This time it’s personal: Review of staff development day 10th June 2010

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Abstract

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Marvellous! Inspiring! Motivating! These adjectives do not often describe staff development days, but they were found repeatedly in evaluations following a research-based staff development day held on 10th June 2010.

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Introduction

Having realised that in the midst of marking work, completing module reports and attending boards, School staff would not appreciate a day of being hectored at about research, Dr Patricia Bond decided to put together a day that was more personal and interactive, allowing the audience to see the softer and more vulnerable side of some of their colleagues involved in research. The day was aptly entitled ‘This time it’s personal: a case study of research in SHaW’.

The day kicked off with a ‘live’ illustration of the launch of an online survey, taking the audience through the process of putting together a research proposal, through a fly-on-the-wall experience, using videos of the School Ethics Committee. Using voting pads, the audience then played a real part in analysing and altering a survey questionnaire to be launched online the following week.

Sophie Orton facilitated the session, superbly fielding questions and arguments that could have defeated a person with far more years and experience. There was also a discussion of the benefits and potential pitfalls in the conduct of insider research. This was the essence of action learning.

There were some didactic elements to the day, with Dr Denise Bellingham-Young discussing the elements of qualitative and quantitative research to be considered in the development of a questionnaire, and Jill Evans giving a practical demonstration of the Surveyor programme for the design of an online questionnaire. Even some of the seasoned researchers present had been unaware of the versatility and ease of use of the Surveyor programme.
The focus of the day, however, was in a number of personal stories from people at different stages in their research journey. Dr Hilary Paniagua gave a very personal and moving account of her research journey, aptly entitled 'My personal Everest'; then, Sarah Sherwin, Peter Eggison and Liz Clifton spoke about their experiences to date on the Professional Doctorate programme, using the title, ‘Who’s got the map?’ The message from all of them was not that embarking on a research journey would be plain sailing, but that the benefits in personal and professional growth generally compensated many times over for the sacrifices made.

The day was rounded off by a talk by Professor Sally Glen about women in research, followed by a plenary discussion about strategies to be adopted to encourage more female academic staff to aim for academic and professional excellence.

The benchmark for research staff development days was set very high on 10th June, leaving everyone a tough act to follow. However, the effectiveness of the day can only be measured in how enthusiastically the school staff participate in follow-up workshops and subsequent research projects. We wait with bated breath.