



Learning and Teaching: Providing Support to Staff and Students in Uncertain Times

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A great deal has recently changed in the higher and further education sectors. Changes underway before the emergence of the COVID19 pandemic were accelerated in 2020 and beyond. Researchers like [Kumar et al. \(2021\)](#) sought feedback on the impact of crisis responses in health professional education. They highlighted the complex, multifaceted and challenging nature of healthcare professionals' roles and responsibilities. Student learning about those roles involved teachers, peers, and patients and often relied on Work Integrated Learning (WIL). They suggested that the pandemic seriously impacted learning opportunities, especially those involving large groups or interaction with peers and patients.

Curriculum implementation quickly embraced on-line formats. But they argued that the changed approach needed scrutiny of the experiences of both students and teachers.

Their sentiments would apply to most programs preparing professionals for practice. The rapid responses described above were necessary to ensure students could continue their studies on time. Likewise, Learning and Teaching Centres personnel needed to react quickly to assist academics in embracing educational designs that were readily adaptable to electronic delivery systems. Some organizations were well prepared, while others may have had to overcome prior reluctance to move to more student-centred approaches reliant on e-learning platforms.

It was evident during the pandemic that access to education was a human right and was central to the development and maintenance of sustainable, cohesive communities, stable environments, and national well-being described by [Wright et al. \(2014\)](#). It was clear that education was central to individual empowerment, equitable but productive societies and social justice. We could see from the impact of the pandemic that well-educated people can lead the pursuit of optimal health and well-being and gender equity. We could also see that inclusive citizenship requires sound governance around learner-centered education.

Higher and further education organizational mission statements inform other statements of learning outcomes central to the assurance of confident and competent graduates in any professional or vocational group. However, given the ongoing casualization of the education and research workforces over the last decade, hiring and training quality staff and the provision of technology along with administrators is necessary to help teachers and students with learning processes. Centres established to help students learn and nurture their self-confidence may require new roles that help improve and sustain new education models and methods. Those who manage learning and teaching centres need to think carefully about their roles and responsibilities and decision-making around the nature of resources that might need support in a rapidly changing environment. Educational services need to be part of sustainable and financially affordable entities. However, they must still meet the professional development needs of the teachers and encourage innovation in response to learners' needs.

Typical university vision statements include elements such as that developed by the College

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of Science as shown on the Australian National University website (ANU Teaching and Learning Centre)

Our vision is to create and sustain a rich teaching and learning environment ...for teaching staff and students. An environment that embodies excellence and innovation in teaching; integration of research and teaching at both undergraduate and graduate levels; collegiality and shared experiences in teaching and learning for all science academics. We will support and value our teaching staff by providing them with development opportunities, a resource-rich environment and recognizing and rewarding excellence.

Usually, vision statements are elaborated upon in strategic goals. For example, the ANU College of Science suggests a commitment to 'providing consistently high-quality learning experiences and outcomes for all our students and to support our academic staff in achieving these objectives. The following goals help us to direct our teaching and learning to ensure a thriving learning environment for all our students. They aim to achieve this through '...capabilities and resources available through (a) Teaching and Learning Centre; evaluation and creation of new initiatives to support student learning; professional development opportunities for staff; coordination of the design and implementation of new approaches to teaching and learning; recognition and reward for excellence; and offers of sponsorships and scholarships.

These Science academics then acknowledge their 'innovative and creative teachers who apply their ideas to their teaching approaches. The latter, they say, is directed towards improved student learning. Therefore, they collate data to demonstrate successful outcomes in projects that focus on effective student learning: Examples provided include a Peer Assisted Learning Project and the introduction of digital learning technologies, MOOCs, and variations of the 'flipped classroom' teaching approaches.

At the Australian Catholic University (ACU) learning outcomes are made explicit.

"...employers DO expect their new employees to be capable in organization and self-management, critical thinking, and analysis, to have effective communication skills, and to be able to collaborate and work in teams (yes, students often find teamwork difficult, but it is an essential skill in the workplace!). These attributes also underpin your capacity to further develop any professional skills in your chosen field".

One can see that the professions continue to rely on the elements of adult learning such as those underpinning PBL, for example, aspects of the principles behind adult learning theories; these elements have become embedded in the university statements of 'graduate abilities'; this suggests all curriculum design

should advocate the use of contemporary stimulus material for more active and student-centred learning that enables the introduction and assessment of

- Critical thinking,
- Information literacy,
- Discipline-specific learning processes and outcomes,
- Professional knowledge, values, and attitudes.

When I look back at the developments in international partnerships worldwide, I can see that they all reach a point where some redefinition occurs. For example, in the Australian higher education example, some aspects of the design of curricula reliant on Problem-based Learning (PBL) eventually became part of the Higher Education framework for policy around Learning and Teaching.

Government policies worldwide support the imperative for contemporary approaches to learning and teaching. In short, I am saying that any renewal is a natural progression in any initiative.

I think it is time for renewal of the ambitions for Learning and Teaching reliant on the international collaboration of a different kind if the pursuit of optimal learning outcomes is to be maintained. I can see that virtual centres that focus on Learning and Teaching more broadly are a possible way forward. Despite the global impact on Learning and Teaching Centres worldwide, the virtual Centres in pre-COVID models used in Delaware in the USA or Maastricht in the Netherlands are examples that could enable

1. Continuation of meaningful international partnerships where each party showcases new ideas that are culturally appropriate
2. Ongoing financial support for research projects that translate to evidence-based practice
3. An ongoing focus on the need for developing more student-centred learning and process-oriented curricula with principles informing the design features of Problem or Practice-based Learning in the contemporary environment.

Maastricht now has four principles for modernizing PBL

- Education based on Constructivism ie Active learning
- Self-directed Learning
- Learning in a relevant context – use real world situations/issues to explore a variety of topics/subjects/problems
- Collective learning, that is, students, collaborating with and challenging ideas from peers and teachers.

The continuation of the international linkages through 'Connected Hubs' across contexts and cultures is possible. Another is the inclusion of a 'Clearing House' for resources that could be stored and shared, e.g., Maastricht promotes creative change in education through sharing small video clips that provide insight

into new initiatives.

My Australian colleagues and I are grateful for the opportunities for international engagement that colleagues have offered over decades. People have been extraordinarily collaborative and inclusive. The essential aspects of internationalization are reciprocity and collaborative learning. Given experiences achieved through international collaboration, universities worldwide were better equipped to adapt to changes accelerated by their pandemic experiences. Through experimentation with novel approaches to learning and teaching, teachers and students became information literate and more skilful with problem-solving and communication skills. They showed great sensitivity in working with emerging scholars.

If we believe in individual empowerment, equitable but productive societies and social justice, we need to appreciate the value of learner-centered education and also consider the role that Learning and Teaching Centres play in the professional development and ongoing support for experienced and emerging teachers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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