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Embedding Excellence in Higher Education

Peter Knight
Faculty of Education, Lancaster University, UK

Peter Knight, visiting instructional developer with the Office of Instructional Development and Technology during the late summer and fall of 1997, has written widely on assessment issues, and has recently completed work on higher education policy for the Quality Assurance Agency in England.

Good teaching at Dalhousie

There were 800 students in the auditorium. The lecturer was relaxed in body and voice and alert in mind and deed. Well-paced descriptions of scientific phenomena were accompanied by invitations to the students to hypothesize. And they did, being asked to identify themselves as they did so, and then being thanked by name. Not only were they getting a sense of the nature of science as an activity, they were all involved when they were asked to stop and identify the most important idea in the lecture so far. The naming of the parts proceeded with humor, was enriched by the lecturer's leading-edge research expertise, and led to a summary that related the functions of the parts to the working of the whole. No wonder that this was a national-award-winning teacher.

Conversations with award-winning teachers at Dalhousie tell me that caring, energy and commitment are important elements in their work: although they are not all charismatics, they talk of having a passion for teaching, which is an activity that comes from the heart. They are accessible to students, listen to them, call them by name, try to see how their teaching might look from the students' point of view, use humor and take care to explain both the material and their expectations as clearly as possible. The techniques they use vary, although they tend to involve students more than the style that

talks at the students for an entire lecture period: some of them place a lot of emphasis on hands-on and practical activities, others set group problems, all set thinking tasks. They are often prepared to convey less information in the interests of generating better understanding.

The Dalhousie *Gazette* of 18 September contains interviews with students on the theme of 'what makes a good teacher?' Some replies may give some faculty members cause for concern: it is having a nice beard, a good butt, and not having spittle at the edge of the mouth when lecturing. Other students talk about the behaviors and dispositions of the good teachers. They value faculty who relate to them, who are committed to their work, and who convey interest. Good lecturers use humor and explain things clearly and with the use of examples.

What both the students and the award-winning teachers are saying fits well with formal research in the area. The enclosed paper by Teeples and Wichman illustrates the way in which researchers are concluding that the range of techniques used by good teachers at Dalhousie is good for student learning. Of course, good practice will always be expressed in different ways by academic staff who have very different personalities. But, the three Cs of Clarity, Care, and Commitment come across regardless

Good teaching and innovation are everywhere. But excellent, and even good, teaching is scattered like gems fallen on the floor: shining, but on a duller background. In England, the government funded higher education institutions (HEIs) to develop innovative programs that fostered a wide range of skills and qualities amongst undergraduate students. There were gleaming successes, but much practice was hardly touched and many students came across only patches of innovation. How might good practice permeate the system? That question is based on the assumption that systems have emergent properties, which means, crudely, that a complete program can have an impact that is greater than the sum of the effects of the component courses. Systemic good teaching–program- and department-wide–has more promise than disconnected advances in pedagogy.

Teaching is the major source of income for most HEIs. Maintaining that income stream becomes increasingly difficult. States provide funding, directly or indirectly, to support teaching in higher education and they are becoming more discerning in their funding. In the USA, many states want evidence, in the form of data from the assessment of student learning, about the outcomes of teaching. In Britain, government agencies expect programs to promote a good range of skills and qualities, and there are moves to make HEIs accountable for their programs' learning outcomes. Nor has this thinking by-passed Canadian provinces, although its exact impact remains to be seen - and felt. The point is not just that states are looking for value for money, but that they have increasingly clear views about what they expect that money to buy. These views define the nature of good teaching as that which encourages such outcomes.

These outcomes owe much to employers' views of the qualities they look for in new graduate hires: for example, communication skills, analytical ability, numeracy, critical thinking, time- and self-management, skill at working in groups, and self-motivation. The popular success of Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1990)and of Cooper and Sawaf's (1997) reinforce the view that success at work (and in life) is about much more than intelligence and knowledge of academic content. Obviously, it is also in students' interests that good teaching has the development of such skills and qualities in mind.

Figure 1 fleshes out this assumption that, apart from ensuring that students understand the subject matter, programs will have other broad goals. These are shown in the cells of the figure, where they are loosely grouped under four headings. It would be unrealistic to expect any program to cover all of the

goals shown in the cells Where one physics program might select a dozen of the goals, another might make a different selection of ten, or of fourteen goals. Once the selection is made,

Learning The Internet opens the possibility of the 'virtual university' with students learning from anywhere in the world. Teaching is being re-defined as that which is planned to promote learning. Skilled

Figure 1. General Attributes Profile
(Based on work done in the UK Quality Assurance Agency, 1997)

Intellectual	Practical	Personal	Social/Interpersonal
Logical thinking	Research skills & methods	Independence/ Self-reliance	Teamwork
Critical reasoning	Practical skills in lab or workshop situations	Enterprise and resourcefulness	Leadership
Understanding & applying concepts	Practical skills in field, community, or employment situations	Planning & organizational skills	Networking
Flexibility & adaptability	Information processing skills	Self-regulation, working within norms & codes	Communication
Problem-solving	Performance skills	Adherence to moral/ethical values	Negotiation
Analysis & interpretation	Context/textual analysis skills	Self-motivation	Client focus
Synthesis	Design skills	Self-preservation	Empathy
Originality	Production skills	Emotional resilience	Ethical practice
Other	Interview skills	Reflective practitioner	Social awareness
	Professional skills	Other	Environmental awareness
	Other		Other

the course team, or department should ensure that they are promoted and that evidence of students' achievements in respect of those goals can be produced.

Good teaching becomes related to the teachers' skill at furthering these aims.

Teaching and learning

At this point it is necessary to scrutinize the very notion of 'teaching ' Increasingly, employers and states are valuing people who are skilled at learning. 1997 is the Year of Life-Long

face-to-face performance, with lecture classes, small groups, and individuals, will remain important, since human contact has much to offer human learning. But it is not the whole story, because it is the package of face-to-face work, learning tasks, and assessment arrangements that shapes learning. For example, program goals that are not given status by being reflected in the arrangements for assessing student learning will tend to be discounted by students and, in practice, by faculty. This phenomenon of 'consequential validity' is a reminder that good teaching includes designing good student assessments.

On this view, the good teacher is the person who facilitates effective student learning, by whatever means. This teacher is the person who plans for the development of a range of goals in terms of activities that will occupy student learning hours (rather than concentrating on performance in face-to-face contact hours) and who does so within the framework of a coherent program, collaboratively delivered.

Change? What change?

Arguably, none of this is remarkable. Good teachers, especially in programs of professional preparation, have always had such learning goals. However, if students are to lay claim in their résumés to achievements in these areas of skills and qualities, it helps if they know (a) that résumés should contain such claims and supporting evidence, which might include reference to a learning dossier; (b) that they have addressed these qualities and skills in their learning; and (c) that their performance has been assessed in terms of these goals. For that to happen, learning goals need to be explicit, and not, as has often been the case, implicit and promoted by happenstance.

The biggest difference between the current policy for higher education and the classic idea of a liberal education lies in the implications. They are that:

- the goals should be explicit and plain to all stakeholders in higher education
- HEIs have the intention to promote them systemically throughout programs
- assessment arrangements cohere with the goals.

These further imply that:

- planning becomes a vital concern
- team planning, as well as individual planning at the course level, matters.

Teaching and planning

If the program is to be effective at anything, such as developing habits of self-management and independent learning, then the parts (courses, in this case) need to contribute to that goal. Agreed, not every course has to contribute to every program goal, but the set of courses should, taken together, offer a coherent education in the program goals. That coherence needs to have at least three forms:

- between program goals and contributory courses
- between the course goals, the learning and teaching methods
- among the student assessment procedures within courses over time, so that the goals are addressed throughout the four years. (This last sense of coherence challenges approaches that have free-standing 'skills' courses available early in the program, and rightly so, in view of that approach's inefficacy.)

This approach to program development does not guarantee good classroom performance, nor care for students, nor careful feedback to students, for example. In that sense, program design does not embed good and excellent teaching. But in the sense that it provides a template within which activities designed to encourage learning should fit, that approach does embed good teaching because:

- It ensures that teaching is the mindful promotion of what is valuable, as embodied in the program goals.
- The diversity of goals implies a diversity of teaching, learning and assessment methods - such diversity is characteristic of the work of good teachers.
- It assumes collegiality and co-operation which are means by which learning about teaching (and learning) takes place within departments and teams.
- It embeds reflection on learning and teaching in faculty cultures and practices.

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Essays on Teaching Excellence

TOWARD THE BEST IN THE ACADEMY Vol. 9, No. 2, 1997-1998

The Critical Match Between Motivation to Learn and Motivation to Teach

Ronald Teeples and Harvey Wichman, Claremont McKenna College

Incongruence

Students will be pleased with a course if educational outcomes match the expectation they had for taking the course in the first place. They may even experience extra delight if outcomes exceed their expectations, but they will surely be disappointed to the extent that the outcomes fall short of expectations. One way professors strive to avoid such disappointment is by providing a syllabus that lets students know in advance what they can reasonably expect. However, even a very clear syllabus won't avoid disappointment if there is a fundamental difference between what professors and students believe their courses ought to achieve. In a recent essay about the different cultures of professors and students, Lars Eric Larson (1993) discusses the problem of professors and students perceiving course purposes differently. In Table 1 we outline five perceptual conflicts that we observe in course interactions. They are based on some of the original professor/student differences identified by Larson. (See Table 1.)

Motivation of Teaching and Learning Behaviors

Martin Covington (1993) and his research collaborators have for many years investigated motivations underlying learning behavior. Their conclusion is that course grades and self-image are far less important in motivating student learning than a student's own self-estimate of ability. In other words, the strongest motivation for learning is the perception by students that their personal abilities will be maintained or improved. Even though an expected course grade might be low, learning motivation will remain high if students believe that necessary personal abilities are being enhanced.

Although students enrolling in a specific course may verbalize a diverse set of motives for doing so, they are quite homogeneous in their overall desire to enhance personal skill and ability. Most college students see education as a way to enhance their positions in life. Given such a promise, students generally respond positively to learning challenges; but, as we know, they are easily bored if this promise weakens or is lost.

Students take a broader view of teachers than mere "knowledge transmitters." They evaluate course experiences by diverse criteria such as effect on grade averages; parental expectations; peer attachments; perceived importance for subsequent courses; usefulness in later life and career; and, yes, interest and entertainment content. However, we believe that their over-riding, long-range concern is the appropriateness of course knowledge to personal growth and plans for skill formation relevant to their career aspirations.

A stark reality of higher education is that it is difficult for students to see direct links between course work and ultimate payoffs, particularly with regard to liberal arts endeavors. So how can the potential energy of student interests be engaged? Our own teaching experiences and understanding of learning show that student motivation to learn can be dramatically influenced by course structures, teaching methods, and instructor attitudes. Thus, we advocate institutional changes that encourage pedagogical modifications — that is, modify teacher attitudes and incentives as a means of ultimately stimulating student motivation and learning outcomes.

Traditionally, faculty members have viewed course material as something to be "transmitted to students." This is typically accomplished by lectures and demonstrations. The professor knows the material, and the students must learn it — a clear and simple learning model. There is a powerful underlying cultural environment that supports this style of teaching, particularly the pervasive notion that the student is solely responsible for educational outcomes, not the professor. That is, professors profess while students "assimilate" and get tested on the amount they retain. Students often feel that this pedagogy grades them for performance unrelated to personal growth and development of their abilities.

We believe that there already exists a broad-based awareness of this cultural predicament. We also acknowledge that we account for only two small voices within a very large chorus of advocates for adoption of "more active" learning methods. The problem is how to begin redirecting the inertial forces of our academic culture? How can the teaching/learning motives of professors and students be made more congruent in the existing environment? In our opinion, what is needed at the discussion table is general exposure to a wide variety of specific, successful tactics. We need to witness how various institutions are solving this problem — implementing new incentive systems that encourage faculty members toward pedagogic innovation, especially active learning options.

What we propose is more than bootstrapping more enthusiastic classroom presentations. Reform involves considerable revamping of traditional teacher incentives and eventual cultural shifts away from the incongruent attitudes displayed in Table 1. Given the great difficulty of making large cultural changes quickly, we have developed a special program that can be embedded within a traditional college curriculum. Our hope is that what is first *embedded* will eventually become *integrated*, sparking shifts in pedagogical preferences. The program is called "The Practicum Program" and is described in detail elsewhere (Teeples & Wichman, 1997). It provides a framework in which it is appropriate and necessary for professors and their students to be jointly responsible for course content while not seriously jeopardizing the strong cultural norm that professors ought to exercise

dominant control over course coverage.

An institutionally supported practicum program is just one tactic for implementing active learning methods and making the motives of professors and students more congruent. Fostering undergraduate student/faculty research is another approach. In general, the incentives should cause professors to feel more responsible for the educational outcomes of their students. By "incentives" we do not refer exclusively to monetary rewards and reimbursement. If a course goal is to complete a project for an outside client, the professor's reputation (as well as the students' and the institution's) is a strong, congruent incentive toward effective learning. In joint projects, the professor is more likely to focus on each team member and make sure he or she performs well enough to meet or exceed criteria agreed upon by the group. Active learning approaches that foster teamwork are especially motivating because the professor can expect social pressures from within student groups to assist in monitoring individual performance levels. Above all, active learning approaches cannot appear to be pointless. The exercises ought to be aimed at clear learning objectives. A connection to students' expectations about improvement of personal abilities is paramount.

In the practicum setting, coursework is usually arranged so that professors and students share similar risks. Students are investing for skills relevant to their futures, and the professors see the project as facilitating professional advancement. Compared to lecturing, the teaching/learning motives are more congruent.

But how plentiful are such opportunities for consistent active learning at the undergraduate level? Other than perhaps some satisfaction from improved educational outcomes, what is a professor's payoff from implementing more active learning pedagogies? What if the tactic causes professors to relinquish some course authority and be exposed to greater risk of professional advancement?

Educational research seems to signal some clear benefits to students from the kinds of pedagogical changes that we are advocating. At least we can say that student motivation is elevated when belief runs high that students are gaining the skills and experience that employers and graduate schools are actively seeking. Positive feedback from these "outside sources" and former students clearly reinforces such belief. Undergraduate professors in our program have been quite successful in making this kind of teaching serve at least some of their scholarship aspirations. The question is whether this source of improved motivation can be made more consistent with the educational goals and professional motivations held by professors.

Conclusion

Our personal experiences convince us that when courses are designed so that professors and students share responsibility and work together to achieve common goals, there are very positive effects on educational outcomes. Not only is learning more uniformly superior but harmonization of teaching/learning motives also improves the emotional quality of the educational experience for both professors and students.

Table 1 Five Key Dimensions of Student-Professor Interactions

Dimension	Respondents	Response
1. Control	**Professors**	Feel authoritative and that they should exercise full course control.
	Students	*Recognize that they are clients, however, feel that paying clients should share in control*
2. Knowledge	**Professors**	See acquisition of knowledge as an end in itself.
	Students	*See knowledge as a means to an end.*
3. Method	**Professors**	Match teaching style to the type of material being taught
	Students	*Judge teaching styles by criteria that are unrelated to course content.*
4. Motivation	**Professors**	Feel a student's enrollment in course is tantamount to being motivated
	Students	*Feel the professor is compensated, at least in part, to motivate them to learn.*
5. Purpose	**Professors**	See narrow purpose for taking a specific course, e.g., learning per se, and preparation for follow-on courses in the discipline.
	Students	*Have varied purposes, e.g., course fits personal schedule, is a required course, raw curiosity, heard that teacher was interesting, wanted to be in course with a friend, parents insisted.*

Derived from Larson, (1993).

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Ronald K. Teeples (Ph.D.,UCLA) is the Boswell Professor of Economics and Director of the Practicum Program at Claremont McKenna College. Harvey A. Wichman (Ph.D., Claremont Graduate University) is Professor of Psychology and Director of the Aerospace Psychology Laboratory at Claremont McKenna College.

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Editor: *Kay Herr Gillespie*
Office of Instructional Development
University of Georgia
Athens GA 30602
kaygi@uga.cc.uga.edu

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David Graf
Manager, Administrative Services
POD Network
15B Exhibit Hall South
Iowa State University
Ames, IA 50011
podnet@iastate.edu

Walking the talk

Many attempts to improve teaching quality center on the individual faculty member, not on the team or department as a unit. Evaluations focus on the course (and often on teaching-as-performance, rather than on student learning). Institution-wide evaluations also take place, but it is neither clear that they are focused upon learning in relation to the institution's goals, nor that they are sensitive to the students' learning experiences in a program. Students do not usually evaluate programs. Quinquennial reviews and the attention of accrediting bodies do not appear to address the coherence of programs in respect of such broad aims. Where attention is paid to organization-wide and departmental concerns, it is dominated by discussion of ways in which the college and its departments can develop climates that encourage the individual faculty member in the business of course improvement. To return to the metaphor, it scatters more gems on the floor. It does not have the systemic approach that leads to a gemstone mosaic. It is blind to emergent qualities. Teams, departments, and programs are relatively neglected. Systems thinking is under-used.

Adopting that thinking is a powerful route to faculty development. If programs are planned so as to stimulate academic staff to adopt new ways of promoting broad learning goals, then initial and properly principled objections may be abraded by the experience of trying the different things that are rooted in the program design. Curriculum development is, on this reading, faculty development. It can embed notions of good practice and set requirements that assume that lecturers will develop better practices.

Some implications

Universities need to see faculty members not as administratively-convenient collections of individuals, but as teams of people who think about curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment. This does not mean that individuality is forfeit. First, what is proposed is what many faculty members would lay claim to doing in any case. Secondly, the goals do not prescribe the methods, so the range of instructional practices that can be seen in the work of good teachers will persist.

It follows that universities will experience what will be, in one sense, a more interventionist and centralized approach to academic management. There is a tendency in the literature to say that this should not take the form of 'hard' managerialism and that it is better to encourage teams to work out their own ways of responding to centrally-agreed goals, values, and expectations.

This will affect departmental and team management. Chairs will have clearer responsibility for curriculum management, which will require distinctive leadership capabilities. One of their most important leadership tasks will be the promotion of a collegial teaching culture. Consequently, team leaders and departmental chairs will need to be chosen for their leadership potential, to be have the post for long enough to have a chance of making a difference, and will need a special kind of leadership training. These people will be pivotal in higher education's response to this new model of curriculum, learning, teaching, and assessment.

Some lessons from England are that:

- Academic staff are not familiar with the language of curriculum development, and they may be hostile to it.
- The business of planning the student learning experience within this framework is a complex and demanding one.
- Common practices, such as thinking in terms of teaching-as-performance, rather than in terms of student learning, are ingrained and readily reassert themselves when faculty members start to plan and think in the new ways.
- Collegiality, in practice, can be limited: a manifestation of this is the 'compliance culture' of 'change without change'–a situation where people

use the new words but maintain existing practices.
- This is a time-consuming process and a slow one.

A conclusion to draw from this last point is that the changes will have an impact that is related to the degree of seriousness with which the institution is committed to them, and to the level of skilled, sensitive central support that is provided to departments and teams. So, these changes create a need for expert advice to academic staff. Universities therefore have a responsibility to ensure that such expertise is available. It is, of course, very much in their interests to do so. Three implications are:

- The work of instructional educational developers will move from the prevalent focus on working with interested individuals to working with teams and departments.
- Their work will focus less on the performance of teaching and more on the design of learning within programs.
- Their clients will tend to be teams in need, not people acting on the basis of a wish to do better.

Conclusions

The nature of good teaching is being redefined across the developed world. The redefinition does not replace what is characteristic of the current work of good and excellent teachers. But it does add a demand that good teachers are explicit in their consistent furtherance of a broad range of learning goals. For other teachers, this represents new standards to pursue, and it provides a context that can be favorable to that.

In this analysis, the improvement of teaching has implications far greater than those that are recognized by current, piecemeal attempts to raise teaching quality. Systemic responses are needed to systemic problems. Embedding excellence becomes a task that is based on organizational development, not individual development. In this way, universities, as they work out collective ways of improving student learning, themselves become learning organizations. All can benefit from institution-wide attention to better teaching through working out a broad vision of student learning.

For More Information . . .

The full text of this paper, with references, can be found on the World Wide Web Homepage of the *Office of Instructional Development and Technology*. There you will also find material on "Working with Large Classes" that develops some of the ideas set out here

http://www.dal.ca/~oidt/oidt.html

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M. Carol O'Neil., Associate Editor
Alan Wright, Ph.D., Editor
Office of Instructional Development &Technology
Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3H 3J5
Tel. (902) 494-1622 Fax.(902) 494-2063
E-Mail: OIDT@is.dal.ca