

Reimagining Professional Coaching in Higher Education: Appreciative Coaching in Action (ACIA)

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Abstract

Professional coaching for higher education lecturers is often assumed an unnecessary luxury, if considered at all. Surely, they are adequately experienced and qualified and attend professional development to remain current as required. The reality is many educators received limited structured support once appointed. This can be especially true in thesis supervision, which is the focus area for this article. If you're a lecturer, then surely you are also equipped to be a supervisor? They attend regular professional development don't they, so surely that is enough. Professional development, whilst beneficial, is limited in support of the growth of the practice of higher education lecturers. This article therefore argues for the inclusion of professional coaching as a key form of professional growth and development for lecturers.

Drawing on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Witney, 2006) this paper introduces the Appreciative Coaching in Action (ACIA) model that emphasises strengths, reflective dialogue and future-focused professional growth and development. Rather than focusing on deficits and practices that could be strengthened through professional development attendance, the ACIA model seeks to identify what practice works well and expand these successes through inquiry. The model draws from the thesis supervision case study of Williams, et. al, (2024) and advocates for embedding appreciative principles within professional coaching conversations, the ACIA model provides a structured yet flexible approach to lecturer development. The paper concludes that strengths-based coaching offers a practical and sustainable strategy for supporting professional growth and development of (on this case) thesis supervisors. Additionally, the ACIA model is broad enough to build professional growth and capability and improve lecturer practice generally in higher education.

Keywords: Higher Education; Appreciative Inquiry Coaching in Higher Education