

Overcoming Pedagogical Solitude:

The transformative power of discipline-specific Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs)

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[submission version; forthcoming (2015) in *To Improve the Academy*.]

Note: The authors would like to thank Professor Tina Piper for the key role she played in the creation of the Law Faculty Learning Communities and the Law Teaching Network Project, and Dean Daniel Jutras for his leadership and support of the Law Teaching Network Project. Thanks also go to Teaching and Learning Services Director Laura Winer and Professor Shauna Van Praagh for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this manuscript. Finally, we thank the participants in our FLCs for their commitment to teaching and learning and for their generosity in sharing their reflections on the FLC experience.

Abstract

This article describes a multi-year Faculty Learning Community (FLC) program as a strategy to overcome pedagogical solitude (Shulman, 1993) in a discipline-specific context. Participant interviews shed light on their FLC experiences and perceived impact on their teaching and students' learning. Grounded within the particularities of the disciplinary context and based on the results of interviews reflecting a highly positive experience, we articulate key factors that had a major role in the success of the FLCs, framed within Lee, Hyman and Luginbuhl's (2007) concept of *readiness*. We also suggest contextual questions to consider when transferring our experience to other institutional contexts.

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Introduction

We close the classroom door and experience pedagogical solitude, whereas in our life as scholars, we are members of active communities of conversation, communities of evaluation, communities in which we gather with others in our invisible colleges to exchange our findings, our methods, our excuses.

(Shulman, 1993, p. 6)

For university professors, a sense of community may be implicit where research is concerned, but is not always apparent when it comes to pedagogy. This paper describes our experiences with Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) as a strategy to overcome *pedagogical solitude* (Shulman, 1993) in the Faculty of Law at our large, research-intensive Canadian university. These FLCs have been one aspect of an ongoing collaboration between the Faculty of Law and our university's center for teaching and learning – Teaching and Learning Services (TLS). The broader Law Teaching Network project aims to generate a shared commitment to excellent, innovative and engaging teaching and learning practices via a comprehensive approach to supporting teaching and learning in the Faculty.

The authors are two educational developers at TLS, a professor in the Faculty of Law, and a graduate student assistant (now a librarian). Respectively, we have participated in and facilitated numerous discipline-specific FLCs over the past few years. Although anecdotal evidence suggested that professors found the FLCs useful, we wanted to develop a more

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thorough understanding of three components: participants' perceptions of (1) the FLC experience, (2) the FLC organization and process, and (3) the impact of their participation in these communities on their teaching. To this end, we developed and carried out a structured interview process with a sample of participants. In this article, we will discuss our approach to facilitating these communities in light of our particular context as compared to the literature. We will describe the methodology and results of the interviews, concluding with lessons learned from our FLC project and our experience that may be transferable to other institutions.

Context and review of the literature

Four years ago, the Chair of the Law Faculty Curriculum Committee approached TLS with a request for assistance in designing a mentoring program. Results of a survey conducted by the Committee had indicated that faculty members wished to have more opportunities to talk with their colleagues about their teaching. At that time, the Chair thought that a mentoring program could provide those opportunities. After several conversations in which we explored different mentoring structures that could facilitate conversations about teaching, we came across the literature on Faculty Learning Communities (e.g., Cox, 2004; Haynes et al., 2010). FLCs showed promise as a vehicle to address the faculty's desire to "open their classroom doors" by gathering in informal learning groups to talk about teaching. It was hoped that the FLCs would provide opportunities for such conversations within the Law Faculty.

When we met with the Dean to discuss the Faculty's interests, it became clear that there was potential for a larger project, consistent with the university's strategic directions. With the Dean's support, we submitted a successful proposal to the Provost for funding a multi-year project that ultimately involved a variety of teaching enhancement and curriculum reform initiatives. These included the FLC program, as well as developing undergraduate program

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outcomes and undertaking a curriculum mapping exercise, offering workshops, teaching retreats, and teaching and education conference funding.

As we explored the possibility of developing FLCs, we looked at their definition and potential goals and roles in promoting conversations about teaching. According to Milton Cox (2004), an education consultant at Miami University of Ohio largely credited with standardizing the practice and structure of FLCs, “creating a faculty learning community program is one approach that engages community in the cause of student and faculty learning and transforming our institutions of higher education into learning organizations” (p. 5). The idea of community is key to the FLC, which is built for the purpose of actively developing and discussing teaching and learning in higher education. These communities generally follow the same design: they are voluntary, and cross or inter-disciplinary. In addition to faculty members, these communities may include professional staff, and undergraduate or graduate students. FLCs can range from six to fifteen members, although it is noted that group sizes of eight to twelve members are particularly recommended (Cox, 2002). The duration is generally one year; members meet frequently throughout the year and develop specific, actionable goals leading to clearly defined outcomes or “artifacts” (Cox, 2002; FLC Developers’ Institute, 2007; Macpherson, 2007). Communities can be conceived as either of two types: cohort-based or topic-based. Cohort-based groups focus on issues or needs of a particular group of people, such as junior faculty, department chairs, or senior faculty. Meanwhile, topic-based groups are open to anyone at any level in their career interested in exploring a particular topic, such as integrating technology into the classroom (Cox, 2004, pp. 8-9).

FLCs can have a variety of outcomes or goals, including professional development (Cox, 2004), fostering collaboration within a campus and even between cross-state campuses (Hansen

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et al., 2004), promoting the teaching-research nexus (Slapcoff & Harris, 2014), or serving as agents for intentional cultural transformation, such as promoting diversity (Petroni, 2004). They may also contribute to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) (Richlin & Cox, 2004), be used as a form of new faculty orientation or as a complement to a traditional orientation (Richlin & Essington, 2004), and promote shared governance (Phillips, Sweet & Blythe, 2011).

Bearing the literature in mind, we worked towards a definition of what FLCs would look like in our context. We were inspired by the “Faculty inquiry into action” report from the Carnegie Foundation (2008) to articulate our goal of creating an environment in which dialogues about teaching and learning could occur among colleagues at all career stages, “where innovations in curriculum and pedagogy [could be developed], and where questions and answers about [legal] education [could be] exchanged, critiqued, and built upon” (p. 3).

The overarching goal of the FLCs offered was to stimulate meaningful conversations about teaching in a supportive, legal education-specific environment. Given the Faculty’s emphasis upon the need to find occasions to discuss their teaching with colleagues in the same discipline, we chose to make these FLCs discipline-specific. This was a significant departure from recommendations in the literature, which emphasizes the need to gather together participants from different disciplines. This recommendation is based on the concern that conversations within a discipline risk focusing on substantive content issues as opposed to pedagogy. We kept this in mind while facilitating the FLCs and in subsequently evaluating the participants’ FLC experience as synthesized in this article. Further, this recommendation contains an implicit assumption that instructors in the same faculty can speak to one another at any time about their teaching. Our experience demonstrated, however, that finding the time and place for those discussions had previously been challenging in this Faculty context.

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The program was officially launched by the Dean in 2010, with the additional incentive of a small stipend toward conference attendance for participants. In terms of support, an FLC manual was created by the educational developers to outline the main goals and characteristics of the program. The Dean also designated a faculty member who acted as a liaison, working closely with the educational developers in the planning of the FLCs as well as other aspects of the larger project, a role that proved to be invaluable to the success of the project. Educational developers facilitated the meetings and contributed to the smooth running and usefulness of the FLCs through actions as varied as developing resource lists and annotated bibliographies related to discussion topics, benchmarking, and coordinating the scheduling and room-booking for the meetings.

Characteristics of FLCs in the Faculty of Law
Discipline-specific
Open to faculty and staff teaching at the Faculty
Number of participants: 4-11
Meet a minimum of four times a year
Voluntary membership
11 topic-based FLCs for a total of 58 participants (34 unique participants) = ~75% of Faculty
Flexible in terms of outcome (artifact vs. process)

Figure 1. Characteristics of FLCs in the Faculty of Law

Over a period of three years, the educational developers facilitated 11 topic-based FLCs, with the participation of 34 unique participants, representing approximately 75% of the Faculty. Topics were suggested at the beginning of each year by the educational developers, and faculty members were encouraged to suggest their own topics as well. The topics chosen reflected individual and group interests: learning-centered course re-design, advancing teaching and research concurrently, teaching and learning with technologies, active learning strategies, peer observation in the classroom, and assessment of student learning. Our FLCs had a minimum of

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four meetings a year for about an hour and a half each. Membership was voluntary and the FLCs were open to all full-time faculty and teaching staff. In certain circumstances, they also included student affairs staff, and doctoral students with a teaching role also participated. A minimum of three participants was required for an FLC to be created; membership ultimately ranged from 4-11 members per FLC. In addition, based on the literature, we emphasized to participants that the goals, outcomes and values of our FLCs should be explicit, shared and documented. However, we decided to adopt a flexible approach in terms of expected outcomes of the FLCs. Although participants were encouraged to consider what outcomes they would personally or collectively like to see from their participation, we departed from the literature in that we did not insist on participants producing an “artifact” (Cox, 2002) at the end of the FLC. We felt that in some cases, the process itself was enough.

Evaluation of the Three-Year Faculty Learning Community Program

After three years of running FLCs in the Faculty of Law, it seemed to be an opportune moment to collect data regarding the participants’ perceptions of the effect such learning communities had on their teaching and on their students’ learning. In particular, we thought it important to obtain empirical results in light of the fact that the FLCs in the Faculty of Law did not always follow the standard characteristics as recommended by the literature.

Methodology

Our study of the three-year long FLC program used structured interviews of past participants to assess the impact of participation in one or more FLCs on teaching and learning in the Faculty of Law. Three FLCs [Table 1] were selected for the purpose of this study: “Rethinking Your Course,” the “Clinical Legal Education Working Group” (CLEWG), and “Advancing Teaching and Research Together.” The structural differences of these varied FLCs,

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along with their distinct origins and the opportunity they afforded to analyze the evolution of an FLC over an extended period of time, were the basis for selection for our study.

[Table 1. here]

Table 1. Summary of characteristics for three selected FLCs

The first FLC, “Rethinking Your Course,” was offered three separate times over three years, with different participants each year (four to six) discussing a variety of topics that fell under the general theme of course design and evaluation. The second, on Clinical Legal Education, grouped together a larger number of people (11 unique participants) and ran for three years with the majority of the members participating for all three years. The third, “Advancing Teaching and Research Together,” had four participants who met over the course of a single year. This FLC had perhaps the most visible link to SoTL, given that participants aimed to explore the link between teaching and research (Richlin & Cox, 2004; Slapcoff & Harris, 2014).

In addition to structural differences between these particular FLCs, the manner in which they originated was also distinct. The three iterations of “Rethinking Your Course” evidenced the most typical organization of the Law FLCs as the overall theme was proposed by TLS. Participants elected to join and then suggested their own particular areas of exploration within the broad topic. The Clinical Legal Education Working Group (CLEWG) began as an ad-hoc working group and evolved into a Faculty Learning Community by virtue of the participants’ own preferences, contributions and continued involvement beyond the initial scope of the mandate. “Advancing Teaching and Research Together,” on the other hand, was an FLC proposed by the four participants themselves. In terms of the number of participants, goals, duration and method of formation, these three FLCs represent a variety of approaches and possibilities.

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Of these three FLCs, 12 out of 26 unique participants were selected and invited to participate in a structured interview. The number of selected participants was based on the size of the FLC in order to achieve a proportional sample. Two participants were selected from the smaller FLCs of four to six participants, and four from the CLEWG, the largest of the FLCs with approximately eight participants per year and a total of 11 unique participants over three years. Past participants who had left the University since their participation in an FLC, or who were on sabbatical during the 2013-2014 academic year, were excluded from the selection pool. Where there were more than two potential participants, we attempted to select those representing a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives (such as non-teaching staff members or visiting professors). Many participants were involved in more than one FLC. However, for the purpose of the interview, each selected participant was asked to focus on one specific FLC, although they could refer to their experiences in the other FLCs if they wished.

The 12 invited participants all agreed to be interviewed in-person by a faculty member (second author) with past experience participating in an FLC, to facilitate the sharing of candid responses regarding their positive and negative experiences. The interviews were not audio-recorded for the same reason. Instead, detailed notes with quotations were taken by a graduate student assistant (fourth author) from TLS, who had previous experience providing support for FLCs in the Faculty. From the interviews, we were able not only to learn about the participants' experiences discussing and learning about teaching from their colleagues, but also about the effectiveness and perceived impact of the facilitation and support from TLS.

The individual interviews, which lasted for approximately 30 minutes each, were conducted using a three-part questionnaire [see Appendix] that was shared with interviewees beforehand. We designed the questionnaire around three broad categories: (1) the FLC

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experience, (2) organization and process, and (3) impact on teaching and learning. Each of the three categories served to gather information on participants' perceptions of their experience participating in an FLC, the structure and management of the FLC, and the impact they felt their participation had on their teaching and their students' learning, respectively. Key interview results have been synthesized and are shared in the Results section.

Data Analysis

The data collected by the graduate student during the interviews were anonymized and organized by question. The authors conducted a thematic content analysis of the data and developed broad categories of key points for each question. These key points were summarized in a table by question along with direct quotes from the interview data to illustrate the responses gathered from participants. The results were then reviewed by the interviewer to ensure accuracy and anonymity of the quotations.

Results

The FLC Experience

The first set of questions focused on the FLC experience itself and asked participants to identify their motivation for joining an FLC. Participants were also asked to reflect on those aspects of the experience that were the most positive or helpful, as well as on those that were the least positive or helpful.

The major reasons identified by the participants as to their motivation to join an FLC included the desire to build community and harness synergies from colleagues' experiences and ideas, accomplish change and improve their own teaching as well as the institution as a whole, and gain personal enrichment. In the words of one interviewee, the decision to join an FLC was motivated by a desire to "break pedagogical solitude." It was reassuring to learn that the

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motivations of the participants we interviewed were consistent with the intended outcomes of FLCs according to the literature.

The feedback regarding the actual experience was overwhelmingly positive. Eleven of the twelve participants interviewed felt that the FLC experience had succeeded in validating their feelings, breaking isolation, building community, forging strong relationships with colleagues or providing a safe space to discuss issues, brainstorm and think freely. Moreover, participants noted that their involvement in an FLC proved to be a “catalyst for change.”

Many of the interviewees had some constructive feedback which could be used to improve the experience of FLCs in the Faculty for the future. Some noted the overuse of educational jargon. Others expressed that the varied composition of the groups led to different expectations and confidence levels amongst group members. Sometimes, there was a lack of focus as a result of too many ideas being proposed. Moreover, despite enthusiastic and voluntary enrolment, the reality of busy academic lives often caused FLC participation to be a low priority. One participant even expressed guilt at investing so much energy in teaching!

Organization and Process

The second set of questions was designed to assess the organizational and process-oriented aspects of the FLCs. In terms of the frequency and length of meetings, most participants felt that meeting for 1.5 hours approximately once per month during the academic year was appropriate, thereby underscoring the recommendations in the literature. Likewise, most participants were pleased with, or neutral about, the size of their group which typically ranged from 4-6 participants (with one FLC being larger at 8-11 participants). Not surprisingly, scheduling meetings was mentioned as the greatest organizational challenge. The first year the FLCs were offered, faculty members served as “conveners” and were responsible for scheduling

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their FLC's meetings. We were operating under the assumption that faculty colleagues would be familiar with internal scheduling logistics. This actually proved to be a logistical barrier and meetings were not scheduled as frequently as they might have been. Facilitators subsequently offered to manage scheduling, which was well-received. Tools such as teaching schedules, Doodle polls and follow-up e-mails proved effective. While this helped to approach scheduling challenges, participants nonetheless noted that busy schedules and multiple commitments meant that attending the FLCs remained a challenge in some cases.

The questions in this section also sought to evaluate how the participants felt about the external facilitation provided by TLS staff. Ten of the twelve participants interviewed found this external facilitation to be key, not only because the facilitators provided invaluable resources and expertise, but also because having such external facilitation symbolized the importance of the FLC project, provided a set of external eyes and, in the words of one interviewee, helped “disturb habitual patterns” by offering faculty members different perspectives and ways of thinking.

One of the ways in which the Law FLCs departed from the directives of the literature was in their discipline-specificity. It was therefore important to assess how the participants felt about this aspect of the project. The reaction of the interviewees was overwhelmingly supportive, with ten of the twelve participants interviewed being in favor of retaining discipline-specificity. They thought it promoted intimacy and brought people together who speak the same language and share the same concerns. Some expressed the fear that the dynamics might change if the groups were to be inter-disciplinary; in the words of one interviewee, “we haven't yet reached the limits of our colleagues.” While most preferred to keep the FLCs discipline-specific, four participants added that they would be in favor of having colleagues from other disciplines attend as guest

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participants when their presence would be appropriate for the intended discussion. Although two participants noted that they would have preferred to have an interdisciplinary FLC experience, others added that, to some extent, the external facilitators provided some interdisciplinary flavor to the experience.

Group composition was also a question we wanted to examine in more detail because FLCs are traditionally open to faculty, staff and even students. The FLCs in the Faculty of Law were composed mainly of professors with some groups including visiting professors, doctoral students and non-teaching colleagues. Here the responses were interesting and evidenced a fairly consistent desire to keep the FLC as a space just for academic teaching staff. Most interviewees felt that visiting professors should be welcome to join FLCs, and one noted that “Including visiting professors is a good way to bring them into the culture”. Participants were less keen on inviting post-doctoral fellows’ and doctoral students’ participation unless they had actual teaching duties. As for undergraduate students, the interviewees were almost unanimous in feeling that they should not be present. Most felt that it would change the dynamics of the FLC and cause it to lose its characteristic of a “safe space.” It would also, as many expressed, induce self-censorship and even self-conscious behavior. The answers related to the participation of non-teaching staff, such as those involved in student affairs, Faculty governance and IT, were the most varied. Only three of the twelve participants interviewed would unequivocally welcome non-teaching staff. Others responded that the participation of non-teaching staff would depend on the particular context of the FLC and whether an administrative perspective would be useful.

Impact on Teaching and Learning

As emphasized in the literature (e.g., Goto, Marshall & Gaule, 2010; Hubball, Clarke & Beach, 2004; Miller et al., 2012), it is crucially important to assess the impact participation in

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FLCs has on teaching and learning. The third set of questions, therefore, asked participants to identify the impact of the FLC experience on their teaching generally, and more particularly in terms of tangible changes they made, as well as their perceptions of the changes' impact on their students' learning.

In terms of general impact on teaching, the participants interviewed felt that their participation in the FLCs promoted confidence in the classroom, thereby encouraging experimentation with different teaching methods. Their participation also promoted enthusiasm regarding teaching and made them more conscious about the importance of syllabi and linking teaching to explicit course objectives. In addition to giving them new ideas, perhaps most importantly, it decreased feelings of being alone. The realization that “everyone is struggling” proved to be very reassuring. While the FLCs in the Faculty of Law were not designed in such a way as to require participants to make tangible changes (i.e., create “artifacts”), there were in fact many concrete changes that instructors adopted as a direct result of FLC participation. These changes were felt at the macro (Faculty) level as well as the micro (course) level. They even went so far as to affect assessment and professorial research.

For example, the Clinical Legal Education FLC had some notable impacts. At the Faculty level, improvements were made to the Faculty website and to communication to students regarding clinical legal education opportunities. Furthermore, an entirely new course was created, and has proven to be very successful and popular. This course, “Critical Engagements with Human Rights,” integrates students' internship experiences and has resulted in student-published papers. The catalyst for this course was the FLC on Clinical Legal Education.

Many participants made changes within existing courses, some going so far as to reorganize their course strategies entirely. By way of example, one professor reorganized his

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course so that the students, rather than the instructor, produced the class notes and case comments. Another professor changed the course to be project-based and still another adopted a “flipped classroom” approach. Many noted improvements they had made to their course syllabi and one participant interviewed stressed that even small changes, such as the one he made in adopting a wireless remote that enabled him to move freely about the classroom, could lead to large pedagogical changes and benefits to teaching and learning.

Changes were also made to assessments and evaluation. One professor integrated an entirely new form of evaluation, namely an Op-Ed assignment followed by peer comments that took the form of a letter to the editor. This particular assignment was broadly disseminated within the university community, both within and beyond the Faculty, and has even been adopted by a law professor at another university. Other professors created group assignments, while still others changed the percentage of the overall mark in the course they attributed to pass/fail assignments. Many learned about the importance of developing rubrics for evaluating existing forms of assessment. And finally, although the FLCs were centered on teaching and did not focus explicitly on research, in one FLC, the participants sought to develop writing support strategies for each other through the organization of a writing retreat, which they called “Misery Loves Company,” and to which they attribute an improvement in their research output.

It is, of course, much more challenging to document the impact of professorial participation in an FLC on students’ actual learning. This was all the more difficult in the case of the FLCs in the Faculty of Law because there were no explicit questionnaires students were asked to answer, or evaluations they were asked to complete, assessing the impact of the changes professors made to their teaching on their learning due specifically to FLC participation. However, as a result of positive comments in student course evaluations, informal student

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feedback in person and via e-mail, improved student work and a sense of a better classroom experience, many interviewees felt that the positive impact FLC participation had on their teaching followed through in their students' learning.

For example, two professors interviewed felt that as a result of pedagogical changes they had made, students obtained a better understanding of knowledge production, since they were now in a position of producing knowledge and not merely passively receiving it in the classroom. Several professors noted an improvement in student skill development as a result of changes made to forms of assessment, as the new forms of assessment required skills that went beyond studying for a written examination. One professor noted that the class projects initiated as a result of FLC participation extended beyond the classroom to the greater community, in that students invited outside participants to attend their presentations, and disseminated their projects via international blogs, Twitter, and presentations to other educational institutions. As these examples suggest, while the precise impact on students' learning was difficult to pinpoint, the majority of participants interviewed perceived there to be a positive impact.

Overall, the participants we interviewed found their participation in the FLC to be an overwhelmingly positive experience, one that ten of the twelve interviewees would repeat. One participant even suggested that since the FLCs that focused on teaching and learning were so successful, the Faculty ought to think about creating FLCs to discuss and improve research.

Lessons Learned

Reflecting on our experience facilitating and participating in these FLCs, we have identified three key factors that we perceive as having a major role in the FLCs' success, as well as the success of the larger Law Teaching Network. They are: (1) flexibility and responsiveness to the Faculty context, (2) a collaborative approach, and (3) appropriate, embedded support

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structures. These factors are related to the concept of *readiness*, or conditions conducive to change, as discussed by Lee, Hyman and Luginbuhl (2007). Although we recognize that these key factors are interrelated, we discuss each separately, below.

Flexibility and responsiveness to Faculty context

The FLC offerings in the Faculty of Law grew out of an overarching goal to generate a shared commitment to excellent, innovative and engaging teaching and learning practices. The FLCs evolved from year to year as we intentionally developed approaches and solutions to address needs expressed by the faculty as they arose. For example, during the first year the program was very structured, with topics suggested by TLS. Based on feedback from the first year, we introduced a more flexible approach in subsequent years, suggesting fewer FLC topics and encouraging interested instructors to propose their own topics. We also recognized the potential of other conversational opportunities and administrative structures to evolve into FLCs, one example being the ad hoc Clinical Legal Education Working Group previously described, which ultimately became our longest-running FLC. Although our process of facilitating and supporting FLCs was quite intentional, we also understood the importance of integrating educational development opportunities in an organic manner, recognizing and responding to the Faculty-specific context and practices. In this way, our approach was consistent with some of the recommended elements of educational development practice. We made efforts to understand and respect established faculty perspectives, and work with the instructors “starting where they [were]” (Timmermans, 2011, p. 144), addressing their needs and capitalizing upon opportunities that presented themselves.

Because of the novelty of the program and the faculty members’ initial desire for informal conversation opportunities, we realized that we needed to be more flexible about

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requiring FLC participants to create what the literature would call “artifacts” (Cox, 2002), or to make tangible changes as a result of their FLC participation. We wanted to allow a wider variety of individual and group goals that could range from focusing on the process itself and not simply an end product (recognizing that process can *be* a meaningful outcome in itself), to more traditional conceptions of artifacts as described in the literature. Ultimately, there were many examples of concrete changes that participants attributed to their participation in the FLCs, as discussed in the previous section.

Collaboration

TLS and the Law Faculty’s joint approach to this project presented the interesting opportunity, and accompanying challenges, of sustained educational development work in a discipline-specific setting (Lee, Hyman & Luginbuhl, 2007). The appointment of a Faculty liaison, a Law faculty member who worked closely with TLS in the planning and development of the FLCs (and other initiatives), was key in articulating the Faculty’s needs and perspectives to the educational developers, enabling the latter to respond to those needs in a meaningful, contextualized way. The liaison, acting as a “cultural broker” (McAlpine & Harris, 2006, p. 14), provided valuable advice in matters related to faculty interests, culture and preferred modes of communication. In the case of the FLCs, the Faculty liaison was instrumental in topic selection, general communication to the Faculty, feedback on the development of discipline-specific pedagogical resources, and encouraging colleagues’ participation from within the Faculty.

Beyond the Faculty liaison, we made a conscious effort to draw in several other faculty members interested and committed to fostering these exchanges within the Faculty. A *sympathetic subunit* (Lee, Hyman & Luginbuhl, 2007) of committed faculty was key in fostering other colleagues’ interest in the project and in its ultimate success. In some cases, pedagogical

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strategies developed during the FLCs were later showcased as examples in pedagogy workshops and materials shared with colleagues in the Faculty. Indeed, this very article is the result of such a collaboration: the Law Faculty member co-author played a key role in encouraging her colleagues to be interviewed. Further, her participation, perspective and experience within the Law Faculty context greatly facilitated the process of data gathering and interpretation.

Support structures

The FLC program started in response to an identified need from the Law Faculty: to have more opportunities to talk colleague-to-colleague about their teaching. This need was recognized by the Dean as an opportunity to develop a larger teaching and learning project in the Faculty. The Dean's support was demonstrated through his sponsorship of the formal launch of the FLC program, as well as the incentives and recognition he provided for participation. The University's Provost saw the potential transferability of the concept of a Faculty-wide pedagogical collaboration to other Faculty contexts and funded the multi-year project. The support from the Dean and Provost to the FLC program and the larger project signaled a commitment to teaching and learning from the University's senior administration. This proved to be an ideal combination of *readiness* conditions: leadership support was provided in response to an authentic need within a faculty culture that was favorable to collaboration (Lee, Hyman & Luginbuhl, 2007).

Transferability of our FLC experience to other institutional contexts: Key questions

Reflecting on what we came to recognize as three important factors in the success of our FLCs led to our retrospective development of a number of key contextual questions that would be pertinent when transferring our experience to other institutional contexts:

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1. Why is an FLC program being established? Is there an authentic need/desire within the Faculty(ies)? If so, what are the particular needs and desires?
2. Who is supporting the request? (both within and beyond the Faculty, at multiple institutional levels)
3. What resources are available? (e.g., people, space, time, money)
4. What are the preliminary desired outcomes and expectations for the FLC program?
5. What form of FLC would best meet the recognized needs in terms of size, composition, topics of discussion and frequency of meetings?
6. What meaningful incentives can be provided for participation?
7. Is there a key point person willing to work with the Center for Teaching and Learning in the planning and development of the FLCs and, in discipline-specific contexts, to serve as a Faculty liaison/cultural broker? Further, can a *sympathetic subunit* be found or developed?
8. Once FLCs are underway, what feedback mechanisms can be established to assess and respond to evolving needs?
9. What evaluation tools could be developed to assess the perceived impact of changes on teaching and learning, brought about by FLC participation?

These questions help to identify the needs, purposes, and initial factors that we suggest be considered when developing an FLC program.

Conclusion

Our participants' responses suggest that discipline-specific FLCs can succeed in building a sense of community that fosters conversations about teaching and learning. We recognize that discipline-specificity represents a departure from the recommendations in the FLC literature but

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we suggest, based on our experience and results shared here, that this can be a valuable approach. Moreover, we propose that keeping a spirit of responsiveness in terms of specific Faculty contexts may result in other justified departures from some of the more prescriptive elements of the FLC literature, such as requiring members to produce tangible artifacts.

The academy is often characterized by pedagogical solitude, which our data indicates can be mitigated by FLCs. Moreover, FLCs can be a catalyst for tangible change in participants' teaching by improving confidence levels, encouraging experimentation and providing new ideas to try out in the classroom. These changes in teaching have the potential to impact students' learning in a beneficial manner.

Appendix

Faculty Learning Communities Questionnaire

FLC experience

1. What motivated you to participate in the [insert name] FLC?
2. What was the most positive or helpful aspect of the FLC experience itself? Do you have a key conceptual take-away, insight or “aha” moment from the FLC experience?
3. What was least positive or helpful about the FLC experience?

Organization and process

1. Were the frequency and length of the meetings appropriate?
2. Was it useful to have external facilitation/resource personnel? Why or why not?
3. Did you appreciate the discipline-specific nature of the FLC, or would you have preferred that it had been interdisciplinary?
4. What did you think about the size and the group composition of your FLC? What would you recommend as an ideal group? (i.e., in addition to size, do you think it should be only instructors, or instructors and students/non-teaching staff/visiting instructors, etc.?)
5. Were there any organizational or process-related challenges associated with your participation in this FLC?

Impact on your teaching

1. Do you think your participation in the FLC has influenced your teaching? If so, how?
2. Can you name something tangible that you changed or implemented as a result?
3. Do you think your participation in the FLC may have influenced your students’ learning experience? If so, in what way and how do you know? (e.g., better results, student feedback, anecdotes)

Future Involvement

1. Would you participate in an FLC in the future? Why or why not?

Is there anything else that you would like to say, that we haven't had a chance to discuss?

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Selected FLCs	Characteristics
<p>Rethinking Your Course (3 FLCs) 13 unique participants (1 participated twice)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proposed by Teaching and Learning Services (TLS) ▪ Broad goal: Enhance individual courses via an open-ended course design learning community ▪ Offered three times over three years, with different topics and participants <p><i>Outcomes:</i> A variety of new teaching and evaluation methods</p>
<p>Clinical Legal Education Working Group (CLEWG) 11 unique participants (not all participated all 3 years)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proposed by the Faculty administration originally as an ad-hoc working group; became an FLC ▪ Broad goal: Enhance communication and integration of clinical legal education offerings ▪ Same group continued for three years <p><i>Outcomes:</i> Clinical legal education website, new course, collegial relationships developed</p>
<p>Advancing Teaching and Research Together 4 unique participants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proposed by faculty members ▪ Broad goal: Personal sharing of strategies for successful integration of teaching and research ▪ Continued for one year <p><i>Outcomes:</i> Half-day writing retreat, “Misery loves company”</p>

Table 1. Summary of characteristics for three selected FLCs