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The Development of Teachers' Key Competences for Student-centred Teaching and Learning

Presentation at Rectors' Conference,
Slovenia

2014

Frank McMahon

Focus on Student-centred Learning

- Broad distinction between Teacher-centred and Student-centred teaching
- Emphasis on what the teacher does or emphasis on what students do
- The move towards a Learning Outcomes Approach to curriculum design
- The influence of the Bologna Process

Differences of Approach

- Difference between input of teachers and the learning activities of students
- The “Sage on the Stage” v “Guide on the Side”
- Differences in how the objectives of the teaching are written
- A paradigm shift towards Student-centred Learning

Key Features of SCL

- Seeking Active rather than Passive learning
- Emphasis on deep learning and understanding
- Increased responsibility for the student
- Greater sense of autonomy for the learner
- Interdependence between teacher and learner
- Mutual respect between teachers and students
- A reflexive approach to the teaching process by teachers and learners
- [Adapted from O'Neill and McMahon, 2005]

Designing Programme for SCL

- Programme outcomes to be designed first
- Statements of what a graduate should know, should understand should be able to do
- May be based on the *Dublin Descriptors* for first, second and third cycle awards
- Represents a radical change away from the traditional approach to starting with what the university will put into the programme

Abbreviated Dublin Descriptors

- First cycle degree awarded to students who have demonstrated knowledge and understanding
- Can apply their knowledge and understanding in a professional way to their work
- Can gather and interpret relevant data
- Can communicate information, ideas problems and solutions
- Have learning skills to continue to further study

Teaching Skills to Implement SCL

- Teaching methods that lead to understanding
- A Teaching Strategy is a plan for someone else's learning
- Exercises and activities for students
- Materials which will be supplied for students to work with
- How evidence of their growing understanding will be collected

Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education

- Many universities now have LTC to offer training to new/inexperienced teaching staff
- PGCert may be mandatory for all new staff
- Part-time, requiring attendance half day per week
- Include reflective piece, tutor observation, peer assessment and micro teaching
- Required before a teacher gets tenure/promotion
- Mixes staff from different disciplines
- May involve staff from other universities

MA in Higher Education

- A follow-on from the Postgraduate Cert/Diploma
- Part-time, 2 years
- Involves modules in year 1, preparation of a dissertation year 2
- Topic chosen by the participant
- Develops research skills as well as the Teaching and Learning skills
- Each participant must produce a journal paper at end of the programme

Benefits of Formal Programmes

- “I became a more reflective teacher”
- “Discussions about educational theory useful”
- “Learned new methods and techniques”
- “Provided stronger theoretical underpinning”
- “Coverage of things like what do you consider to be knowledge and learning” very useful
- “Enjoyed working with colleagues from different disciplines” (Skelton, 2013)

A Poisoned Chalice

- Some course participants experienced negative reactions from colleagues
- One participant advised by boss not to spend too much time on dissertation because there is pressure on research aspect of his job
- Threat of being marked out as a teacher in a research-intensive department
- Course seen as good for individual but no benefit to the department (Skelton, 2013)

Programmes for teachers to be voluntary or mandatory

- Difficult to introduce mandatory training for long-established teachers
- Easier to teach participants who have chosen to be there rather than forced to be there
- Could start with some short voluntary courses
- One can make a strong case for at least some training to be mandatory for all new staff
- Evidence suggests that most staff enjoy courses in pedagogy and assessment

Developing Student-centred Learning

- Consulting students about their learning
- Emphasis on deep, not surface, learning
- Involving students in process of learning
- A sense of autonomy for the student
- Mutual respect between teacher and student
- Greater choice for student in study path

Building in Choice for Students

- Make it obligatory that each semester must have 5 ECTS for free electives
- Distinguish between core/compulsory subjects and electives
- Organise the timetable so that it is feasible for a student to take an elective subject
- Construct programmes so that all modules carry 5 or a multiple of 5 ECTS credits

Building in Choice (2)

- May need a university-wide policy that Wed. and Friday afternoons are kept free for electives
- Advertise the benefits to students of having choice of a free elective “something you always wanted to study”
- Promote the benefit of a humanities module for scientists/engineers and vice versa

Assessment for SCL

- Emphasis should be on formative assessment, not summative
- Feedback to students should be timely (the quicker the better)
- Can include both self-assessment and peer-assessment
- Assessment related to the key aspects of the subject

Training in New Technologies

- Some universities offer MSc programme in use of new technologies to support learning
- Duration 2 years, part-time
- Modules in year 1, project in year 2
- Core modules in Learning Theories, Instructional Design and Research Methods
- Optional modules including Trends in eLearning & Creativity
- All must prepare eLearning Portfolio

Teaching Fellowships

- Member of academic staff selected by each faculty
- Work on a topic chosen by the sponsoring faculty
- Hold feedback sessions in home faculty periodically
- Present findings at annual showcase on L & T initiatives
- Links faculties/schools with LTC

Annual Showcase

- A day dedicated to highlighting developments in L & T
- Includes presentations by holders of fellowships
- Includes an invited keynote speaker
- Other staff can present
- Poster exhibition
- Encourages collegiality

Teacher of the Year

- Can be University Teacher of the Year or one per faculty/school
- Possibility of student nomination or staff nomination?
- Award presented at graduation ceremonies or other public occasion?
- An external chair or panel of judges
- Cash prize or funding for research/travel

Support to Faculties

- Finance made available to each faculty/school to enable it to design new approaches to teaching or assessment
- Guidance provided by LTC
- Presentation made by each faculty on results
- Results published on website of LTC

LTC Workshops

- Short workshops (half day to 2 or 3 days) popular with staff
- A wide variety of topics
- Can be even shorter e.g. lunch-time presentation; (“bring your own sandwiches, free coffee”)
- Encourages interaction with LTC
- Gets academic staff to interact across disciplinary boundaries
- Need to be in central location

Perspectives on Education

- Once a month debate on an educational topic
- One speaker for, one against
- Involve internal staff and external staff
- Held at lunch time

Organisation Structure for LTC

- LTC should be seen as available to all faculties/schools
- Should be neutral between faculties/schools
- LTC could report to Head of Academic Affairs or similar
- Desirability of having staff of LTC seconded from faculties.
- Collaboration, internally, nationally and internationally is key to success

Summer School

- LTC can organise a summer school on a selected topic e.g. eLearning or Assessment
- To take place when all teaching in the university has ceased
- Duration one week (5 days)
- Available to all academic staff of the university and possibly other universities
- Include an element of training in the programme e.g. how to develop eLearning resources

Heads of Learning Development

- There is a need to ensure faculties and schools implement new teaching approach
- Appoint Head of Learning Development(HoLD) in each faculty/school
- HoLD to serve as link between LTC and staff in faculties
- Benefits of nation association for Learning and Teaching.

National Level

- Need for a national body to share Learning Resources developed for eLearning
- Need for HEIs to agree on a preferred eLearning platform
- Desirability of opening up programmes to staff of other HEIs
- Possibility of a single LTC to serve Maribor region
- A national conference each year on developments in L & T

What is Teaching Excellence?

- High level of competency in a wide range of teaching skills
- Commitment to integrity of subject matter
- Deep appreciation of the importance of various stakeholders' needs
- Genuine interest in continual improvement
- Constructive contribution to curriculum development (Robinson, 2003)

Staffing of LTC

- Depends on funding available
- Desirable to have expertise in teaching, assessment, use of IT in teaching, etc.
- Desirable to have staff with different backgrounds e.g. Science, Engineering, Humanities, Medicine, etc.
- Staff of LTC to specialise in teaching, assessment, eLearning.
- Staff to be seconded by faculties?

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Questions/Discussion

“All higher education institutions must ensure that all teaching staff are both qualified and competent in teaching and learning, and should support ongoing development and improvement of their skills”.

[Extract from National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, Ireland]