Exploring Faculty Developers’ Experiences to Inform Our Understanding of Competence in Faculty Development

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Abstract

Purpose
Now a mainstay in medical education, faculty development has created the role of the faculty developer. However, faculty development research tends to overlook faculty developers’ roles and experiences. This study aimed to develop an empirical understanding of faculty developer competence by digging deeper into the actions, experiences, and perceptions of faculty developers as they perform their facilitator role.

Method
A constructivist grounded theory approach guided observations of faculty development activities, field interviews, and formal interviews with 31 faculty developers across two academic institutions from 2013 to 2014. Analysis occurred alongside and informed data collection. Themes were identified using a constant comparison process.

Results
Consistent with the literature, findings highlighted the knowledge and skills of the faculty developer and the importance of context in the design and delivery of faculty development activities. Three novel processes (negotiating, constructing, and attuning) were identified that integrate the individual faculty developer, her context, and the evolution of her competence.

Conclusions
These findings suggest that faculty developer competence is best understood as a situated construct. A faculty developer’s ability to attune to, construct, and negotiate her environment can both enhance and minimize the impact of contextual variables as needed. Thus, faculty developers do not passively experience context; rather, they actively interact with their environment in ways that maximize their performance. Faculty developers should be trained for the adaptive, situated use of knowledge.

The roles and responsibilities of medical school faculty are continually evolving, alongside changes in the health care system, education system, and society. Faculty are now expected to be creative and effective teachers, successful researchers, productive clinicians, competent administrators, and academic leaders.1,2 These new expectations require faculty to acquire new knowledge and skills in a relatively short period of time.3,4 Faculty development has been identified as one of the key tools to support faculty and their changing needs and has consequently become an essential component of medical education.4,5

Faculty development is defined broadly as the range of activities that institutions use to assist faculty in their roles.6 These activities include workshops, fellowships, and other longitudinal programs offered to health professions faculty.7 In the past few decades, researchers have attempted to unpack the components of “effective” and “successful” faculty development activities.5,8 While the literature is replete with program descriptions and program evaluations, the roles and experiences of faculty developers—the people who plan and deliver these activities—largely have been overlooked.9

Given that faculty development is now a mainstay in medical education and that faculty developers play a crucial role in these activities,10,11 we must enhance our understanding of what these educators do in their daily work. Doing so will enable individual faculty developers to better understand and improve their own practice as well as optimize the formal training of competent faculty developers.

Traditionally, becoming a competent faculty developer (and a competent educator more broadly) meant acquiring an agreed upon set of knowledge and skills.1,12–19 For example, a competent educator needed to possess pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, and interpersonal skills, among other abilities. However, contextual variability and unpredictability complicate the application of one’s knowledge and skills. For example, one group of learners with a particular background might necessitate a different starting point for content development and a different selection of teaching methods than another group with a different background. Over the last few decades, researchers have paid increasing attention to the influence of context on the delivery of effective education.14,20–22 Educators who demonstrate competence in their role in one context may struggle to do so in another; yet, empirical research exploring this phenomenon remains scant in the literature. Competence, in light of contextual influences, becomes something individuals enact dynamically in relation to others, particular contexts, or situations;23 rather than something they acquire and possess as a static
achievement. Further exploration is therefore needed to understand what processes enable faculty developers to achieve competence in different contexts so that we can optimize and improve our training models for these educators.

Our research explores competence by studying the real-world experiences of faculty developers. Our aim was to construct an empirical understanding of competence in faculty development by digging deeper into the actions, experiences, and perceptions of faculty developers as they perform their facilitator role (i.e., developing and delivering faculty development activities) in their daily work.

Method

Study design

We employed a constructivist grounded theory approach to explore faculty developer perceptions, actions, and interactions.25 An interpretive paradigm informs constructivist grounded theory. This methodology asserts that grounded theories explain social processes and phenomena and are derived from researchers’ interactions with participants and their interpretations of data. Given the role of the researchers in shaping the theories from the data, being reflexive about the various perspectives the research team brings to the process is essential. Our research team engaged in reflexivity throughout this study, encouraging dialogue during data collection and analysis, and continually questioning our own assumptions, the research process, and the developing findings. Five members of our research team are experienced faculty developers who are familiar with the activities involved in the design and facilitation of faculty development activities (K.L., D.P., A. Walsh, A. Wong, B.S.). Two members of the team are education researchers whose focus is adaptive expertise and faculty development, respectively (M.M., L.B.). Thus, we brought both theoretical and clinician–educator perspectives to bear on our data as we constructed our theory of faculty developer competence.

We conducted our study across two sites—the University of Toronto and McMaster University. The Centre for Faculty Development in the Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto at St. Michael’s Hospital offers a range of programs for faculty in the health sciences. Learners and faculty developers represent medicine, rehabilitation professions, pharmacy, nursing, social work, and other disciplines in the health sciences. Faculty development programs are offered centrally (at the university) and in distributed formats (at affiliated community sites) using video teleconferencing and Webcasting technologies. Program formats include single three- to four-hour workshops, intensive two- to five-day short courses, and longer longitudinal programs. In addition, many departments in the Faculty of Medicine offer their own faculty development programs.

The Program for Faculty Development of the Faculty of Health Sciences at McMaster University provides faculty development for all of the schools and programs in the Faculty of Health Sciences, including medicine, nursing, rehabilitation sciences, the physician assistant program, the midwifery program, the health sciences graduate programs, and others at the university and distributed regional campuses. Most activities are delivered on the university campus, but the program liaises with distributed campus coordinators to facilitate faculty development regionally. The program offers from 150 to more than 200 hours of faculty development programming each year. Topics covered across sites include teaching and learning in the clinical setting, problem-based learning tutor skills, interprofessional education, professionalism, mentoring skills, educational scholarship and research skills, and academic leadership.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto and the Research Ethics Board at McMaster University.

Participants

A purposive sample of faculty developers was recruited from both sites to include a range of professions (including medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech-language pathology, and research) and experience levels. Thirty-one faculty developers consented to participate—10 were observed facilitating faculty development activities, 6 participated in formal interviews about their practice, and 15 participated in both observations and interviews.

Data collection

Data collection included observations of faculty development activities and field interviews and formal interviews with faculty developers.

Observations and field interviews.

Observations generated an in-depth understanding of the nature of faculty developers’ practices in situ. Data were gathered by an experienced educator–researcher (L.B.) unobtrusively observing faculty development activities and the practices that faculty developers employed as they taught and interacted with learners. We purposely selected a range of faculty developers and faculty development activities over a six-month period (April 2013–September 2013) across both sites. Activity formats included workshops, series of workshops, and longitudinal programs. The range of these observations and the longitudinal dimension allowed us to build a comprehensive understanding of the nature of faculty development practices and activities. Preliminary data analysis highlighted the importance of context; therefore, workshops observed over the following 12-month period (October 2013–September 2014) were theoretically sampled to explore the role that contextual factors (i.e., program format, program location, learner population, faculty developer role) played in the processes and activities of faculty developers.

In total, 21 workshops (73 hours) were observed, resulting in the generation of 218 typed pages of field notes. Twenty-five faculty developers were observed at least once; seven were observed in more than one context. Field interviews were conducted with the faculty developers during breaks and after the observed activities, allowing for questioning about their decision-making processes and probing of emerging issues. Table 1 provides a summary of the contexts observed.

Formal interviews. Emergent findings from the observations and field interviews informed the formal semistructured interviews with faculty developers. These interviews (approximately 90 minutes in length) helped us generate a deeper understanding of participants’ views and perceptions of their faculty development
Table 1
Context of the Faculty Development Activities Observed From April 2013 to September 2014 in a Study of Faculty Development Competence

| Context                  | No. (% of 21) |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| **Activity**             |               |
| Format                   |               |
| Longitudinal             | 8 (38)        |
| Series                   | 6 (29)        |
| One-off                  | 7 (33)        |
| **Location**             |               |
| Faculty development center | 15 (71)    |
| Academic hospital         | 1 (5)         |
| Community hospital        | 3 (14)        |
| University department     | 2 (10)        |
| **Learners**             |               |
| Professions              |               |
| Mixed                    | 18 (86)       |
| Uniprofessional          | 3 (14)        |
| **Motivation to attend** |               |
| Voluntary                | 17 (81)       |
| Voluntary                | 4 (19)        |
| **Faculty developer**    |               |
| Content development      |               |
| By faculty developera    | 18 (86)       |
| By others                | 3 (14)        |
| Familiarity with topic   |               |
| First-time facilitationb | 6 (29)        |
| Repeat facilitation      | 15 (71)       |
| **Familiarity with learners** |          |
| Facilitated learners previously | 7 (33) |
| Unfamiliar with learners  | 14 (67)       |
| **Facilitation**         |               |
| Solo                     | 9 (43)        |
| Cofacilitation           | 12 (57)       |
| **Profession**           |               |
| Clinician                | 17 (81)       |
| Nonclinician             | 4 (19)        |

*Indicates that the activity content was developed by at least one of the faculty developers (if more than one faculty developer was observed).
*Indicates that at least one of the faculty developers (if more than one faculty developer was observed) was a first-time facilitator.

As our analysis progressed, and as a preliminary model for competence in faculty development emerged, we conducted theoretical coding by deductively using sensitizing concepts from seminal articles about teacher competencies17,18 (e.g., specifically looking for instances of faculty developers using communication skills, interpersonal skills, learner centeredness, professionalism) while continuing to inductively analyze the data (allowing for new areas to emerge).

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We completed three types of triangulation—data, site, and researcher. Data triangulation gave us a more insightful understanding of the observations and interview data sets. Site triangulation exposed commonalities and divergences between data gathered at the two study sites. Researcher triangulation addressed discrepancies between members of the research team during our early analysis.

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The developer’s perception of her strengths and weaknesses rather than accurate self-assessment, as these perceptions may shift depending on the context. Identity also included the faculty developer’s philosophy of education—her beliefs about the purpose of education, the role of the teacher, and what should be taught and by what methods. Finally, identity included the faculty developer’s theory of expertise—her perception of how she acquired knowledge and skills. Some believed these abilities were innate; others believed they acquired them through formal education, experience, or from mentors/colleagues.

The context
Context refers to the environment within which the faculty developer is situated. Our data highlighted three levels of context—institution, program, and session—interacting with faculty developers.

Institution. Institution refers to the environmental details at the organizational or societal discourse level. People operate in these contexts broadly speaking; they create norms, structures, and routines (e.g., the funding structure of academic medicine).

Program. Program refers to the environmental details at the programmatic level (e.g., the format of the faculty development activity). Is it a one-off workshop, a series of related workshops, or a longitudinal program? Are there prerequisite requirements for participants to attend the activity?

Session. Session refers to the environmental details at the individual session level (e.g., the background of the learners [their professions, their level of experience], the temperature of the room, the timing of the session).

The processes in between
Faculty developers engaged in three processes while integrating their knowledge, skills, and identity with their context: (1) negotiating, (2) constructing, and (3) attuning. See Table 3 for exemplary quotations about these processes.

Negotiating. The process of negotiating occurred as faculty developers operated within the parameters set by the organizational structures and goals (the institution-level context), over which they had no control. Importantly, the organizational context could either be aligned or misaligned with the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the faculty developer or with her overall teaching philosophy as an educator. For participants, the process of negotiating was about dealing effectively with these misalignments, including setting limits on what they were willing to change, accepting other suboptimal conditions, and making the most of the situation.

For example, the situational control afforded to a faculty developer in the design of an activity revealed a lot about the underlying cultural aspects of education at the organization. Faculty developers faced situations where a limited budget and/or scheduling logistics restricted the amount of time for the activity. They were asked to deliver content typically covered over multiple days in a half-day workshop. Similarly, faculty developers were often asked to facilitate an activity on a topic not of their choosing, deliver content that was developed by others, and/or facilitate with someone they did not know.

In these “voluntold” situations, faculty developers negotiated with their context in multiple ways. Many felt that they were not able to be successful faculty developers without feeling some ownership over the activity content. Some asked the organizers to modify the topic slightly to be more aligned with their area of expertise. Others modified the content in small ways to make it their own or to better align it with their educational philosophy (e.g., adding personal stories to help illustrate the message or inviting learners to share their expertise). In situations where time constraints impacted content decisions, they focused on the highest-priority objectives while clearly communicating to program organizers that this was not their preferred approach.

Cultural aspects of education also played out in the structure of the room. Rooms set up with rows of desks and a raised podium at the front suggested a view of education as the transmission of knowledge from expert to novice. In comparison, rooms organized with tables in groups or in a U-shape, with the faculty developer sitting alongside the learners, were more supportive of an educational philosophy that viewed learning as social interaction. Participants typically designed highly interactive workshops, expecting learners to engage in discussion with each other and share their expertise. Therefore, when faced with rooms set up as traditional rows of seats, some faculty developers negotiated by choosing not to stand at the podium, instead walking amongst the tables to feel more connected to the learners. Others asked learners to form groups standing around the edges of the room to engage in interactive activities.

Constructing. The process of constructing occurred when faculty developers worked to align their practices with the program- and session-level contexts over which they had control. That is, they were able to construct an environment for themselves that highlighted their strengths and/or minimized their weaknesses and aligned with their educational philosophy. Constructing included actions such as choosing a cofacilitator, developing familiarity with learners, building legitimacy/credibility, and engaging with program/curriculum development.

Participants discussed the benefits of choosing whether or not they cofacilitated the activity. Some preferred facilitating alone, while others preferred facilitating with a partner; for those who preferred to work with a partner, their choice of cofacilitator often varied from context to context. In some contexts, their decision involved thoughtful consideration of who might balance their perceived strengths and weaknesses, perhaps filling gaps in content knowledge or providing credibility to a specific audience. In other contexts, the decision involved considerations of comfort—who they were familiar with personally. Feeling comfortable allowed them to plan and facilitate optimally. In addition, an established familiarity or friendship between facilitators allowed for nonverbal communication and anticipation of each other’s behavior, enabling them to adjust to learners in the moment.

Constructing typically involved communication with faculty development program organizers regarding their preferences for room setup (e.g., small-group tables, U-shape, facilitator table
### Table 3

**Exemplary Quotations Illustrating the Processes That Faculty Developers Engage in as They Integrate Their Knowledge, Skills, and Identity With Their Context, From a Study of Faculty Developer Competence, 2013–2014**

| Process     | Exemplary quotations                                                                                     | Explanation of the interaction between the faculty developer and her/his context                                                                 |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Negotiating | When I was [an invited speaker], we did a lot of work ahead of time to say look, you will not do all of that in one day. If your budget only allows for one day then we have to tailor the material you want to [work within] that time frame. Because otherwise, you’re dead in the water, I mean you’re running around and [learners] say, there are gaps in my learning. I don’t understand, or there wasn’t enough time. You didn’t focus on this. And I’m thinking well good grief. We had from 8:00 to 4:00, what do you want me to do? (03) | This faculty developer had a discussion with the program directors during the planning of an invited workshop. He modified what he normally covers in a two-day session to accommodate a one-day session to fit the budget and time constraints imposed by the organization. He was willing to adapt some things, but others he felt strongly needed to be covered. |
| Credibility  | I think there’s a little bit more trying to figure things out and being a little bit political, and making sure you’re not stepping on toes. And, you’re trying to give them what to expect because, whether the material is there for you or not, there’s still prep work beforehand, and (deciding) who’s doing what. So, when you’re developing a relationship and also trying to teach, it’s just that little bit more work. (16) |                                                                                                                                                    |
| Constructing | There was a podium … everyone else stood on the riser behind the podium and I, during the sessions, while I’m watching this, figured out how I’m going to do this and I stood in front. I spoke loud enough, I spoke to the AV guy, I sweet-talked him to sort of do this and do that and change that and I figured out and I did it. That’s part of my style. I know that isn’t for everybody. (08) | A podium and microphone prevented this faculty developer from moving around freely and interacting with the participants (her preferred style of facilitation). She negotiated to make small changes to the physical setup of the room to be more in line with her educational philosophy. |
| Constructing | I remember going to … a conference where they weren’t used to this kind of engagement… So they were all sitting at tables just like I asked, but when I asked them to do some work at their tables, they looked at me blankly, like, “What do you mean, talk to the person beside me?” … So even if things are set up right, you can have problems. (01) | This faculty developer successfully communicated ahead of time her preferred room setup. However, the educational culture of the learners was such that they were uncomfortable with interactivity. In this context, the faculty developer had to spend additional time modeling the types of interactions she expected. |
| Attuning     | When I was [an invited speaker], we did a lot of work ahead of time to say look, you will not do all of that in one day. If your budget only allows for one day then we have to tailor the material you want to [work within] that time frame. Because otherwise, you’re dead in the water, I mean you’re running around and [learners] say, there are gaps in my learning. I don’t understand, or there wasn’t enough time. You didn’t focus on this. And I’m thinking well good grief. We had from 8:00 to 4:00, what do you want me to do? (03) | This faculty developer had a discussion with the program directors during the planning of an invited workshop. He modified what he normally covers in a two-day session to accommodate a one-day session to fit the budget and time constraints imposed by the organization. He was willing to adapt some things, but others he felt strongly needed to be covered. |
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(Table continues)
at the front) and format (e.g., slides, handouts, breaks, food). Faculty developers also tried to gain as much knowledge about the background of the learners as possible to adapt or modify their curriculum to best meet the learners’ needs. Further, faculty developers designed their activities differently based on the familiarity the learners had with each other.

**Attuning.** The process of attuning occurred when faculty developers applied or “fine-tuned” their skills and knowledge during the facilitation of a faculty development activity (session level). Attuning involved the in-the-moment, learner-based activities that allowed faculty developers to read the room, monitor engagement levels, respond to learner and co-facilitator needs, and know where to focus. Faculty developers were better able to attune if they had been able to negotiate and construct successfully, allowing more energy and attention to be paid to the learners.

**Evolution of competence**

The three processes discussed above (constructing, negotiating, and attuning) represent both how the faculty developer shapes the context of the activity and how the context of the activity shapes the faculty developer (see Figure 1). Faculty developers will behave differently in different contexts—they will use their knowledge and skills differently depending on their identity and the specific environment—and therefore, what competence looks like shifts from one setting to another as faculty developers integrate their knowledge, skills, and identity with context.

Temporarily, negotiating occurs throughout the entire faculty development activity timeline, from planning through delivery. Constructing occurs in the lead-up to the activity, and attuning occurs during the facilitation of the activity. However, constructing and attuning can overlap. For example, faculty developers often construct a workshop during which they establish credibility at the beginning of the session and then, depending on the makeup of learners in the room, modify that approach accordingly.

The wraparound arrow in the middle of Figure 1, which connects and integrates these processes, represents the opportunities that arise for practice-based learning. Faculty developers described engaging in problem-solving activities to continually work at improving their knowledge and skills (see Table 3 for exemplary quotes). Over time, through trial and error, they learned what worked (or did not work) for them in various situations.

**Table 3** (Continued)

| Process                        | Exemplary quotations                                                                 | Explanation of the interaction between the faculty developer and her/his context                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Evolution of competence        | I make sure I'm standing up. I'll probably think about, okay, what have we been talking about because it seems like it's not on target for them, and I'll rethink on my feet where we need to go. So I'll start shortening the area, moving on to maybe other important content based on the objectives that we've set, I wouldn't probably try and keep flogging a dead horse to get them engaged in an activity or a content area. (01) | This faculty developer described what happened when she read the room and felt that the learners were not engaged. She modified both her physical behavior and the curriculum in an attempt to capture their attention. The specifics look different depending on who is in the room. |
|                               | The ability, as a facilitator, to really pick up on comments from the group. I find that is an incredible skill that I'm not necessarily always so good at because I'm so focused on what I'm doing…. I will have an appearance of being flexible and spontaneous, but it is planned. (02) | This faculty developer described how she learned through trial and error what worked for her and what did not work for her in various contexts. This helped her feel more confident in her abilities and evolve her knowledge, skills, and ability to attune during facilitation. |
|                               | If I do a session with them again, I think I may structure a little bit more about how I get them to introduce themselves. Or, if I had more confidence with that group or if I had known them a little bit better, I would say, hey, yeah, that totally doesn't work for me. Let's try that again. Or, I didn't do well. I didn't structure this well enough. I don't know enough about you. Let's try that again. But, it's just a group of people that partly were intimidating or partly were just not friendly to start with… I like [trying new things], especially in that kind of a setting. So, this is a cohort that you get to be pretty comfortable with and you see them over time, and so I think it does allow you to stretch your borders a little bit. (23) | This faculty developer described her opposing behaviors in two different contexts. In the first, she felt uncomfortable adapting her strategies or teaching plan because she felt intimidated by the group. However, in the second, she had developed relationships with the learners and described feeling more comfortable and confident taking risks and pushing herself beyond her comfort zone to try new things. |
|                               | I think you need to have things that you know you can always fall back on, but I think you always have to incorporate new things to try and figure things out or to try and make things better. (09) | This faculty developer recognized the importance of working at improving his knowledge and skills by trying new things in different situations. This type of purposeful improvement facilitated the evolution of his competence in faculty development. |

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Faculty developers recognized patterns in their practice that posed challenges, and they developed strategies to be more effective educators. Some patterns related to their teaching, others to their interactions with cofacilitators or learners. For example, one faculty developer recognized and valued spontaneity and the ability to respond to learners in the moment. However, she felt that she lacked these skills as a facilitator. As a workaround, she scheduled extra time and learner choice into her teaching plan, which made her workshops appear more flexible. Similarly, another faculty developer recognized her tendency to teach to the least interested learner; she was able to break this pattern by reminding herself that focusing her energy on engaging that one individual was at the expense of the others in the class and most likely had little to do with her abilities as a facilitator. She described reciting a reminder to herself before each activity to avoid falling into the familiar trap.

Depending on the interaction between context, their identity, and their perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses, faculty developers were more or less likely to take risks or try new things. One faculty developer described her opposing behaviors in two different situations. In the first, she was not in a context where she felt comfortable adapting or modifying her strategies or teaching plan. Her icebreaker activity did not work as she had planned, and she felt that she did not sufficiently understand the needs of the learners to proceed with her workshop in an effective and meaningful manner. However, she felt intimidated by the group and was not comfortable asking them for more information about themselves. Then, in the second situation, she was involved in a longitudinal program and had developed relationships with the learners. There, she felt more comfortable and confident taking risks with her teaching, so she tested out new approaches. This type of purposeful improvement to enhance her knowledge and skills as a faculty developer facilitated the evolution of her competence.

Discussion

These findings have implications for the growing imperative to better understand and foster competence in faculty development.11 In particular, and consistent with the broader discourse about competence in health professions education,22,27 our findings emphasize faculty developer competence as a situated and integrated construct with important implications for understanding and developing competence in faculty development.

First, our results suggest that faculty developer competence is best understood as a situated construct; that is, it is shaped by the interaction between the properties of the environment that allow an individual to perform an action and the knowledge, skills, and identity of that individual.28 Just as competence in clinical practice is dynamic and influenced by context, so too is competence in faculty development. This idea that competence is contextually bound is not new in health professions education29,30; however, our results suggest another dimension to our understanding of situated competence, describing how an individual’s ability to attune to, construct, and negotiate her environment can both enhance and minimize the impact of contextual variables as needed. Thus, faculty developers are not passive recipients of the features of their environment; rather, they actively interact with their environment in ways that maximize their performance. Ensuring that faculty developers acquire essential knowledge remains critical; however, our results suggest that we must move beyond training faculty developers to apply knowledge and instead train them for the adaptive, situated use of knowledge.31,32 While this adaptive behavior is recognized as essential, few have explored what this would look like. Encouraging faculty developers to struggle through difficult scenarios in training (i.e., simulations or role-play), forcing them to engage in the processes of negotiating, constructing, and attuning, is an important starting point toward achieving this goal.

Second, our results highlight the evolution of competence as practice-based learning. While formal education for faculty developers is unquestionably important as a foundation, their evolution in practice, particularly in developing the processes of attuning, constructing, and negotiating, is critical for excellence in faculty development. Models of adaptive expertise emphasize the ability of experts to use their knowledge interpretively to create new knowledge that addresses practice...
challenges. Adaptive experts are thought to use their own problem solving as an opportunity to learn; our participants emphasized this process by describing their own development as facilitators through their real-world experience. Therefore, we must make it clear that we are preparing faculty developers to continue to learn, rather than “producing” experts at the end of train-the-trainer training. Thus, struggles should not be framed as failures but as opportunities to learn and improve.

Third, our results demonstrate the ways in which competencies are integrated, as faculty developers purposefully engage with their contexts. Competency frameworks based on literature reviews, expert consensus, and existing clinical competency frameworks have defined discreet core competencies for health professionals. On the basis of our findings, a faculty development competency framework that defines discrete core competencies may not be the most effective way to conceptualize understanding and training for faculty developers. For example, our process of attuning can be thought of as the integration of learner-centeredness and communication skills, as defined by Srinivasan and colleagues. Integrating competencies is an increasingly powerful concept that recognizes the complex and situated nature of the challenges that professionals face on a daily basis. Our results suggest that aligning our evolving understanding of competence in faculty development with this broader discourse may best reflect faculty developers’ experiences in their facilitator roles. This alignment involves a shift in the language we use in our training of faculty developers. The discrete competencies listed in current educator frameworks can be understood as building blocks for competence, with an awareness that checking off a list of competencies is not enough. Focusing curricula for faculty developer training on integrated competencies would help individuals meaningfully reflect on their practice.

Limitations

By focusing on the facilitation of faculty development activities, we explored only one aspect of the complex faculty developer role. Although it is a critical aspect, it would be valuable to explore faculty developer competence in other facets of the role—for example, in the assessment of learning outcomes and organizational change skills. Our findings may not be generalizable to all faculty developers given the contextually situated nature of qualitative research and the selection bias inherent in any study with voluntary participation. However, we believe that transferable lessons and meaning can be derived from our findings with contextual adaptation.

Conclusions

Our empirically derived model represents an expanded conceptualization of faculty developer competence. We acknowledge the importance of core knowledge and skills but recommend that faculty developers (and other educators) move beyond these toward competence by mediating contextual variables at the institution, program, and session levels. Our model provides faculty developers with language and concepts to use when thinking about and reflecting on their own practice. It also provides a framework for organizations to better support faculty developers in being proactive and reactive to the needs of their learners and to the demands of their local and broader systems contexts. Our model highlights the different layers of context and draws faculty developers’ attention to aspects of their environment that they may otherwise take for granted. This awareness will help them successfully negotiate, construct, and attune to their environments. As our model may be helpful for educators more broadly, future research should explore its relevance in education contexts beyond faculty development.

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