An inter-university community of practice in France: fostering new faculty developers and new pedagogical support units

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Abstract: In response to the high proportion of new faculty developers in the Rhone-Alpes region of France, our 3 institutions have come together to form a network to facilitate the reflective professional development of the associated faculty developers. This inter-institutional collaboration encourages a broader perspective, often enabling us to recycle successful approaches or avoid potential obstacles. Other strategies for the development of semi-isolated faculty developers will be discussed.

The number of university-based faculty developers in France (conseillers pédagogiques) is increasing significantly; most are new to the profession, offering a novel service within their institution and/or associated with a nascent teaching support unit. This accurately reflects the situation in the Rhone-Alpes, where our 3 services, ICAP at the University Claude Bernard Lyon 1, SUP at the University Joseph Fourier (Grenoble 1) and PerForm at INP Grenoble, have created the self-facilitated community of practice PENSERA. This network offers a significant, formative source of support to accompany our professional development and the development of our services within our respective institutions. We are 8 faculty developers, some full-time and others with additional activities in teaching and research, to engage in a dynamic exchange based on monthly meetings, supplemented by joint sessions with our "initiator" Swiss Romande (R-CFE) network. A typical PENSERA discussion is centred on a current project of an individual faculty developer which ensures that both practical and theoretical concerns are addressed. We do not always reach consensus but the collaboration encourages us to remain critical and flexible in the design of new projects or the analysis of past actions. Further professional development has been undertaken by internships at teaching support units in Canada, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland, and the co-facilitation of pedagogical workshops between our institutions.

A concrete result of this network was the collective hosting of francophone higher education faculty developers' conference (the BSQF, Belgium-Switzerland-Quebec-France) in October 2009 for the first time in France.

The presentation will explore the following questions, with the intended effect of exchanging successful examples of inter-institutional collaboration:

- What can new faculty developers do to promote their professional development?
- Where can new teaching support units find support?
- How can we find partners in unfertile soil?