcing to support the participation and professional development needs of sessional staff.

Keywords

sessional staff, tutors, demonstrators, teaching assistants, role, subject coordinator

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Introduction

Higher-education institutions internationally have struggled to support the professional development of casual or sessional staff (Gappa & Leslie 1993; Husbands & Davies 2000; Langenberg 1998). In Australia the increasing recognition that sessional staff are the group with the greatest contact with students has made this a higher priority for many universities (May 2013). This paper reports on the outcomes of a nationally funded initiative that recognised the role of subject or unit coordinators in creating environments that enhanced the professional development of sessional staff within the context of their subjects. The project, Coordinators Leading Advancement of Sessional Staff (CLASS), addressed the development of subject coordinators' capacity to lead and manage a teaching team, particularly with regard to sessional staff. The project targeted both professional development and resource development as a means of improving leadership practice. An action-learning methodology and a distributed-leadership framework underpinned the teaching teams' actions of as well as the project itself. This paper provides examples of initiatives where project teams addressed some of the identified challenges, and proposes a professional-development framework for leadership capacity and an effective dissemination strategy for these and similar projects.

Background

There are diverse terms for subject coordinator used in the literature – unit coordinator, module leader, course leader, unit convener, unit chair, programme coordinator, course coordinator and programme director. Throughout this paper the term subject coordinator is used to identify the role of leading and managing all academic activities in an individual subject, module or unit. We distinguish this role from that of the programme, course or degree coordinator, who is responsible for leading and managing the suite of subjects that define a course or programme of study. We define sessional teaching staff broadly to include those who are employed on a sessional basis, often on an hourly rate of pay, and may perform the following roles: "Lecturer, Tutor, Demonstrator, Course/Unit/Subject Coordinator, Course/Unit/Subject Designer, Clinical Supervisor, Practicing Professional, Conjoint & honorary appointment, Auditor of marks & grade, Laboratory Supervisor, Field Supervisor, and Casual Marker" (Percy, Scoufis, Parry, Goody et al. 2008, p9).

Sessional Staff and "Quality" Learning and Teaching

The growing casualisation of the academic workforce is identified as a significant risk in the quality of teaching and learning in Australian higher education (Dearn, Fraser et al. 2002; Kift 2003; Bradley, Noonan et al. 2008; Brown, Goodman & Yasukawa 2008; Percy, Scoufis et al. 2008). However, sessional staff are routinely overlooked for training and staff-development opportunities (Kift 2003; Brown, Goodman & Yasukawa 2008, 2010). More recently, as universities have become more risk-averse, sessional staff are invited/expected to attend induction programs or teaching-related workshops, but this does not address the quality issue. Solutions to the "quality problem" posed by casualisation are unlikely to lie in simply providing workshops to increase the individual expertise of the casual teacher. Rather, "professional learning and quality enhancement are the product of open collaborative and collegial social practice" (Percy & Beaumont 2008, p1). They are, therefore, systemic issues that require universities to grapple with not only the lack of recognition and support for the role of the subject coordinators who lead casualised teaching teams, but the exclusion, invisibility and lack of recognition afforded to the sessional academic workforce (Percy, Scoufis et al. 2008).

The need for systematic integration and support for sessional staff has been identified as an issue in the Australian higher-education sector through earlier research (AUTC 2003), government reports (Ewan 2009) and the commissioned *RED Report* (Percy et al. 2008), which was produced by the Council for Australian Directors of Academic Development. The *RED Report* identified a range of challenges related to sessional staff, including the lack of clarity about their actual numbers and the invisibility of their contribution to teaching.

This invisibility and marginal position of sessional academics is a dominant theme in the literature. They are variously described as "throw away academics" (Kogan, Moses & El-Khawas 1994), "the invisible faculty" (Gappa & Leslie 1993), "frustrated careerists" (Gottschalk & McEachern 2010), "career casuals" (Percy & Beaumont 2008), "treadmill academics" (Coates & Geodegebuure 2010) and the "tenuous periphery" (Kimber 2003). These scholars are all referring to the institutional practices that combine to exclude sessional academics from full participation and inclusion in their university communities. This exclusion is such that some casual academics struggle to access the resources that are basic to fulfilling their teaching duties, such as a computer, office space, a telephone and an e-mail account (Kimber 2003; Coates & Geodegebuure 2010). Casual academics are rarely included in meetings, decision-making processes or the evaluation and review of their teaching and the curricula (Percy et al. 2008). They often report that they lack a sense of belonging and inclusion, and are not part of the "tacit web of relationships" (Anderson 2007, p117). Such exclusive practices mean that universities displace responsibility onto the subject coordinator to bring sessional staff into university communities (Roberts, Butcher & Brooker 2011).

There is evidence to suggest that when university teachers, and especially sessional academics, have access to a variety of supports, teaching and learning strategies, and are meaningfully connected to their faculties, they are likely to be effective both in creating engaging learning environments and sustaining high levels of student achievement (Jordan, Schwartz & McGhie-Richmond 2009). It is subject coordinators who are charged with the responsibility of leading and managing in ways that create and sustain such conditions and collegiate learning cultures. The CLASS project aimed to clarify this aspect of the subject-coordinator role through leadership-capacity development that targeted all members of the teaching teams and engaged them in situated, collaborative activity.

The Role of the Subject Coordinator as Leader

A dominant theme in the literature pertaining to subject coordinators in higher education is the lack of recognition and clarity in understanding their role (Debovski & Blake 2004; Blackmore et al. 2007; Cohen et al. 2007; McDonald et al. 2010; Holt et al. 2013; Milburn 2010; Roberts et al. 2011). Debovski and Blake (2004) argue that the role of the subject coordinator is not well understood and needs to be more clearly defined. This lack of clarity is accompanied by a lack of specific acknowledgement and capacity-building for this complex work (Holt et al. 2013). Almost all the literature discussing the role of the subject coordinator reports that the role is unrecognised, hidden and poorly supported (Blackmore et al. 2007; Chang et al. 2010; Holt et al. 2013; McDonald et al. 2010; Roberts et al. 2011). This can lead to established, experienced academics avoiding subject coordination, especially of first-year subjects with large teaching-teams of sessionalised academics. One result is that subject coordinators often take up the role at first appointment and often without relevant prior or concurrent professional development and with little time to prepare (Blackmore et al. 2007).

The literature argues that subject coordination is critical to the quality of the student learning experience, and should be recognised as an academic leadership role (Blackmore et al. 2007; Cohen et al. 2007; Holt et al. 2013; McDonald et al. 2010; Marshall et al. 2011; Roberts et al. 2011). The current informal character of the leadership role creates tensions for subject coordinators (Blackmore et al. 2007; Roberts et al. 2011; MacDonald et al. 2010). They have important leadership responsibilities, but not the corresponding authority and power to act. This creates conditions in which subject coordinators do not often see themselves as leaders (Scott et al. 2008; Vilkinas 2009).

Because subject coordinators don't usually have line-management responsibility for staff, they effect change by establishing collaborative and collegiate relationships and learning cultures in which they influence, coordinate and act as role models (Marcella & Smith 1998; Milburn 2010). Being an informal "leader among peers" requires a fine balance between collegiality, consultation and being directive (Blackmore et al. 2007). Recent research into distributed leadership provides an approach to support this informal role, and is discussed further in the methodology (Spillane 2006; Jones et al. 2012; Jones et al. 2014).

The role of subject coordinators is complex, diverse, demanding and expanding, and has fundamental learning leadership components (see for example, Cohen et al. 2007; Vilkinas, Ladyshewsky & Saebel 2009; McDonald et al. 2010; Marshall et al. 2011; Roberts et al. 2011; Holt et al., 2013). The diverse aspects of the role – "organizational skills, curriculum design, managing staff teaching in the unit, supporting students, dealing with systems and ensuring quality within the unit" (Cohen, Bunker et al. 2007, p8) – demonstrate that subject coordinators need a broad range of capabilities and behaviours to practise effectively. These capabilities must be supported by a thorough working knowledge of the subject discipline and the context within and beyond the university in which it is embedded (Vilkinas et al. 2009). The intricacy of the role creates pressures associated with its different demands, and is, at times, in conflict with other academic duties (Roberts et al. 2011). Contemporary subject coordinators are required to demonstrate "team leadership skills in their professional repertoire, to deal effectively with greater demands from students and to maintain appropriate standards in the face of shifting expectations from various influential stakeholders: (Holt et al. 2013, p239). The evidence suggests the importance of subject coordinators being well prepared and confident in their complex role, and we propose that leadership-capacity development can more broadly influence and support this progression.

The lack of professional development and training for the role of subject coordinator is a recurring theme in the literature (Blackmore et al. 2007; Cohen et al. 2007; Davis 1998; Debovski & Blake 2004; Holt et al. 2013; Marshall et al. 2011; MacDonald et al. 2010; Mercer 2009; Roberts et al. 2011; Timberlake 2010; Vilkinas 2009; Wisker 1996). This absence of professional training and induction for the role, combined with the lack of recognition and value afforded this aspect of academic work, means that staff tend to learn the process "on the job" and "just in time". Expertise gained through practice is tacit and becomes hard to articulate. It is situated in a specific context and learned through trial and error and observation of others (Blackmore et al. 2007). Early work by Wisker (1996) identified the need for professional development and resources to support academics in their leadership role; this is supported by recent studies (Marshall et al. 2011; Roberts et al. 2011; Holt et al. 2013).

Subject coordinators have a dual role in professional development (Davis 1998): they are both participants and providers. As leaders of a teaching team made up of largely sessional staff, subject coordinators are often the key professional-development providers for the team and its individuals (Percy et al. 2008). The skills required to fulfil this academic leadership role are complex in relation to team leadership, team management and teaching for effective learning. The CLASS project sought to address both layers by providing professional leadership development for the subject coordinators to enhance their capacity to cater for the teaching-team members' development needs.

Brew and Boud (1996) advocate a holistic approach to the development of academics in roles (such as subject coordination) that encompasses diverse aspects of their role. They argue that academic development should be grounded in the daily demands of academic work and take place in response to particular projects and responsibilities (Brew 2010). It is asserted that work-based learning is central to the effective professional development of subject coordinators. In support, Timberlake (2010) argues that not only do the development needs of increasing numbers of sessional teachers require addressing, but so do those of their supervisors, the subject coordinators. He advocates a model of academic development, situated in the workplace at the level of the teaching team that builds leadership capacity and meets the needs of both subject coordinators and sessional staff. He proposes a "tripartite model that sees the central academic development unit taking a leading role in facilitating a 'meetings of the minds' between sessional teachers and those leading them" (Timberlake 2010 p.597).

It is crucial that such professional development be accompanied by a cultural shift that requires "public and concrete valuing of the responsibilities and management of learning and teaching by the senior institutional leaders" (Marshall et al. 2011, p102). Targeted leadership development should be work-based, include collective reflective practices and be situated in everyday work contexts. The literature supports an action-learning approach involving targeted development activities that are created from the needs and context of the participants. These key ideas underpin the focus of the CLASS project, to establish a leadership capacity-building framework for cross-disciplinary networks to support subject coordinators in leading the sessional teaching team.

The CLASS Project: An Overview

The CLASS project addressed a gap identified in the literature by focussing on developing the leadership capacity of subject coordinators in universities, with an aim of supporting the professional development of sessional staff in a situated work context. The program involved a facilitated leadership-development program over one semester, initially piloted, then implemented nationally. It included a one-day workshop that engaged subject coordinators in reflecting on their current leadership practice within the teaching team and identifying a specific area for improvement. They developed an action plan and implemented the plan with their teaching team over the semester, supported by a facilitator from the central academic-development unit. Each subject coordinator completed a reflective report on their plan. Institutional facilitators were supported through an additional half-day workshop and provided with a variety of resources via the CLASS website, such as video triggers and good practice exemplars, to support their activities (http://www.cadad.edu.au/file.php/1/CLASS_CADAD_Project/CLASS%20Website/index.html).

Good Practice Examples emerged from the individual participants within the workshops, and from faculty teams investigating existing practices within their faculty or school. Participants were able to share outcomes and solutions to challenges faced, and identify new ways of addressing issues,

such as appointing head tutors with additional hours for very large teaching teams to help balance the workload. They also shared resources identified during the program that facilitated improved practice for the teaching team, such as team-meeting templates and marking rubrics, as well as specific resources related to improving leadership skills, such as video triggers for identifying solutions to common dilemmas in the teaching team. Institutions engaged in developing and sharing policies and guidelines on role expectations, workload allowances and expected standards of professional/leadership development for subject coordinators.

Approach and Methodology

The project adopted an action-learning methodology, as this has been demonstrated to be an effective approach to continuing professional development in the tertiary sector (Revans 1982; Zuber-Skerritt 1993). Action learning is a process whereby a group of people learn together through engagement in a workplace project to effect change through questioning and reflective practice, supported by a facilitator (Revans 1982). In this project, the action-learning approach was achieved through:

- Formal leadership training and professional-development activities (a pilot workshop program followed by five national workshops);
- Authentic learning activities that were situated in real contexts (collaboration between subject coordinators and their teaching teams to improve an aspect of teaching and learning);
- Engagement in reflective practice (regular meetings of the teaching team and the institutional networks);
- Opportunities for dialogue about leadership practice and experiences (various activities during the project, such as the workshops and network meetings, as well as through resource sharing); and
- Activities that expanded current professional networks (network development and community-of-practice development in institutions) (Lefoe & UOW 2006; Lefoe & Parrish 2008).

This approach was guided by social-constructivist thinking, which describes the development of leadership capacity as an active process of building knowledge and skills within a supportive group or community (Vygotsky 1978). This includes the ideas of the development of a community of practice (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002) and the role of reflection in learning (Schön 1983). Here, communities of practice are defined as collectives where people share and co-construct knowledge and experiences in the workplace (Lave & Wenger 1991) and participants are engaged at many levels, including the teaching team, institutional groups and national workshop programs.

The project drew on the distributed model of leadership, which recognises the ability of those in non-formal leadership positions to develop their leadership capacity through an active approach (Bolden 2011). Distributed leadership encourages a shift from leadership roles and individual leaders to a focus on leadership as practice (Spillane & Diamond 2007). Distributed leadership acknowledges the ability of people at many organisational levels to lead and influence learning and teaching (Harris 2009; Leithwood, Mascall et al. 2009).

A review of the literature found that Bennett, Wise, Woods and Harvey (2003) suggest that distributed leadership is based on three main premises: first, that leadership is an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals; second, that there is openness to the

boundaries of leadership so that it may stretch beyond the organisation; and third, that varieties of expertise are distributed across the many, not the few. Distributed leadership for learning and teaching

> *...is a leadership approach in which collaborative working is undertaken between individuals who trust and respect each other's contribution..It happens most effectively when people at all levels engage in action, accepting leadership in their particular areas of expertise.... Through shared and active engagement, distributed leadership can result in the development of leadership capacity to sustain improvements in teaching and learning (Jones, Lefoe, Harvey & Ryland 2012, p21).*

An external evaluator contributed to both formative and summative evaluations of the project. The evaluator integrated three compatible approaches to evaluation – Participatory Action Research, MERI and Participatory Evaluation – to provide a tailored approach for this project. The flexibility of action research also provided opportunity for a range of data collection, engaging all project-team members as "participant observers" during the formative evaluation phase (Wadsworth 2011). All members of the team contributed to the evaluation process, and data was collected at each institution by the project manager, the project team, the reference committee, the external evaluator and the participants of the action-learning projects (Harvey 2011, p8). This quantitative and qualitative data included:

- Participants' pre-workshop surveys (n=31)
- Professional-development workshop (subject coordinators) evaluations (N=95)
- Facilitators' workshop evaluations (N=38)
- Project participants' summative online evaluations (N=19)
- Project participants' action-learning reports (N=21) and
- Interviews of team members by the external evaluator (N=4)

For the purpose of this paper the focus is on the subject coordinators' perceptions of how their professional development needs were being met through the workshop program (workshop evaluation surveys) and through the reflective reports on the action-learning activities from the first-phase participants. An analysis of the professional-development workshop survey data was tabulated to produce a summary table of results. In addition, qualitative feedback was coded and analysed for themes related to the evaluation questions (see Harvey 2011). The evaluation data had a dual purpose, providing the basis for both the project evaluation and research into the CLASS framework, strategies and impact.

The Professional Development Framework: Year 1

In the first year of the CLASS project, a one-day professional development workshop for subject coordinators was piloted in Sydney, with all members of the team contributing to the design and presentation of the workshop program. Thirty-nine subject coordinators from the four partner institutions attended the pilot workshop. The pilot workshop consisted of activities designed to explore and enhance participants' capacity to lead and manage teaching teams. The Integrated Competing Values Framework (iCVF) (Vilkinas & Cartan 2006; Vilkinas 2009) was used as a basis from which coordinators could examine their leadership roles and responsibilities, and identify aspects of their leadership and management that they perceived required development. The iCVF conceptualises academic leadership as:

- Having people-task and internal-external dimensions
- Involving competing demands; for example, implementing a new approach to tutorials in a large-enrolment subject might compete with a desire for consistency across tutorials run by multiple sessional teachers
- Requiring behavioral and cognitive complexity as different roles are used flexibly in different situations
- Involving critical observation to determine which role is appropriate for the situation
- Involving reflection and learning (Vilkinas et al. 2009).

Workshop participants acknowledged the usefulness of the iCVF and its value in identifying their leadership strengths and areas for development. The imperative for subject coordinators to clarify their role as leaders and ascertain their development needs is affirmed in the literature (Roberts et al. 2011; MacDonald et al. 2010).

The areas for development, identified in the pilot workshop, became the focus of action-learning projects that subject coordinators facilitated with their sessional teaching team over the following teaching semester. These projects were self-initiated and self-directed, addressing an issue specific to the subject coordinators' context, and therefore were broad in scope. Throughout the implementation of the action-learning projects, participants' leadership capacity was further developed through their engagement in communities of practice and strategic networking activities. All the subject coordinators identified successes that they perceived to be a consequence of the implemented action-learning projects. Most commonly, subject coordinators noted the practice and skill development of sessional staff; this was articulated in their reflections in the project reports:

> *Demonstrators felt their skills were enhanced by participation in the project.*
> (UOW CLASS Project, Year 1 Participant)

> *Developed capacity of sessional to teach the unit from week to week.*
> (ACU CLASS Project, Year 1 Participant)

Three of the action-learning projects focussed on trialling new student-learning programs, with anecdotal feedback from participants highlighting noticeable improvements in student grades and assessment performance, and in enhanced student experience and engagement. These align with findings in other studies where attention to the professional development of both sessional staff and subject coordinators was found to promote effective learning environments and enhance student experience (Percy, Scoufis et al. 2008; Keevers & Abuodha 2012).

A number of the action-learning projects focussed on developing subject resources and trialling contemporary strategies to deliver content. The implementation of new teaching strategies and increased awareness of available resources resulted in professional-development outcomes for both subject coordinators and sessional staff.

> *Professionally, the sessional staff member developed an increased awareness of*
> *university teaching and learning resources.*
> (ACU CLASS Project, Year 1 Participant).

> *The mentoring has identified important features in my professional learning and encouraged conversations and an insight to my academic development.*
> (ACU CLASS Project Year 1 Participant).

Sessional staff often lack a sense of belonging, largely due to the fact that they are rarely included in meetings, decision-making processes or the evaluation and review of their teaching and the curricula (Anderson 2007). Across the action-learning projects, facilitated professional-development activities were aimed at improving this sense of belonging. Activities included mentoring, peer discussions, demonstrations, meetings, targeted resources, reflection on action and teaching evaluations. Comments describing the value of facilitated professional development activities included:

> *The outcomes of the project included visits and updates by the Unit Coordinator with each sessional staff member by the end of the third teaching week to debrief with staff at the end of an observed teaching session. Sessional staff felt comfortable [that] they were appropriately guided and were confident they could prepare for their classes.*
> (UWS CLASS Project, Year 1 Participant)

> *Both students and sessional staff expressed approval of the tools and prompts developed for these classes. Sessional staff who had taught in the subject previously generally improved their performance in student feedback, in some cases significantly. New staff members said the provided materials helped them enormously.*
> (UTS CLASS Project, Year 1 Participant)

The professional-development initiatives were recognised as being instrumental in building the confidence, knowledge and skills of sessional staff to effectively deliver their subject. Jordan et al. (2009) found that when sessional staff were supported and appropriately developed they were more likely to foster effective learning environments and sustain high levels of student achievement. This was an outcome of the action-learning projects in this project, with the subject coordinators claiming enhancements to strategies employed by the teaching teams that included sessional staff in delivering and administering subjects. These enhancements included promoting quality assurance and moderation of marking and assessment, as described in the comments:

> *An assessment-review meeting for the early major assessment task was scheduled and marking was compared. This process was not as formal as the Unit Coordinator would have liked; however, divergent points were identified and were discussed, to ensure greater consistency in the marking. The Unit Coordinator marked all assessments as well and they later compared grade distribution, which was the same in both cases. The final assessment tasks were also the same. The unit coordinator feels confident to leave marking to the current casual staff and feels comfortable that it is consistent. The Unit Coordinator believes that this approach is important for all units that use sessional staff.* (UWS CLASS Project, Year 1 Participant)

> *Each assessment had specific criteria for marking provided by the subject coordinator, but the meetings with tutors provided very valuable additional information to refine those criteria. After applying the new criteria and the practice of collaboration and inclusiveness among staff, the variability in marking assessments was reduced.*
> (UOW CLASS Project, Year 1 Participant)

Additional achievements resulting from the action-learning projects, as identified by the subject coordinators, included improved communication across the teaching team, greater team cohesion and refinement or development of systems and processes.

The predominant challenge experienced by subject coordinators in the implementation of their action-learning projects was in relation to time management. Most commonly, time-management challenges were influenced by the limited availability of sessional staff to attend formal events such as meetings and training, and the difficulties that subject coordinators encountered in accomplishing in the allocated timeframe all the tasks that the action-learning projects created. Budget constraints and issues related to resourcing were described as challenges, as were concerns about communication between team members, staffing-related issues such as maintaining a consistent team from session to session and fostering in sessional staff the desired skills, values and knowledge for their roles and associated responsibilities.

The Professional Development Framework: Year 2

In the second year, the cascade stage of the CLASS project, a half-day facilitators' workshop for leaders from academic-development units was added to the professional-development program. The addition of this workshop is aligned with the approach recommended by Timberlake (2010) in which the tripartite involvement of the central academic-development unit, sessional staff and subject coordinator is advocated. Learnings from the evaluations of the Year 1 pilot workshop informed modifications to the Year 2 subject coordinators' professional-development workshop. Five state-based professional-development programs, comprising the subject coordinators' workshop and the half-day facilitators' workshop, were conducted in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane. Each professional-development program was facilitated by two project-team members. Subject coordinators and institutional leaders attended the subject coordinators' workshop on day one of the program; institutional leaders attended the half-day facilitators' workshop, which was designed to provide guidance and support for institutional facilitators to implement the CLASS project in their own institutions, on day two.

The subject-coordinator workshops in Year 2 explored the iCVF, and participants then identified effective practices they adopted in their leadership and management of sessional-teaching teams. These practices were shared in small groups, and a selection of practices considered to be innovative and effective were shared with the larger group. This approach to academic development, which is grounded in the authentic daily tasks of leading and managing, and is focussed on learning through the experience of others, is advocated in the literature as holistic (Brew & Boud 1996; Blackmore et al. 2007).

In total 129 subject coordinators from 26 institutions attended the workshops, and 95 participants (74%) provided feedback through a survey. In addition, 43 facilitators (who would be the key individuals to facilitate the project implementation in their institution) attended the half-day workshops, with 38 (88%) providing feedback.

Eighty-seven percent of the subject coordinators (n=83) believed that the workshops extended their ideas on ways of leading and managing their teaching team. Eighty-two percent (n=78) perceived that the workshops extended their ideas on ways they could develop members of their teaching team. Given that the majority of academics take up the subject-coordinator role without prior or concurrent professional development (Blackmore et al. 2007), workshops similar to those in the CLASS program could be highly beneficial in preparing and supporting subject coordinators for working with sessional staff.

Most (87%) of the facilitators felt that the workshop was supportive to implementing the CLASS program at their institution, and 89% of respondents perceived that the workshop content clarified strategies for promoting the CLASS project at their institution. A majority (86%) also perceived that the workshop extended their ideas on ways of leading and promoting the CLASS initiative, and thereby sessional staff, at their institution.

Participants affirmed the fact that the practical exemplars and guidance provided were highly relevant and could be used immediately. The opportunity that the workshops afforded for reflection on leading and managing sessional staff, and for exploring strategies for developing leadership capacity, was also acknowledged as extremely beneficial. Suggestions for enhancing the facilitator workshop were largely in relation to the provision of more examples of how sessional staff were being supported and advanced in other institutions, and how coordinators were being professionally developed.

The professional-development workshop program approach, adopted to cascade the CLASS project nationally, engaged academics across the sector and promoted the dissemination of CLASS project outcomes. An email follow-up with the institutional facilitators participating in Year 2 of the CLASS project indicated that 13 of the 26 institutions undertook a CLASS-related institutional activity after the workshop program. The activities included the implementation, review and instigation of professional-development initiatives for both sessional staff and subject coordinators, and the development of resources to support and advance sessional staff. Additionally, institutional activities focussed on the assessment, renewal and establishment of institutional policies and practices related to sessional staff. Marshall et al. (2011) acknowledge that these types of initiatives are crucial.

The CLASS project provided wide-ranging opportunity for improving and embedding practice in the partner institutions, and supported opportunities for scaling it up in other institutions. This was in addition to sustaining the initiative through artefacts such as the website and the resources developed to support future developments at multiple institutional levels (Gannaway et al. 2011), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Resource Development that Resulted from the Project

Level	Activity	Resources developed and available on website classleadership.com
Subject	Formal workshop; subject team meetings; action-learning projects for teaching and learning enhancement	Sample action-learning projects [pdf documents] Workshop facilitation guides [pdf documents] Video triggers [downloadable video clips] Facilitator guide [booklet]
Faculty	Promotion and sharing of good practice; induction programs	Guidelines and templates for institutional, faculty and subject coordinator use [booklet] Good-practice exemplars [pdf documents]
Institutional	Mentoring; sharing of policies and guidelines on role expectations, workloads and expected standards	Guidelines and templates for institutional, faculty and subject coordinator use [booklet]
National	CADAD network support; management and facilitation of formal workshops plus facilitator workshops; networking	National sharing of expertise and knowledge

Conclusion

This paper presents an argument for the leadership work and contributions that subject coordinators make to both creating effective learning environments for students and enhancing innovation and practice-development with sessional staff. An overview of a multi-level professional-development framework has been introduced. This framework targets improved professional practice to support both subject coordinators and sessional staff, who increasingly comprise teaching teams in Australian universities. A number of challenges faced by these two groups have been identified, and a model has been provided which has enabled the development of strategies and resources to address many of the challenges and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and expertise at a national level The need for facilitated support through the central professional-development unit was also highlighted, as it can ensure opportunities for developing networks and communities of practice, further improvements in institutional policy and practice, better recognition and reward for subject coordinators and resourcing to support sessional-staff participation and professional development.

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