



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

Teaching in an age of complexity

Exploring academic change and
development in higher education

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för
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Abstract

Higher education (HE) has expanded and diversified at an unprecedented rate over the last two decades in response to a rapidly changing educational and political climate. Change and development are omnipresent, a constant part of university teachers' sociocultural and organisational practice at multiple levels; the micro-level, the meso-level and the macro-level. Against this background, the aim of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence academic change. A further aim of the thesis is to provide insight into factors that may be relevant in the design of academic development activities to support teachers and managers in the enhancement of teaching and learning. A twelve-year longitudinal study of teachers on an online pharmacy programme forms the basis for the research, where a multilevel approach is used to investigate academic change and development in a teaching and learning environment supported by educational technology (Edtech). The approach captures the influence of factors such as conceptions and approaches to teaching at the micro-level of the individual teacher, as well as the influence of systemic factors such as the sociocultural context at the meso-level of the department or programme and the structural context at the macro-level of the institution.

Taking into account a combined analysis of the five papers included in the thesis, it can be concluded that if a deeper understanding of academic change and development is to be achieved, it is necessary to adopt a holistic approach, considering factors at micro-, meso- and macro-level and the interrelationships between these factors. This thesis discusses the consequences of the research for the facilitation of academic change and development. A multilevel, holistic approach is suggested, building on the principles of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) model. SoTL initiatives at all levels should be aligned to promote academic change and development through: the development of teachers' individual practice at micro-level, the collaborative development of scholarly practice at the meso-level of the department and a strategic institutional approach at macro-level linking SoTL to employment and promotion frameworks and the recognition of teaching quality.

The main contribution of this thesis lies in the adoption of a holistic approach to understanding academic practice in higher education, taking into consideration factors at micro-, meso- and macro-level and the interrelationships between these factors.

Keywords

Higher Education, Academic Development, Educational Technology, Conceptions of Teaching and Learning, Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, Change and Development.

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