

TLABs : A Teaching & Learning Community of Practice Case Study

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Communities of Practice (COPs) are increasingly common in higher education settings. COPs are promoted as being an important mentoring tool in higher education because they have the potential to: connect people; provide a shared context; enable dialogue; stimulate learning; capture and diffuse existing knowledge; introduce collaborative processes; and generate new knowledge. COPs can therefore play an important role in the development of university academic staff have been reported to be critical to professional development in higher education; and it has been recommended that staff development units implement this type of learning).

Initiated in 2015 at Edith Cowan University, TLABs is an acronym for 'Teaching and Learning for Level A and B' academic staff and was designed to build a community of practice to mentor these junior academics, improve their teaching performance and prospects for academic promotion. To provide some context, TLABs operates in the School of Medical and Health Sciences (SMHS) at ECU wherein a diverse range of courses are offered. The School is grouped into the following three broad discipline clusters that together offer a total of 42 courses:

- Medical and Exercise Sciences (medical and biomedical science, exercise and sports science, exercise rehabilitation);
- Allied Health (paramedical science, speech pathology, occupational therapy, dietetics); and
- Public Health and Occupational Health and Safety (health science, public health, occupational health and safety, health promotion, addiction studies, nutrition and environmental health).

The Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) (ADTL) in the SMHS works to achieve the University and School goals in learning and teaching which include enhancing the overall student experience. One of the key leadership roles of an ADTL at ECU is to mentor teaching staff in relation to effective practice in learning and teaching. The challenges of mentoring staff in such a large multi-disciplinary school are numerous and in 2014 the ADTL established regular informal meetings with junior academic staff with the view to building a formal teaching and learning community of practice in order to mentor such staff and to foster improved teaching practice and subsequently an improved student experience within the School.

Since its inception, 16 TLABs have been run and this presentation will describe how TLABs operates; summarise the teaching-related topics that have been introduced, discussed and debated; present the results of a 2018 formal evaluation of TLABs from the perspective of the participants; and suggest best practice guidelines for anyone considering establishing their own teaching and learning community of practice.