



## Reflections of a New Educational Designer

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### Abstract

Educational design is an area of growing significance in tertiary education. However, the career pathway to educational design is varied. Because few specific qualifications are available, educational designers (EDs) tend to take up their roles with little experience or in-depth knowledge. The purpose of this study is to investigate one new ED's development from new-to-role to experienced practitioner, in order to identify what new EDs might expect as they develop. In the early stages of her role Nicky Meuleman, ED at the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, captured significant encounters and recorded ongoing reflection. This paper summarises and discusses the key themes from those reflections, providing insight into one ED's journey from beginner to proficient practitioner.

**Keywords:** educational design; instructional design; learning design; online learning; professional development

### Introduction

According to MacLean and Scott (2007, 2011) the terms “instructional design” and “learning design” are international synonyms. ‘Educational design’ is arguably one also, although it is a term more deliberately situated in a formal education setting. Studies indicate that educational designers require a broad set of foundational competencies in the areas of communication, knowledge of instructional design models, problem-solving, and knowledge of technology (Kenny, Zhang, Schwier, & Campbell, 2005; Liu, Gibby, Quiros, & Demps, 2002; MacLean & Scott, 2011). Education design is an activity requiring a great deal of situational judgement and problem-solving (Gray et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2002), which are difficult skills for a new educational designer to bring to an organisation. Teamwork and relationships management are also vital components of educational designer work. Instructional design models provide conceptual frameworks of practice rather than rigid prescription (Kenny et al., 2005); as such, models do not define the educational designer's role.

Higher education is providing more and more opportunities for educational designer (ED) roles (“Instructional designers in higher ed, 2016); however, training opportunities for those seeking to become EDs are fragmented. Although educational design is clearly an area of professional expertise, there is no established career pathway. Up to 20% of EDs have no specific training for the role (MacLean & Scott, 2007); in Australasia, some 50% have up to an (unspecified) bachelor's degree as their highest qualification (ibid.). Many EDs are drawn to their craft without really knowing what to expect and with little direct experience. The journey of a new ED is not well understood, and various works central to instructional design practice (Dick, Carey, & Carey, 2005; Gagné, 2005; Gibbons, 2014; Richey, Klein, & Tracey, 2011; Smith & Ragan, 2005; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) must, by necessity, assume a context of activity that does not necessarily match that of the practitioner. Learning ‘on the job’ requires new EDs to learn their

craft quickly, and in ways that align with institutional practice and constraints (Gray et al., 2015). Similar challenges arise for those academics who need to take a more deliberate approach to educational design (Jones, 2005). Learning the principles and potential of educational design can be achieved by reading, sharing good practice, and learning through a professional community of practice. Learning the actual practice of educational design requires settling into a team of practitioners that has a set ways of doing things, in an institution with its own set of expectations.

This paper describes the experiences of a new ED who joined the Education Design Services team at New Zealand's Open Polytechnic in mid-2015 with no previous experience. Nicky (co-author) came to the role with an MBA and some teaching experience in China as a result of her certificate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Qualified teachers and those with teaching experience are typically attractive choices for employers of EDs.

Given the trend toward more potentially capable yet inexperienced appointments to educational designer roles, and a desire to help orientate such EDs, the authors agreed to collaborate on a project to explore what a new ED might expect and how they might best develop proficiency. The collaboration, in the form of mentor (Mark) to mentee (Nicky), was later formalised through the ASCILITE Community Mentoring Programme of 2015.

## Educational design at Open Polytechnic

Educational design as an activity is practiced across a variety of contexts. Educational design might be considered both an art (giving the designer opportunities for creative flair and innovation) and science (reflecting good practice based on pedagogical evidence); various core texts describe the role and its methods (Brown & Green, 2016; Dick et al., 2005; Laurillard, 2012; Reigeluth, 1999; Wiggins & McTighe). The degree to which an ED can practice artistically depends on the demands of the client or commissioning agent. Many formal providers of higher education have an institutional house style and a need for consistency alongside the nuances of the preferences of other design team members.

The role of an ED is, in its broadest sense, summarised in the study of MacLean and Scott (2011), who draw on a variety of international competencies and standards. Educational design work can involve multiple responsibilities spread across tasks such as project management, needs analysis, preparation of aims and learning objectives, technical writing, assessment preparation, client management, team work, and research. The *actual* tasks of an ED are influenced largely by the responsibilities assigned to them in any specific institutional and team context. Open Polytechnic is New Zealand's largest dedicated distance learning provider, and is part of New Zealand's Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITP) sector. Based close to the country's capital, Wellington, the government-owned and funded institution delivers courses throughout New Zealand and internationally. Every year, more than 34,000—mainly adult—students enrol to gain the skills they need to help them advance or change their careers (Seelig & Nichols, 2017).

At Open Polytechnic the role of the ED broadly follows that of MacLean and Scott (2011), although some of the specified tasks overlap with contributions made by other specialists. The Polytechnic, which recently celebrated 70 years of operation, has a well-tuned and largely centralised approach to course design, development, and delivery with a strong emphasis on distance education models. Course development generally follows five stages. Initially, a new qualification is proposed via concept then business case. If approved, the curriculum (programme and course aims, and learning objectives) are formalised along with the methods of student and lecturer/tutorial support that will be applied. Once the curriculum is formally endorsed, an educational design document (a Programme Design and Delivery Document, or PD3) is agreed. This document outlines the major instructional decisions for courses in the programmes leading

to the qualification. In the fourth stage, a schedule for course development is set up and personnel are confirmed. Roles for a course generally include a writer and reviewer (one of which is likely to be a member of Open Polytechnic faculty), ED, editor, and media producers. This group liaises with programme leaders, project managers, and the senior educational designer (SED) responsible for the PD3. Assessments and more detailed views of course coverage are agreed at this point. Finally, each course is developed in accordance with the design and project plan.

The role of an Open Polytechnic ED is neatly summarised by Nicky in an initial piece she wrote as a self-reflection, 4 months after starting her employment:

I basically transform the learning material provided by a subject matter expert into an interesting course for the students. An educational designer does this by taking the learning to the next level so that students will enjoy taking this course, have a good retention of information, have good results and are happy to continue to study. . . . This process involves working closely together with many different parties, such as the senior educational designer, the video team, the content reviewer, the writer (subject matter expert), the editor and in some cases the Head of School and the bicultural reviewer.  
(Initial self-reflection)

A project manager is also a central member of a courseware development team.

In my (Mark, co-author's) estimation, Nicky is a very successful and talented ED. Despite not having a specific qualification she grew into her new responsibilities extremely quickly. Throughout the mentoring period, and only 1 year after her initial appointment, Nicky was involved in orienting new EDs into their roles. Her growth and development reflects her willingness to learn and grow, as evidenced again in her initial self-reflection:

My role can be quite challenging, especially as a new ED with very little related prior work experience. There is a lot of information coming your way and the responsibilities can be quite daunting. However, I love this job because it gives me a new challenge every day. I think I am growing every day as an ED because of these challenges. . . . For me, being an educational designer means that I have a real influence on the learning experience of the students. With the job I do, the better I do it, the better it will be for the students. Since I am a firm believer in lifelong learning and I consider myself a lifelong learner, I know how important studying as an adult can be. I am very proud of the fact that I am now helping others do the same.  
(Initial self-reflection)

This project traces Nicky's development as she draws on her account of experiences on the job, and her regular reflection points.

## **Method**

The methodology of this study is that of narrative inquiry, with a population of one, subject to categorical analysis. Nicky is the subject and sole source of data. The project relies on a semi-structured series of written journal entries. The limitations of the approach, a single set of reflections based on a single new ED, are clear. However, the method serves to provide a case study—illustrating the challenges and development that a new ED may experience in their role—as a guide and encouragement to others. Nicky's lessons were shaped by her prior experience and her openness to new experiences as much as the context in which she is employed; real-life variability across both individual and organisation mean that Nicky's experiences are illustrative at best. Further, the reflections themselves were not an absolute account of everything that happened. Analysis is therefore restricted to those events that were on the top of Nicky's mind during any period of reflection.

After writing an initial piece describing her context as an ED, Nicky undertook to prepare a series of accounts of her experience (reflections based on experiences she considered meaningful to her role and development) and fortnightly summaries of her development. Fortnightly summaries used the headings: “What I did well”, “What I learned”, “What I need to be able to do better”, and “What I need to know more about”. Reflections were up to 500 words.

In all, Nicky prepared 37 reflections. Each was regularly uploaded to a shared DropBox folder. I (Mark) would reflect on each post and add comments, often probing Nicky’s account or providing ideas for her to consider. We met twice (early December 2015, mid-January 2016), with a third synchronous contact by Skype (end of April 2016). Each session had a particular focus, with conversation often leading to suggested readings and articles based on Nicky’s experiences and expressed interests.

Reflections were analysed using constant comparison analysis, which is useful when an overarching understanding of data is sought (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008), and recursive analysis, with an interim set of codes confirmed with Nicky following the first 20 reflections. The final code set resulted from multiple passes over the data, although only one rater (Mark) applied the final codes.

## Mentoring approach

Because most of Nicky’s development as an ED took place as a result of her work, I (Mark) was conscious that she may not get much exposure to some of the important underlying theories and frameworks which, for the most part, determined her work context. However, Nicky’s later reflections indicated that some valuable peer professional development did take place. For example, at one stage this internal PD programme required Nicky to research and present an overview of Robert Gagné’s work.

Our first meeting focused on experiential learning and reflection in preparation for the project. Kolb’s experiential learning cycle served both as a discussion point for the mentoring relationship and as an introduction to adult learning theory in general. During this meeting we also agreed on the project’s parameters.

During the second meeting we explored Nicky’s ongoing professional development and potential options for further study following the project. I recommended the introduction and the first chapter from Parer’s *Developing open courses* (Parer, 1993). Parer’s introduction squarely contextualises the role of the ED in terms of the classic distance education themes of industrialisation, guided didactic conversation, and “adult students who take responsibility for their own learning” (Parer, 1993)—neatly introducing the main ideas of Peters, Holmberg, and Moore. Parer also introduces the role of the ED (‘educational developer’ to Parer) as a pedagogical specialist. Concluding his first chapter, Parer notes that:

Study materials are a complex mix of pedagogical and personal teaching methods and are not simply the replacement of lecture notes . . . study materials must contain all the dynamic elements that are present in the traditional face-to-face teaching. . . . The educational developer works to ensure that students have a clear overview of the learning pathway.  
(p. 11)

In the third meeting we discussed one particular comment among Nicky’s reflections, and how we would consolidate themes from the 19 reflections and experiences to date. I suggested three further articles to help give more description of the role of an educational designer (Miller & Stein, 2016), and a sense of Open Polytechnic’s institutional identity as it relates to pedagogy (Nichols, 2011a; 2011b).

Miller and Stein found that the instructional designers they surveyed, who mainly worked in face-to-face higher education, were involved in:

- Providing both pedagogical and technology training, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes separately
- Moving courses between learning management systems
- Creating new online courses or transitioning face-to-face courses to online formats
- Producing video and other multimedia
- Supporting a variety of software that faculty want to use to create their courses or have their students learn
- Training faculty to teach more effectively using technology
- Supporting students using LMSs
- Ensuring that courses meet federal requirements for accessibility
- Lobbying for funding for faculty who are taking time to create online courses
- Creating challenging assessments to minimize cheating  
(2016, para. 8)

The purpose of these specific readings was, in part, to help Nicky anchor her role among historical and international practice and, in part, to reassure her that she had entered a profession with a knowledge base and ongoing scholarship.

Mentoring also took place in the form of challenge questions and feedback on Nicky's various reflections. Ongoing mentoring included reference to the work of Gray et al. (2015), Liu et al. (2002), and Kenny et al. (2005) to provide further insight into the breadth and development of the educational designer role.

## Findings

Thirty codes emerged following multiple passes over the data, and these codes were organised into three sections (see Table 1).

**Table 1** Sections and codes from the data, with frequency

Development, growth and knowledge	Experience	Personal traits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-worker appraisal (14)<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Developing confidence (19)</li> <li>• Developing context (30)</li> <li>• Developing personal style (30)</li> <li>• Interdependence (41)</li> <li>• Intuiting student needs (12)</li> <li>• Learning new things (41)</li> <li>• Rationalised expectation (14)<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Seeking guidance (19)</li> <li>• Self-confident collegiality (22)</li> <li>• Self-determination in uncertainty (10)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contextualised frustration (33)</li> <li>• Contributing to decisions (20)</li> <li>• Discovering areas of uncertainty (14)</li> <li>• Institutional knowledge (10)</li> <li>• Managerial support (28)</li> <li>• Politics (12)<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Workload planning (5)<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Sense of being appreciated (13)</li> <li>• Technical tools (32)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active inquisitiveness (24)</li> <li>• Approach to change (22)</li> <li>• Frustration (16)</li> <li>• Helpfulness (35)</li> <li>• Optimistic exploration (13)<sup>5</sup></li> <li>• Personal boundaries (24)</li> <li>• Productivity awareness (29)</li> <li>• Sense of responsibility (30)</li> <li>• Straightforward expectations (9)<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Willingness to extend (20)</li> </ul>

Although some data from the reflections had multiple codes applied, the highest level of co-occurrence (where two codes were used to describe the same excerpt) was 38%. Codes were not mutually exclusive, though they are exhaustive. All codes are important elements of Nicky's reflection.

Findings are further considered based on a classical content analysis and a chronological appraisal of development, with high-level abstract themes. Following subsequent analysis of Nicky's personal traits drawn from the data, advice for new EDs is provided.

### Classical content analysis

Classical content analysis involves identifying those codes that were most frequently applied to the data. Here, analysis is restricted to the seven codes with a frequency of 28 or more (excluding 'personal trait' codes, which are discussed later in this paper). A simple count of codes was applied to the data to gain insight into the main themes of Nicky's experiences and reflections across the time of data capture.

<sup>1</sup> Applied when Nicky mentioned her impressions of colleagues.

<sup>2</sup> Applied when Nicky found she was unable to act in accordance with her preference or expectation, yet was able to articulate and understand the reason.

<sup>3</sup> Applied when a situation involving office politics was mentioned, whether across the institution or unit.

<sup>4</sup> Such planning was not always because of too much to do; twice the code was applied to situations where a lack of deadline or pressure led Nicky to reflect on her productivity.

<sup>5</sup> Applied when Nicky was tasked with something she was not immediately familiar with, but agreed to undertake out of interest.

<sup>6</sup> Applied when Nicky expressed how she anticipated things to be in a situation she described—usually in the context of that situation being different to how she thought it ought to be.

Of the 30 codes ‘interdependence’ (41 mentions) and ‘learning new things’ (41) were applied most often. Broadly, these are two key themes for new educational designers as they settle in to their responsibilities: finding their place in a collegial team, while developing the skills and knowledge they require for their work. The frequency of the codes demonstrates the importance to a new ED of peer relationships and engagement with new ideas and ways of doing things. An example of ‘interdependence’ is where Nicky offered to consolidate a file list to help settle a dispute: “I offered to look at the folders for the EDs, the writers and the content reviewers. I was going to look at all the documents we should provide them with, and get rid of all the extra files.” The action recognised the need for a clear set of files to assist with teamwork. ‘Learning new things’ included references to professional development workshops as well as deliberate actions to get a better sense of context:

I am starting on a new programme and I need to know more about how different programs have different needs and it is not a one size fits all across all the programs that we offer. I need to give myself the time to go through the [qualification design document] so that I understand what is expected of all courses and how I can create continuity, even when I am joining when the program is halfway through completion.

The next two most frequent codes applied were those of ‘helpfulness’ (35) and ‘contextualised frustration’ (33). The former is discussed later in this paper in relation to Nicky’s apparent personal traits. The latter code was applied when a frustrating situation was described along with an explanation of its cause, which provided an awareness and acceptance of the situation. A candid example is given here:

I need to shake off this feeling of things not being fair. I am having difficulties coping with the fact that as an ED you are working with other EDs. Some of these are perfect. Some of these just seem downright lazy. . . . I am getting frustrated over things that will never change, which is very unhealthy. I need to let it go and just do my best.

The code frequently indicated resilience and an ability to rise above the situation being faced. A new ED is likely to be faced with many situations where things do not work out as they perhaps ought to; tracing causes to their root will probably provide a satisfactory, if not satisfying, explanation.

The codes ‘developing context’ (30) and ‘developing personal style’ (30) were applied when there was clear evidence of Nicky’s growing awareness of her immediate work environment, and of her awareness that she was developing or deciding on a particular approach to her role as an ED. Here is an example of ‘developing context’:

There are certain aspects of my job that I haven’t had to do yet, but they are coming up now as I am about to finalise the first course I did from start to finish. I need to know more about: copyright, readings, marking schedules, writing the intro page for a course, checking if the assessments meet all the learning outcomes, checking if the learning material gives enough information for the students to successfully do their assessments, making sure I have all the documentation before I let the writer know that their job is done.

‘Developing context’ differed from ‘institutional knowledge’ (10) in that the latter was concerned with the broader work environment. For example: “[I had an experience where someone went] behind the back of their manager to get something done, so that they could try and force the issue because they were not getting the outcome they wanted.”

The ‘sense of responsibility’ code, also applied 30 times, is an apparent personality trait. A new ED will be in a formative situation whereby they learn the dynamics of their workplace and deliberately situate their approach to their role.

Three additional high-frequency codes were ‘technical tools’ (32), ‘managerial support’ (28), and ‘productivity awareness’ (29) (the latter also an apparent personality trait). The prominence of ‘technical tools’ is both an indication of the importance of technology to educational design, and an indication of the changes taking place with authoring tools at Open Polytechnic. Nicky was frequently at the forefront of the changes because of her technical knowledge, and would sometimes be asked to explore new features and present them to the wider ED team. ‘Managerial support’ (28) was applied when managerial assistance was either helpful, or (sometimes) disappointing. The relatively high frequency of this code indicates the significance of managerial encounters for new EDs.

### Chronological development and abstract themes

Over time, Nicky’s reflections indicated changing stages of development. The emergence of key codes followed a particular progression across analysis, suggesting a chronological development confirmed by multiple passes across the data. The stages identified in bold type might also be considered the major, abstracted themes of the codes in Table 1. Broadly speaking, the seven stages and major themes of Nicky’s experience are:

1. Initial **excitement and bewilderment**, helpfulness and eagerness; a new job, in an exciting area.
2. **Frustration** at her lack of knowledge alongside developing confidence and independence in the role; a natural fit, yet **self-consciousness** about her need to grow.
3. **Increased awareness** of her collegial and institutional **context**; increasing awareness of the political and organisational culture.
4. **Rationalisation** as to how much she could contribute (following a time of real pressure); setting personal boundaries for work hours, while still mindful of her responsibilities.
5. **Recognition** as a technical expert and contributor to new initiatives; the result of prior knowledge, and a willingness to get involved constructively.
6. **Satisfaction** as to the results of her work and her development as an ED; seeing the results of her work, and maintaining a student focus alongside an increasing awareness of the constraints of her role.
7. **Disillusionment** and questioning about the role as a career; experiencing the repetitiveness of much of the work, understanding the constraints of institutional tools and project focus, the call of other options. (This was at the end of the period of data collection.)

These stages were often accentuated by specific events as well as the time Nicky had spent on the job. It is also important to note that subsequent correspondence reveals that disillusionment is not necessarily the last stage; other opportunities within the role have opened up, providing Nicky with a fresh sense of purpose. Overall, Nicky could be said to have undergone an initial stage of excitement and bewilderment, followed by times of self-consciousness, increasing awareness of context, rationalisation, satisfaction, and disillusionment. These stages certainly overlapped but were clearly discernible in the data.

### Personal traits

Nicky’s reflections revealed a range of apparent personality traits that assisted in her development. As Table 1 shows, ‘helpfulness’ (35) and ‘sense of responsibility’ (30) were two discernible characteristics; both reveal a particular orientation to her ED role. Helpfulness is exemplified in comments such as “I helped out one of my colleagues with one of her courses, since she was struggling. It is nice to know that I can already be helpful with ED work, even though I am a relatively new ED.” ‘Productivity awareness’ (29) was applied when meeting deadlines or time on task were mentioned; the comment “It will happen more often over time that I will need to work on a programme that I haven’t worked for before, so I also need to figure out

the best way to find my way around a new programme in the shortest amount of time possible” illustrates that Nicky had an acute sense of deliverables and dedication to task.

‘Active inquisitiveness’ (24) was another high-frequency characteristic, sometimes linked to the ‘learning new things’ (41) code mentioned above. Nicky’s natural approach toward something she did not know was an eagerness to learn about it:

I am still a bit in the dark on what an ED does during which stage of the development . . . if there would be a good summary out there somewhere, I would eat that thing up. I don’t like this feeling of not knowing exactly if you are doing a good job and if you are meeting people’s expectations.

‘Personal boundaries’ (24), another frequent code, applied when Nicky’s reflections indicated she had deliberately chosen to adapt her decisions because of a particular situation or ongoing effect:

I still need to learn how to let go on some of my standards. I want to do everything perfect but there just aren’t enough hours in the week to actually do this. This makes me stressed out and I will try and put in more time, even though that is not possible. My standards are apparently pretty high and they are not achievable in the structure and time planning that we have right now.

This code was sometimes applied along with ‘developing personal style’ (30), although more in the sense of Nicky determining what she would pull back from in a form of self-management.

## **Advice to new educational designers**

Educational design work requires much more than a knowledge base of models and theories. For new EDs, obtaining knowledge about models and theories must take place alongside getting to know new colleagues in a new workplace. In addition, they need to work out how the institutional expectations of their role shape their practice and aspirations. All the while, they must also work to develop the perspective required for decision-making and problem-solving required of EDs, and the additional confidence required to contribute to a team environment.

From Nicky’s reflections and code frequency analysis it seems her personal traits made the most significant difference, as it was primarily these traits that provided the experiences linked to her development as an ED. The experiences demonstrated an appreciative sense of change and frustration (as long as the standards of change are constructive and lead to improvement); a willingness to try new things; a dissatisfaction with current knowledge; a collegiality that focuses on task; and a keen sense of productivity. By way of meta-reflections on the data Nicky provided, the following advice is promoted for new EDs:

1. **Relax, because the context will come.** That you were appointed shows you have potential. Expect to be bewildered and feel out of your depth from time to time. Eventually you build knowledge of the task, and the inter-relationships and workings of the organisation you’ve joined will gradually make sense.
2. **Trust—and challenge—your instincts.** Often your gut sense about design is a good guide, but be open to your instincts being further shaped and improved by others. You will often need to apply your own judgement, because not everything will be clear. Learn when to take your own initiative, and when to ask for guidance.
3. **Expect to change.** Even your standards will change over time; they will not necessarily get worse, but they will be tempered by productivity, available technical solutions, institutional style, and the good practice you encounter in the work of others. You will eventually understand that productivity is not necessarily the antithesis of good design.

4. **Be realistic about your workplace.** Temper your expectations. Not everything will be perfectly outlined or systematised. As much as you can, adopt an appreciative and constructive approach to such situations. Expect a political environment, and be deliberate about your response to it. Adopt a flexible approach to situations; even with good management deadlines will change, stakeholders will change, and the courses assigned to you will change from time to time.
5. **Learn the rhythm of the role.** There will be peak times when you are likely to get frazzled, frustrated, and fed up; there will also be times when you can celebrate achievements. From time to time things will slow down, giving you an opportunity to develop further.
6. **Foster good relationships with all.** Educational designers always work in a team. Rely on and support your colleagues and other project members.
7. **Be deliberate about self-development.** Learn, learn, learn. Master the tools of the trade, both technical and pedagogical. These enhance both your practice and potential. Expose yourself to new experiences as much as possible. These will provide ample means of learning, while boosting your confidence and independence. Develop an instinctive mastery of soft skills. Related to this is an additional element of advice, **consider keeping a reflective diary** as a valid and useful form of professional development:
  - a. What did I do well this last fortnight? What am I proud of?
  - b. What did I learn this last fortnight? What was new to me?
  - c. What do I need to know more about? How can I further extend myself?
8. The same questions can be posed as a prompt to reflection after a **significant, unusual or important experience.**

Self-development also involves rereading diary entries every 2 months or so. As Nicky reflected after reviewing the first draft of this paper, re-reading a diary will assist new EDs to “see how they are growing in their role. It has certainly helped me a lot with acknowledging that I actually have improved a lot over the last couple of weeks and it is quite satisfying to see that development.” Keeping a learning diary is also a wonderful means of transitioning from beginner to reflective practitioner.

This advice to new EDs recognises the importance of professional development in the institutional context, which is an important part of developing the situational judgement, problem-solving, teamwork, and relationships that are critical to the ED role (Gray et al., 2015; Kenny et al., 2005; Liu et al., 2002). The advice is also a relevant means of assisting inexperienced EDs into a new area of expertise (MacLean & Scott, 2011).

## Conclusion

Literature provides clear insight into the sorts of skills EDs require to perform their roles (Gray et al., 2015; MacLean & Scott, 2011; Miller & Stein, 2016). Less understood is the journey new EDs must take in developing these skills. As more opportunities for ED work become available, and with few specific training and professional development opportunities available (MacLean and Scott, 2011; Miller & Stein, 2016), orientation and self-development become important activities. Such orientation must go beyond the underpinning technical models, into the soft-skills and institutional contexts that also determine successful practice.

‘Interdependence’ and ‘learning new things’ were top of mind in Nicky’s first-year reflections on the job, followed by ‘developing context’ and ‘developing personal style’. Learning about an ED’s organisational responsibilities, house style, and internal processes takes place alongside learning the more technical elements of the role. The institutional context, technical tools of the job, and quality of management are important elements shaping the experience of new EDs. This

case study also affirms the personal traits of helpfulness, sense of responsibility, and productivity awareness as contributing to rapid growth as an ED.

While a case study of one is no basis for generalisation, new EDs can benefit from maintaining a reflective journal and by anticipating ‘real life’ ups and downs. The self-awareness promoted by journalling, with the feedback and support provided through mentoring, assisted this new ED to become proficient in a timeframe of less than a year. Nicky’s apparent success from inexperienced beginner to proficient practitioner is probably a reflection of the personal traits of ‘helpfulness’, ‘sense of responsibility’, and ‘productivity awareness’ she brought with her into the role. Nicky’s journey of development illustrates how a new ED might go from bewildered-yet-excited newcomer, through the challenges of learning how things work, into a collegial and trusted practitioner who is well positioned for an ongoing career.

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