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## Designing for Change: What Makes a PGDHET Work?

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### Abstract

Within the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), attention has increasingly shifted towards understanding how academics learn to teach and which forms of professional learning lead to meaningful and sustained pedagogical change. Postgraduate Diplomas in Higher Education and Training (PGDHETs) are widely positioned as mechanisms for enhancing teaching practice, yet there is limited empirical work examining which design features of such programmes enable transformative learning for academics. This study investigates the PGDHET as a learning environment, with a focus on identifying programme design elements that support pedagogical change. Adopting a SoTL-informed approach, the study draws on participant feedback, reflective narratives, and programme documentation from academics enrolled in a PGDHET at a comprehensive university. The analysis examines how structured reflection, peer dialogue, assessment practices, and theory–practice integration shape participants’ engagement with teaching and learning. Findings indicate that opportunities for sustained reflection on practice, dialogic engagement with peers across disciplines, and authentic assessment tasks closely linked to participants’ teaching contexts were central to meaningful learning. Participants reported shifts in how they conceptualised teaching, learning, and assessment, as well as increased confidence in adopting student-centred pedagogical approaches. However, challenges related to workload, time constraints, and disciplinary norms were also identified as factors influencing the depth and sustainability of change. This study contributes to SoTL by conceptualising the PGDHET as a pedagogical intervention and offering evidence-informed insights into how academic development programmes can be designed to support reflective, scholarly teaching practice. The findings have implications for the design of academic development curricula aimed at fostering enduring improvements in teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** Scholarship Of Teaching and Learning, Academic Development, PGDHET, Reflective Practice. Professional Learning in Higher Education