

QUALITY LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Relates higher education to the labour market, noting that the pace of change in national and international economies requires higher education to encourage the development of people who can act effectively in turbulent circumstances. Shows that quality and standards are open to interpretations which depend upon the interpreter's perspective. 'Education' and 'training' must be balanced. The imbalance is harmful to individuals, to industry and to society. A well-balanced education should, of course, embrace analysis and the acquisition of knowledge. It must also include the exercise of creative skills, the competence to undertake and complete tasks and the ability to cope with everyday life and also doing all these things in co-operation with others. List of techniques can be applied to enhance quality learning both to students and educators. On the other hand, it can also increase their motivation.

Keywords: Quality, Learning, Knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

The assurance of quality and standards is important. Higher education is tied up with the notion of "the learning society" in Mantz's (1999, p.15)- a concept that seems to have extrapolated from "the learning organization" and which captures the need for societies to transform themselves if they are not to suffer relative decline. Optimisation is particularly pertinent to higher education and students are themselves varied in background, preferred learning style and so on. Students are both customers of provided services and partners in the process of learning. Students judging their experiences in higher education may think of its quality simply in terms of what was provided.

According to Stephenson and Weil (1992, p.7), capability approaches to learning improve the quality of student learning by emphasizing the application of

knowledge and skills, the negotiation of programmes, collaboration with others and structured reflection on progress.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Every educational institution insists that its primary commitment is to “quality” or “excellence,” terms that are used interchangeably. The designations “higher education” or “higher learning” implied some generally accepted qualitative norm. These phrases suggested which activities were appropriate for colleges and universities.

Quality is always an elusive concept. Quality can be equated with consumer preferences, in the words of the well-known industrial quality expert J.W. Juran (1974, p.22), “Quality is fitness for one.” Crosby (1979, p.15) when he defined quality as “conformance to requirements.” No review of approaches to defining quality would be complete without W. Edwards Deming’s definition (1986): quality is the reduction of variance.

Clearly, quality takes on difference meanings in different settings. When evaluating a manufactured product, one must decide what weights to assign to variables such as performance, features, reliability, durability, serviceability and/or aesthetics. On the other hand, if one is evaluating a service, the assessment of quality will probably be shaped by the knowledge, skill, attitude, appearance and timeliness of the providers as they interface with the needs and expectations of the receiver of the service.

CAPABILITY APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Application of knowledge and skills

Rigid distinctions between the possession of knowledge and the application of knowledge are unhelpful. Reflections on the outcomes of actions can extend our knowledge or deepen our understanding. Greater knowledge and deeper understanding can inform our planning and improve the effectiveness of our actions. Properly managed, action-based learning can be an effective way of testing what we know and improving what we do.

The negotiation of programmes

To prepare and secure agreement for programmes of study, students need to develop clarity of purpose, to communicate those purposes, to express their purposes as learning goals which can be achieved and demonstrated.

Collaborative learning

This requires students to share roles and tasks which, in turn requires awareness and acceptance of those tasks. There is access to a greater amount of data when students are able to pool their individual learning for the collective purpose. Pooling of learning requires students to communicate what they have learnt to peers and eventually to others and the collaborative learning environment gives opportunity for the practice and development of their interpersonal skills.

Reflection on progress

Learner responsibility and accountability promote deep learning, taking students into a search for meaning and for underlying principles. Students have to judge the relevance of what they learn to their long term goals. As they do so, they are able to integrate the various components of their studies in their own minds, around the unity of their negotiated purpose.

It is the overarching purpose of higher education to be fostering higher order intellectual capacities in students. The purpose of a university is thus about developing general qualities of a personal and social kind as well as those of an intellectual kind. It encompasses outcomes including communication skills, problem-solving abilities, interpersonal skills, including logic. Nightingale and O'Neil (1994) states that high quality learning occurs in several conditions.

High quality learning depends on high quality lecturers

A case study conducted by six lecturers in a Spanish university (Andreu, et al., 2003) emphasized that evaluation is important to encourage improvement. However, some lecturers are reluctant to examine each other in a critical way and therefore it is necessary to build an atmosphere of trust and that every member should understand how the process works. In other words, lecturers must learn to renew their knowledge and accept changes in the way their tasks are viewed and developed.

Depending on the way they react in the face of change, four types of lecturers can be distinguished.

1. Those who accept developments in teaching as an unavoidable requirement for social change, which requires that they should modify their behaviour and adapt to new demands.
2. Those unable to face the uncertainty resulting from changes and are therefore unwilling to modify their teaching habits, perhaps because they have tried to improve but found themselves unable to go on. These lecturers resort to evasive methods such as inhibiting

themselves and turning teaching into a routine which allows them not to feel personally involved.

3. Those who do not know whether to favour changes in teaching methods, they think it is necessary for social advancement, but they do not believe there is a real possibility of change.
4. Those afraid of changes, which they perceive as a threat. They think that any reform will eventually show their weaknesses regarding their teaching contents, their methods or their relationship with students.

A wide range of teaching method are employed to deliver the programme, including lectures, seminars, tutorials, workshops, peer feedback, demonstrations, case studies and simulations. It is important for the lectures to make judgements about the appropriateness of particular teaching and learning approaches in terms of local contexts, their subject disciplines and the tradition operating amongst their own course teams. So while always seeking best practice, lectures must be prepared to be pragmatic. They should:

- ▶ Develop and use a variety of teaching aids.
- ▶ Use students' experience as a learning resource.
- ▶ Encourage active and cooperative learning.
- ▶ Perform effectively as a personal tutor.
- ▶ Monitor and evaluate their own teaching performances and evaluate programmes they deliver.
- ▶ Reflect upon their own teaching practice, identify needs and form plans for continuing development.
- ▶ Establish an environment (physical and social) to support the achievement of high quality student learning.
- ▶ Employ a range of techniques to assess students' work and match these to intended learning outcomes.

There are also other points to be evaluated (Andreu, et al., 2003)

- ▶ Use of support materials
- ▶ Language, tone of voice, clarity of expression
- ▶ Gestures and behaviour
- ▶ Gaining the students' attention
- ▶ Providing examples
- ▶ Coping with the unforeseen
- ▶ Miscellaneous

Lecturers had to become less the 'fount of all knowledge' and more facilitators of learning as noted by Stephenson and Weil (1992). They also had to engage in a

more complex set of activities, including: working as a team, exerting influence rather than control, explaining and justifying the form and context of the programme, engaging in discussion and debate, dealing with here and now issues, being a process consultant and accepting feedback.

High quality learning occurs when the learner is really-cognitively and emotionally to meet the demands of the learning task

Readiness is an important concept in designing learning programmes. For instance, it is obviously pointless asking people to undertake tasks for which they do not have the skills. On the other hand, acquiring skills seems to be more effectively achieved if one wants the skill in order to complete a task at hand, so for the facilitator of learning there is a balancing act in structuring a programme: creating the need for the skill and then presenting the opportunity to learn it.

High quality learning occurs when the learner has a reason for learning. The better the reason, the better the learning

Passing an examination is a reason for learning. Hence, the importance of designing assessment that encourages high quality student learning-not unthinking memorization of fact or lecture notes. Assessment should not be the only motivation for learning. Planning learning programmes so as to build on past experience or giving learners the opportunity to initiate their own learning by setting themselves problems are among strategies which will encourage learners to engage in high quality learning.

High quality learning occurs when the learner explicitly relate previous knowledge to the new

It is vital that students' existing knowledge and experience are brought to bear in learning. The subject matter being learnt must also be well structured and integrated. Even an 18 year old has had many experiences and accumulated a great deal of knowledge and it is the lecturer's responsibility to help all learners recover relevant learning from their past and build upon it.

High quality learning occurs when the learner is active during the learning

Logically no one can be entirely passive when learning. People learn through doing, that is the foundation of problem-based learning programmes. Encouraging interaction between students in a lecture or designing assessment tasks which require different types of activity than library research or working sets of traditional problems can increase the purposeful and meaningful activity of learners.

High quality learning occurs when the environment offers adequate support for the learner

Here we come to a condition which seems to be neglected, even ignored in many of the discussions of enhancing quality. Libraries, laboratories, computers and classrooms are obviously necessary parts of the environment and institutions. However, in addition the environment includes the climate of the society, the things people say and write about the institutions and their students. Finally, within the institutions there is all too often a failure to recognize that the whole environment affects students' learning.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH QUALITY LEARNING

Capable people have confidence in their ability to take effective and appropriate action and explain what they are seeking to achieve. They also live and work effectively with others and continue to learn from their experiences, both as individuals and in association with others in a diverse and changing society. There are several characteristics of high quality learning listed by Nightingale and O'Neil (1994).

Ability to discover

The learner is not a sponge soaking up information which has already been processed by a single instructor. He or she has research skills and the ability to analyze and synthesize the material she or he gathers, be it quantitative or verbal. She or he understands different learning strategies and can choose the most appropriate for the task at hand. Being able to discover knowledge for oneself does not necessarily mean that the knowledge must be new to the whole world. It simply means discovering something to the learner.

Long term retention of the knowledge

Even when it comes to remembering facts, names, formulae etc, the evidence is that an approach to learning emphasizing understanding rather than memorization results in greater retention.

Ability to perceive relations between old knowledge and new

The learner cannot disregard past experience. The ideas and methodologies of one area of study should inform others. The quality learners are always trying to put the pieces together to apply logic.

Ablity to create new knowledge

This goes beyond being independent in discovering knowledge is that it is creative but the newly created knowledge may still be old to someone else.

Ablity to apply one's knowledge to solving problems

In solving problems, it is necessary to put the pieces of data, information and experience together. The importance of stating this characteristic is to make specific the value we attach to acting as well as thinking. Interpersonal skills come into play in much problem-solving.

Ablity to communicate one's knowledge to others

Communication of knowledge almost always requires the spoken and/or written word, but it may also require skills of numeracy skills in graphical representation, technical drawing etc.

Want to know more

Enabling people to become lifelong learners has become part of the educational buzz. High quality learning requires one to go on with the task because it requires one to be questioning and critical, of one self and of one's environment.

CONCLUSION

Capable people not only know about their specialization, they also have the confidence to apply their knowledge and skills within varied and changing situations and to continue to develop their specialist knowledge and skills. Some study in higher education will be undertaken as continuing professional development within a context in which lifelong learning is the norm. After all, the pace of development in the world is such that an initial qualification has a decreasing shelf-life. One needs to trot to stay still and to run rather faster in order to get ahead.

All of us have the capacity to be effective in our personal, social and working lives. Higher education should be judged by the extent to which it gives students the confidence and ability to take responsibility for their own continuing personal and professional development. It also prepares students be personally effective within the circumstances of their lives and work. In addition, it promotes the pursuit of excellence in the development acquisition and application of knowledge and skills.

In summary, giving students opportunities to be responsible and accountable for their own learning prepares them for effective performance in their personal and working lives, enhances their commitment to their studies, promotes deeper

understanding, builds confidence in their ability to learn and helps the development of high level personal qualities and skills. In short, capability education is quality education.

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