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EFFECTIVE TEACHING FOR NEW TERTIARY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Students commencing tertiary studies may be casualties of their schooling and their under-achievement in secondary education precludes tertiary success. Therefore, it seems desirable to involve them in collaborative and cooperative learning to better prepare them for skills demanded in the 21st century workplace. A more effective approach has the aim for students to become active, reflective, independent and collaborative learners. In developing strategies for increasing learning involvement, a key factor is the extent to which these strategies are compatible with their own expectations and preferences. Whilst ambitious it is worthwhile for university teachers to focus on how gaps between students' ways of learning, and the ways required achieving quality outcomes from higher education, might be bridged. Teaching and learning requires an inclusive pedagogy because it takes a wide view of intelligence and works towards teaching and assessing students using their own strengths and not be marginalised by having to focus on traditional ways of learning. This is important given the increased diversity of university students. As educators we need to find ways of discovering what our students know that is relevant to the high-level intellectual studies of university. One of the most significant changes and impacts on teaching and learning has been the universal availability of a range of information and communication technologies (ICT). This impacts on the approaches adopted by

teachers and the use of technology to enhance learning.

Keywords

Deep Learning, Pedagogy, Learner-Centred Approach, Student Learning, Reflection, Student Engagement.

1. Introduction

Many nations throughout the world governments are aiming to increase participation in higher education in response to improving the quality of the workforce and contribute to economic growth. In recent decades, tertiary institutions in many countries have responded to increasing public expectations and demands of accountability by economic and government sectors to address the quality of tertiary teaching. This is a reflective paper of recent teaching and learning experience in a tertiary setting with the aim to promote a critical understanding of one's own practices. It proposes ways practice could change to enhance the teaching and importantly learning experiences of students.

In Australia, the Bradley Review and its adoption as government policy in 2009 was significant in terms of student enrolment, funding and quality assurance and its attempt to reshape the higher education sector. Though widening participation does not come without its difficulties for both the universities and students because there is a tension between supporting students and encouraging a dependency (Leese, 2010). The enrolment of an increasing diversity of students including some who previously may not have been eligible for direct entry (more educationally disadvantaged students) could find successful completion a challenge and would benefit from academic support (Carpenter et al., 2015). Whatever a student's prior experiences, making a successful transition to university is not easily accomplished nor be considered achievable by all. The success of all our students requires teachers to be committed to excellent education design and quality practices.

Teaching in tertiary institutions is both motivating and rewarding for those that desire to educate the whole person. Whilst for some that presents the teaching profession with huge and possibly unrealistic expectations and demands. These include ensuring student success and assisting the wider student audience engage with the expectations of university learning and respond to increasing demands of the academic profession. Yet some teachers are doing exceptional and exemplary work and educating in an inspiring manner. A teaching philosophy

guides your style of teaching and interactions with students and influences our developing policies and practices.

The students entering tertiary studies do so with the desire to be engaged and with an expectation that learning is relevant to careers in the real world. They enter a complex and challenging environment with individual and unique needs. Often there is a mismatch between student expectations and experiences. Students face unique challenges as they make very individual transitions; particularly academic, social, cultural, administrative and environmental. Thus, this transition requires ‘support structures and pedagogical programs purpose-planned, comprehensive, flexible and diverse, as well as tightly integrated, coordinated and managed’ (Clarke et al, 2015, p108). It is critical tertiary institutions plan to successfully integrate their students into a tertiary academic culture (Penn-Edwards & Donnison, 2014).

To fulfil their desires a developed philosophy of teaching and learning assists us focus on their understanding using varied and flexible teaching strategies or styles. To maintain interest, relevance and purposefulness as teachers we evaluate through discerning critical reflective frames the methodology and effectiveness of our practice.

1.2 Tertiary Learning Environments

Our role as tertiary educators has been changing from teachers to facilitators of learning. This involves the development and implementation of teaching practices that will foster in students the skills to acquire and apply their knowledge efficiently, think critically, analyse, synthesise and make inferences (Gijbels et al., 2009). Taylor & Colet (as cited in Saroyan & Frenay, 2010, p.50) suggest a perspective that focuses on the development of learning and teaching capacity as an educational development process. This development has three dimensions: excellence in teaching, expertise in teaching, and scholarship of teaching (Saroyan et al, 2010). Key features include knowledge of course and curriculum design, teaching skills, development activities about learning and teaching, self-reflection, mentoring and peer review. Thus, educational development concerns activities applied to strengthen learning and teaching capacity. Inherently important is to establish the supportive teaching and learning environment.

There are numerous pedagogic practices for tertiary teachers to develop competency in to ensure the achievement of intended learning outcomes (ILOs). The key is identifying methods to improve teaching practice and practice strategies that encourage student learning (Rowley, 2014), learning means acquiring insight and understanding. The challenge for tertiary teaching is

to establish deep learning with active learning activities such as group work, small group learning, peer-teaching, problem-based learning. Biggs (2003) as cited by Bevan, Chan & Tanner (2014) proposed 'such strategies require a shift of focus from the teacher to the learner, and are considered better suited to the increasing diversity of tertiary students' (p.474). This describes ways in which learners collaborate reflectively to co-construct new understanding by engaging in open and critical discussion with teachers and their peers. The relationship between a deep approach as the study process and student learning experience is important to improve and benefit new tertiary students. The students use high level activities appropriate to achieving the intended outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2011). It consists of deep motive and deep strategy. Deep motive is about intrinsic interest and deep strategy about maximising meaning (Chan & Chan, 2010). Thus, deep learning means understanding and developing insight, knowledge and cultivating a positive learning experience. Contemporary usage identifies a deep approach to learning as occurring when students often motivated by intrinsic interest learn by seeking personal meaning in and connections within the to-be-learned task (Ginn, Martin & Papworth, 2014). This is ambitious and not always achievable. Marton & Saljo, (1997) cited in Gijbels, et al, 2009) claim that a deep approach is difficult to incite and further results 'indicate that small changes in a learning environment do not necessarily lead to changes in students' approaches' (p.509). Part of the reason for this is student learning approaches are affected by a complex interplay between aspects in the environment and student characteristics (Biggs, 2007). As teachers we know not all change is positive and we need to consider how we implement innovations and how students perceive these measures. By focusing on pedagogy, curriculum design and teaching practice we can develop curiosity, questioning active learning strategies and adopt formative assessment to enhance student learning and engagement. For this reason focusing on what students do should be emphasised in the learning process.

A meaningful and effective learning approach engages students. Increased engagement by students and a higher level of student participation makes teaching more interesting. Students adopt different approaches depending upon the learning environment and specific task. Students must accept responsibility for their learning using different motives and strategies to adapt to their learning environment. Such a combination is called an "approach" to learning (Biggs, 1991). As teachers we can introduce students to learning styles and specific learning strategies

that complement their preferences. This establishes engagement which is an important part of optimising learning. In essence the proof of enhancing teaching is seen in enhanced learning (Gurung & Schwartz, 2013). This is accompanied by successful engagement with the teacher and content, developing expectations giving confidence in future success (Biggs & Tang, 2007).

To facilitate this the teacher must develop thinking and practice which is referred to as reflective teaching. According to Biggs et al (2011) there are three teaching levels. Level 3 focuses on teaching that leads to learning. 'Level 3 is a student-centred model of teaching: the purpose of teaching is to support learning, focusing on what the student does and how well the intended outcomes are achieved' (p.20). Level 3 theory of teaching is based on constructivism, emphasising what students have to do to construct knowledge to learn effectively, which in turn suggests teachers' learning activities to lead to these outcomes (Biggs et al, 2011).

A contemporary feature of change in tertiary institutions is socially interactive learning environments. Anecdotal experience and observations indicate tertiary institutions today are being transformed in order to engage learners. The learner-centred approach is created by such actions and approach. First by introducing learning management systems (LMS) and second, innovative web-based teaching to create online classroom environments. The significance today of adopting Web based teaching and learning is from a social constructive perspective portrays the learner as an active conceptualiser and be used to promote a reflective and collaborative learning environment (Taylor & Maor, 2000). This approach justifies the performative expectations of students developing knowledge and understanding. This is associated with learnerism (student-centred learning) emphasising the need for the student to be seen to be learning and constructing a personal understanding instead of acquiring knowledge (Macfarlane, 2015). In the last decade of technological and social change there has been increased adoption of Web 2.0 technology often to introduce online distance learning and replace face-to-face (F2F) traditional individualised learning and/or minimise opportunities for students to engage in effective collaborative learning. As a result, most of the traditional teaching is more correctly referred to as blended learning. This is the integration of a range of instructional methods such as lecture, discussion group, self-paced activity, and contains both face-to-face (F2F) and computer-mediated portions (Alammary, Sheared & Carbone, 2014). The rise of massive open online courses (MOOCs) is an interesting development in higher education and tertiary institutions no

longer see face to face (F2F) as the only medium of instruction. Online teaching, learning and assessment are features of the flexible learning modes and is one core enabling strategy in responding to political and social pressures to widen participation.

In this context there is a need to expand our vision of pedagogy so that students are active participants in their learning. The pedagogical approaches that are encompassed by blended learning are practiced at different undergraduate and postgraduate levels in many tertiary institutions. The understanding of online teaching by teachers and learning by students can impact the ultimate effectiveness of the technology. It is important to implement quality control processes to ensure that students are able to participate in effective collaborative learning. Further to this students must see teachers actually use and model the use of technology so that students will trust and engage in eLearning (Rowley, 2014). Interactivity is about successful communication and a fundamental success factor for teaching and learning (Sims et al., 2002). The information and communication technologies (ICTs) and proliferation of Web 2.0 services such as blogs, wikis, podcasts, as well as social software networking sites (software supporting interaction) are more focused on creating communities where people collaborate, learn and build knowledge (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007).

1.3 Assessment

Assessment has an important role in affecting students' learning by providing students the opportunity to demonstrate evidence of logic, reasoning and understanding of learning. For this reason, assessment and learning pedagogy are interdependent and need to be aligned holistically. Well designed and implemented assessment is key to student engagement, learning and progression in their studies. Assessment is too important to assume that students are on the same wavelength as we are. Given the importance of assessment to learning, we need to engage students about assessment in the same way they engage content. Assessment dialogues can help students to demystify the assessment process and engage with required standards (Carless, 2006). Anecdotally the practice of giving specific feedback for a task and also general comments to feedforward into future tasks encourages learning.

Assessment for Learning (AfL) has gained increasing international both prominence and practice (Swaffield, 2012). Accompanying this is feedback to students that highlights quality in

their work, indicating where they are in their learning, how it can be improved and giving clear explicit guidance on how to make the improvement. As teachers we enable, encourage and facilitate student's learning. It is transforming their role into active participants, being able to critique their work, respond to feedback and regulate their learning. Anecdotal experience and dialogue with colleagues suggests deep learning and formative assessment using multiple forms of tasks engages students more effectively than a surface approach and summative assessment. I have implemented ongoing assessment focused on achieving intended learning outcomes. The practice of scaffolding student understanding of assessment tasks by providing resources to make expectations explicit can enhance student learning. Also, self-regulation and motivation are important factors in studying and might prevent the negative effect of inappropriate assessment.

1.4 Concluding Remarks

Continuing professional development provides the major learning opportunity for tertiary educators. This fosters improvement and/or changes in our understanding and practice of teaching. Reflecting on personal experience by completing a postgraduate course in university teaching provides me with an opportunity to undertake academic preparation for an educational development role. The choice to undertake professional development enhances my understanding, knowledge, skills set in providing specific preparation for tertiary teaching.

Tertiary teachers have a responsibility to leverage the curriculum and its delivery to provide access with support in changing tertiary education specifically the student learning environment to influence and benefit the experience of all students. Wise and effective teaching requires ongoing systematic review and improvement of current practice and regular feedback to encourage new initiatives and responses to improve student learning quality. The theory of constructivism helps teachers improve their teaching providing a framework to aid reflection on what they are doing (Biggs, 2012). Adopting transformative reflection on your own teaching, seeing what is wrong and how it may be improved, tells you what you might become (Biggs et al, 2007). Understanding the power of reflection and reflective practice enables us to be active and authentic models of good learning practices to engage students in their learning.

Finally, institutions open to evaluation and review can secure objective feedback that is both meaningful and supportive for educational development. Institutions can set standards to

assess teaching and learning with autonomy and flexibility and against a set of external reference points, but there needs to be sufficient flexibility and operational interpretation (Thompson-Whiteside, 2012). For example, the Australian Federal government quality indicators for learning and teaching provides prospective students with relevant and transparent information of forty Australian universities from the perspective of recent students and graduates. The six indicators from the university experience survey relate to factors including overall quality of educational support ([http://www.qilt.edu.au/about-this-site/university-experience-survey-\(ues\)](http://www.qilt.edu.au/about-this-site/university-experience-survey-(ues))).

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