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**Author**

ENGLUND, Chris (OLOFSSON, Anders D.; PRICE, Linda)

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**Abstract**

Teaching quality improvements frequently focus upon the ‘development’ of individual academics in higher education. However, research also shows that the academics’ context has considerable influence upon their practices. This study examines the working environments of teachers on an online pharmacy programme, investigating contextual conditions that facilitate or impede academic change and development. Interview data and institutional policy documents are examined within a Cultural-Historical Activity Theory framework. Distinct differences in the teachers’ sociocultural context were identified as influencing change and development. Departmental teaching cultures and patterns of communication influenced practice both positively, by offering collegial support, and negatively by impeding change. The findings have significance for academic development strategies. They suggest that departmental-level support should include communicative pathways that promote reflection upon and development of conceptions of teaching and learning. (HRK / Abstract

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übernommen) Englund, Claire, E-Mail: [claire.englund@umu.se](mailto:claire.englund@umu.se)