ONLINE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHING IN TURKEY: A PROPOSAL

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ABSTRACT
The following article discusses the worldwide need for professional development in university teaching and the kinds of initiative that are being introduced in some countries. It examines the case for adopting such measures in the Turkish higher education system to ensure quality in all forms of teaching and learning, both on-campus and off-campus. It also considers the barriers to achieving systemic professional development for university teaching and suggests that the solution could lie in professional development via the internet/web and encouraging and supporting an online professional development community.

Keywords: professional development – university teaching and learning – online professional development – online learning community

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHING – AN INTERNATIONAL OVERVIEW

Before considering professional development issues in Turkish universities, it may be useful to consider the worldwide developments that are occurring as a consequence of changing expectations of universities and faculty.

With the exponential expansion of higher education, faculty are expected to teach larger classes and students from non-traditional backgrounds with a wide range of motivations and abilities. Governments, employers and students expect faculty to be more accountable for quality in teaching and learning and seek improvements in completion rates and grades. In some institutions, teaching portfolios are required for appointment and promotion. In some countries, universities are also being audited and then ranked, in part in according to their teaching quality. Universities are expected to provide different kinds of degree pathways to provide lifelong learning for adult learners. New understandings of human cognition and social-constructivist approaches to adult learning (Vygotsky,1978; Slavin, 1996) are leading to a greater emphasis on learners assuming greater responsibility for their own learning and case-based, collaborative learning in which learners engage in problem-solving and open dialogue (Hausfather,1996). In such learning contexts, faculty are expected to change from being 'instructors' to providing guidance for the learners, acting as 'resource specialists' and 'response specialists'. Faculty are also expected to embrace new forms of educational delivery such as open, distance, blended, and work-based learning and master the latest tools and methodologies of information and communications technology. And all of this is expected to occur without commensurate increases in funding and in most cases, adequate training provision.

Murray (1999) suggests that to be effective, faculty development needs to have institutional support, be formalized, structured and goal-oriented, link faculty development and recognition and reward, promote a sense of ownership among faculty and evidence the fact that quality teaching is valued by the senior managers. Steinert (2000) suggests that professional development needs to relate to the institutional context and culture, be concerned with overcoming common problems, employ diverse strategies and incorporate the principles and theory of adult learning.

The corporate world accepts that the better trained and qualified the employees, the more productive and efficient the organization and that those organizations that invest in maximizing their staffs' capabilities are the best positioned and the longest lasting in the marketplace. In general, such thinking is slow to come to the universities. With some notable exceptions, there is little in the way of systemic professional development to help faculty tackle the challenges outlined above. All too often, as Dearn, Fraser & Ryan (2003) observe in Australian universities, faculty are neither trained nor qualified to do what they mostly do — teach. Ironically, the very persons who accredit graduates to engage in professional practice have no formal training or accreditation for their own practice in this area.

Some universities have established centralized professional development, acknowledging the value of a high profile one-stop shop of educational and technology expertise, services and resources that symbolizes the institution's commitment to change (see for example, Latchem & Moran, 1998). Others have opted for a devolved model – arguing that professional development needs to be responsive to, and embedded in, the

specific disciplines, cultures and operations of the schools/departments. Many more institutions have ignored the issue, often on economic grounds. Even in the best of institutions, time, resources and money for professional development are limited and all too often, the workshops and other training events prove to be ineffectual. And there is little evidence of rigorous self-reflective practice or research informing teaching. The majority of staff – including the enormous and ever-increasing number of sessional staff – are unwilling to grant time and effort to learning about the practice and theory of university teaching. Having to be largely self-reliant, they often revert to the face-to-face teaching practices of yesteryear that they themselves were exposed to.

There is clearly need for universal, systemic and formal and informal professional development within the universities. At India's Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Koul and Murugan (1989) established that professional development was essential for three groups:

- *Policy-makers, planners and administrators* needed to learn about managing the academic, organizational and administrative aspects of teaching and learning.
- *Academic staff* needed to learn about developing and delivering courses and programs and supporting student learning.
- *Non-academic and technical staff* needed to be guided in dovetailing their expertise with the teaching and learning requirements.

It was also found that professional development was needed in three forms at IGNOU:

- *Short-term orientation* to meet the immediate needs of teaching staff, policy-makers and planners.
- *Medium-term training* ranging from basic principles and operations to advanced levels and special themes.
- *Long-term human resource development* based upon perceptions of future needs.

Introducing distance education into Institut Teknologi MARA (ITM), Malaysia, Abdullah (1998) identified three categories of staff need. Some teachers had difficulty understanding the new concepts and requirements. These could be helped through workshops. Others were concerned about their lack of knowledge and skills in course and materials development. Here attachment to course teams was found to be more appropriate. Others had difficulty in dealing with ITM's off-campus mature-aged learners. Here student survey findings were used to help these staff recognize the positive aspects of these learners, the circumstances under which they were learning, and how they might be helped in their studies.

These findings indicate that far more is needed that once-off, occasional training sessions without any follow-up to help lecturers implement and evaluate the new approaches that are being advocated. Latchem & Lockwood (1998) suggest that professional development requires a multi-modal approach involving:

- Centrally-provided workshops and seminars.
- Training, mentoring and support at the school/department level.
- Self-study/online learning.
- Individual and collaborative action research and reflective practice.
- Showcasing best practice.
- Face-to-face and online communities of practice.
- Sabbaticals, secondments, exchanges and shadowing.
- Presentations by visiting experts.
- Formal study.
- Participation in off-campus conferences and in-house teaching and learning forums.

Reviewing the state of professional development in Australian higher education, Dearn, Fraser & Ryan (2003) recommended that:

- All staff new to university teaching – including all sessional staff - should be required to complete a formal preparation program in university teaching and/or present a portfolio evidencing their teaching competences as part of their probation requirements.
- The minimum standard required for professional practice as a university teacher should be a Graduate Certificate in Higher Education, accredited at a national level with a new body, the Australian University Teaching Quality Council, comprising practitioners, student representatives and industrial bodies, as the mechanism for benchmarking, peer review and quality assurance..

- Formal teaching qualifications/portfolios should be portable and flexible in curriculum and delivery to allow for the needs and characteristics of different institutions and disciplines.
- Preparation programs for sessional teaching staff should comprise components of the Graduate Certificate of Higher Education so that those part-timers wishing to gain formal teaching qualifications could do so.
- There should be comprehensive ongoing professional development programs.
- Universities should either provide, or facilitate access to, further formal studies in higher education teaching, building on the Graduate Certificate...
- Universities should be specifically funded (from a Teaching Quality Fund) for the time release and other resources needed for such development programs.
- There should be encouragement for schemes such as the Fellowships of the Higher Education, Research and Development Society of Australia (HERDSA) which are granted to individuals demonstrating excellence in their teaching.

The UK has gone further in advancing the higher education teaching and professional development agenda by establishing the Higher Education Academy (http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/) whose mission is to help institutions, discipline groups and all staff to provide the best possible learning experience for their students. It does this by:
- Leading, supporting and informing the professional development and recognition of staff in higher education.
- Providing an authoritative and independent voice on policies that influence the student learning experience.
- Improving the standing and recognition of higher education professionals by maintaining a register of accredited practitioners.
- Accrediting higher education institutions' professional development programs in teaching and learning.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHING IN TURKEY

As an emerging country aspiring to be a member of the EU, Turkey needs to achieve best practice in its university teaching and learning and faculty need help in improving their teaching, research and management abilities, adapting to new technology and coping with the changing work conditions. There is clearly need for professional development for all faculty, regardless of rank, location or personal circumstances. However, it may be some time before Turkish faculty are able to take advantage of the full range of approaches described in the previous section. Professional development for faculty is a novel concept in Turkey universities where, as Aydin (2003) observes, human resource development receives a low priority. Very few lecturers – save those in the faculties of education – have undertaken formal training in teaching and learning and the only academic development system that currently operates uses a master-apprentice model and applies only to research assistants. These research assistants – who represent 49% of the 54,823 faculty in the Turkish higher education system - enter the system under the tutelage of more senior members of faculty, most of whose schooling took place many years earlier. The only compulsory training that the Higher Education Council (Yuksek Ogretim Kurulu or YOK) requires all doctoral students to undergo – save those in education - are two short non-credit courses in planning and evaluating instruction and development and learning offered by the educational sciences institutes in their universities (Odabaşi, 2005). There has been no formal evaluation of these courses but anecdotal evidence suggests that the doctoral students are dissatisfied with these mandatory courses (Aydin, 2003). A recent review of the needs of research assistants in Turkish educational faculties in Turkey shows that they are highly desirous of training   professional development and personal development, instructional development and institutional development (Kabakçi, 2005). After receiving their PhDs, the graduate assistants immediately embark on teaching, mainly learning through trial and error and observing faculty members. As assistant professors they receive no further training in teaching and their portfolios are solely concerned with research and publishing.

Such a system clearly falls short of what is needed to ensure quality and achieve the paradigm shifts needed to bring teaching and learning in Turkish universities in line with the highest international standards. Not surprisingly, many faculty do not regard teaching as seriously as they should. However, there is evidence to suggest that some Turkish faculty are aware of the need for professional development. A small-scale study at Anadolu University (Odabasi, 2003) showed that a number of faculty would be interested in learning about how to teach more effectively and make more effective use of technology and felt that professional development should be available on a regular basis to all teaching staff. Their preferred modes of learning were through workshops and seminars and from other faculty with proven expertise. They also saw need for these activities to be provided through a faculty development centre.

In an earlier study in Turkish universities, Odabaşi (2000) found that faculty acknowledged the increasing availability of information and communications technology, the growing interest of the students its applications and its potential to enhance teaching and learning. It was shown that they were currently more familiar with such

traditional technologies as video, radio and film and that their use of the newer technology tended to be limited to such traditional functions as preparing course, presentation and examination and materials. They therefore indicated that they would welcome in-service training and time to help them harness the new technology to new ways of teaching and learning.

Professionalizing faculty's teaching role, providing systemic and universal professional development programs, and linking these to recognition and reward systems are clearly agendas that need to be addressed by YOK and the universities. However, such changes would have major political and economic implications and advancing and gaining acceptance of these ideas within the Turkish higher education system cannot be expected to occur overnight. It is equally unrealistic to expect professional development centres to be created in all universities, not least because of the difficulty of finding faculty with the necessary experience and expertise to run these centres. Also, time is a precious commodity, which makes the provision of face-to-face training for everyone an impossibility. However, one strategy which can be immediately applied, and has been successfully adopted in US, UK, Australian and other universities, is the provision of professional development through self-study materials and collaborative learning via the internet/web, supported by tutoring and mentoring, and through this, the fostering of an online professional development community.

One Turkish university that has explored such online professional development is Anadolu University (Aydin, C.H., 2003; Kuzu & Odabaşi, 2004: and Kabakçi & Odabaşi, 2004). In 1999-2000, the College of Education initiated a two-week, eight hours a day, face-to-face training program to help assistant professors improve their knowledge and skills in course design, uses of educational media, assessment and evaluation and academic counselling. In the event, the full-time attendance requirement and condensed nature of the course caused the participants to refuse to join any future activities. In 1999-2000, the Educational Communications and Technology Centre or Eğitim İletişimi ve Teknolojisi Birimi (EİT) and College of Education at Anadolu decided to trial a WebCT-based faculty development program to see whether this might prove more effective. Opportunities for asynchronous online study were provided through:

- An *information desk* – featuring online articles about different aspects of university teaching and links to online resources.
- A *development program* – short-term online courses for faculty members and in particular, assistant professors.
- An *online learning community* – enabling all faculty members to share experiences, ideas and resources.

The second of these components, the development program, was launched in 2003-2004. Through a series of one-week modules and a mix of research assignments, reflection and application, the staff learned about the changes in university teaching, presentational technology in the classroom, and educational applications of the internet. The modules were so designed as to encourage and support three types of interaction - participant-participant, participant-facilitator and participant-content and the tools for these included email, forum, chat and announcements.

Participation was voluntary but the courses were certificated and the certificates were acceptable for academic promotion. Significantly, although this program was conceived as an in-house initiative, applications were received from other universities and private institutions, indicating interest in this form of professional development. In the event, the courses were only made available to Anadolu staff but in time they could be opened up to other institutions.

In evaluating the program, it was found that the time commitment and workload factors weighed heavily on the participants' willingness to enrol in and continue with this form of professional development. It was found that some face-to-face elements would have been desirable as well as more frequent social interaction online. It was concluded that rather than making such programs available at a specific time in the university calendar, a 'kanban' approach wherein each faculty member could access advice and information 'just in time' for their needs might be more appropriate. Promoting the online program was also found to be problematic. It was published on the Anadolu University website but the assumption that faculty members regularly checked out this website proved to be ill-based.

PROPOSALS FOR AN ONLINE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM AND CREATION OF AN ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITY

What is proposed below is an online professional development system which uses the multimedia and interactive capacities of the Internet/Web, CDs and DVDs and is designed to:
- Improve the quality of university teaching and learning in Turkey

- Extend the use of technology in teaching and learning.
- Provide information, advice and training in easily-digested modular form.
- Provide a flexible learning environment that is responsive to faculty members' needs.
- Encourage a network of committed staff across the Turkish higher education system who will share experiences, opinions, ideas and findings, learn collaboratively and support the resolution of commonly experienced problems.

This system would give a high profile to professional development and the national commitment to access, equity and new forms of delivery. It would also familiarize staff with the new technologies and methodologies and their benefits. All faculty members, in all regions, at all institutions and at all times, would be able to receive 'just in time, just for me and just for now' information and training material of a uniform standard that is easily updatable. Faculty would be enabled to assume greater responsibility for their own personal/professional development. They could use the Internet to interact and collaborate with their peers within other institutions and even internationally, thus experiencing the kinds of social-constructivist learning they could then introduce into their own teaching. In the longer term, such a system could be used to provide formal study in higher education teaching and learning, equitably and flexibly across the entire Turkish sector.

There would be three main components to the system:

ANNOUNCEMENTS
- A homepage
- A training programs/resources index
- A noticeboard
- A newsletter

INFORMATION AND TRAINING MATERIALS
- Information and training resources developed by Turkish faculty
- PowerPoint presentations, lecture transcripts and audio/video recordings of presentations by visiting experts
- Examples of courses and courseware
- Links to other professional development resources on the internet
- Frequently asked questions (FAQs) and answers

COMMUNICATIONS
- Email
- Asynchronous conferencing tools
- Asynchronous collaboration tools
- Chat/discussion boards
- Videoconferencing and audioconferencing
- A Help Desk
- Forum

As far as the content is concerned, the topics covered must ultimately be determined by the needs and interests of Turkish faculty. However, given the experience in other countries, it is anticipated that they would include:

- An introduction to the theory and practice of university teaching and learning
- Learners and their learning
- Curriculum and course design
- Lecturing
- Conducting tutorials
- Laboratory, practical and fieldwork studies
- Improving students' writing skills
- Student assessment
- Postgraduate teaching
- Open and distance learning
- Information and communications technology
- Materials design and development
- Learner support

- Copyright and plagiarism
- Researching higher education teaching and learning
- Change management[i]

Turkish faculty could be encouraged to identify or create materials that could be added to this website. There are also excellent, freely accessible, professional development materials on the web. There could therefore be links to such Australian sources as the EdNA online database of web-based resources for teaching and learning (http://www.edna.edu.au/edna/) and Flinders University's Teaching for Learning materials (http://adminwww.flinders.edu.au/teach/t4l/cur_des/index.htm) and in the UK, the London Guildhall University's DeLiberations (http://www.city.londonmet.ac.uk/deliberations/home.html), a resource for managers and faculty, with material arranged by discipline and educational Issue, and the wealth of material available through the Commonwealth of Learning on developing, delivering, managing, researching and evaluating open and distance learning courses and programs (http://www.col.org). There could also be links to free online journals such as the International Research Review of Distance Learning (www.irrodl.org) and the Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education (TOJDE) (http://tojde.anadolu.edu.tr/tojde).

The majority of the materials and interactions are likely to be in the form of text, but technically, it would also be possible to include digital audio and digital TV components where these are appropriate.

CONCLUSION
The article has shown that there is great need for professional development to help faculty improve the quality of teaching and learning in Turkish universities and to ensure that this is up to world standards. It has also shown that there is currently little systemic provision of such activities and that the majority of faculty lack formal training or qualifications in teaching or education.

Given the methodologies and technologies of open and distance learning, it is possible to provide professional development online or via CDs or DVDs for those without online access, albeit with some face-to-face elements of training. The learning can be interactive, it can combine self-study and collaborative work, and the materials can be developed in the Turkish universities and adopted or adapted from overseas.

The costs of setting up and maintaining such an online system would not be excessive. If YOK could be persuaded to invest in it, there would be enormous educational and cost benefits.

The system would require a part-time co-ordinator and a management committee comprising Turkish faculty representatives committed to improving the quality or teaching and learning. There would also be need for a full-time research assistant who would be responsible for organizing the web-based content, chat/conferencing and other features. There would also be need for technical support for the website. Given Anadolu University's extensive experience in providing open and distance education, moving into e-learning and developing online professional development and range of the technical facilities and support persons it can bring to these tasks, this institution may be an appropriate base for this initiative. However, this is a matter requiring further discussion and in any case, in the establishment and day-to-day operations, it is important that the Turkish higher education community has strong sense of ownership in system. The success of such an enterprise stands or falls by the commitment and inputs of Turkish faculty.

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