Significant Learning and Quality Learning Experience

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When we offer a programme or a course, in general, we intend our students to learn something and to have a quality learning experience. As advocated by Fink (2013), this "something" must be significant (fundamental) lessons that we want our students to have; and ascertaining quality means creating a learning-centred environment that takes into account how students learn, how they identify and engage with the content, and how they develop an intrinsic interest even beyond the programme or course.

In this issue, we present five articles and reflections that examine the impact of an approach or intervention on students' learning and learning experience.

Continuing from the previous issue of *AJSoTL* (http://www.cdtl.nus.edu.sg/ajsotl/current-issue/index.html) on technology enhanced learning, this issue starts with an article that interrogates the effectiveness of webcast lectures. This is followed by an innovative integration of the flipped approach, mobile learning, and fieldwork in applying concepts in a business module.

Bill Gates famously says that "Technology is just the tool. In terms of getting the kids working together and motivating them, the teacher is the most important" (Green, 2014). At the heart of Gates' message is that technology is but a tool.

Interrogating the philosophy behind how technology is used is the first article by Maniclang, Ang, Hong, Lee, and Sng. Central to their query is whether webcast videos in its current form aligns with a student-centric approach. They administered a 24-item questionnaire on 1464 respondents, asking respondents about the usefulness and effectiveness of the webcast videos for learning. One of the key findings is that the majority of respondents preferred live lectures to webcast videos, ascribing the quality of webcast lectures, accessibility (technology), and non-interactive approach as the main reasons.

Contrary to the learning experience of respondents in Maniclang *et al.*'s study, students in Menkhoff's module, which adopted an integrated flipped, mobile, and experiential learning approach, reported a deep and positive learning experience. Menkhoff's article shares three examples of fieldwork-based social-enabled learning projects that required students to make use of mobile phones to capture and document content which was subsequently used as learning material to be uploaded on an e-platform. Menkhoff's approach highlights the importance of coherence in the integration of technology and content for the creation of (new) knowledge.

These two articles on the use of technology for education contribute to the ongoing debate on the effective use of technology for learning. As remarked by Palfrey and Grasser (2008), "The most important thing that schools can do is not to use technology in the curriculum more, but to use it more effectively".

The next two articles take a closer look at a living-learning programme (LLP) of a residential college in creating significance for learning and a quality learning experience.

One of the key learning outcomes of the living-learning experience at residences is to enhance students' level of maturity in social, interpersonal, emotional, mental, and meta-cognitive competencies. Shushok, Scales, Sriram, and Kidd (2011) discuss three models of campus residence—the Alpha "eat and sleep" model, the Beta "market" model where residential programmes are farmed out, and the Gamma "learning" model with carefully thought through residential learning programmes that are aligned with the institution's strategic goals. Shushok *et al.* advocate for the Gamma model which is where the LLP that Tambyah and Mukhopadhyay's study, and Toh and Ortiga's reflection are situated.

In evaluating the extent to which learning outcomes of the LLP had been achieved, Tambyah and Mukhopadhyay asked two cohorts of students, with a total of 484 respondents, about their sense of belonging, engagement with the College community, and personal and intellectual growth. They were interested to see if there was difference between male and female, and Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM) and non-STEM students. Their findings show no significant gender difference. Interestingly, STEM respondents derived more benefits from the academic life of the LLP, while non-STEM respondents reportedly experienced more involvement in the co-academic and co-curricular aspects of the LLP. In terms of the year of study, as anticipated, they found that involvement and sense of belonging increased with duration of stay at the LLP. The comparison between cohorts, gender, STEM/non-STEM students has contributed to existing literature in LLP.

Toh and Ortiga's reflection provides further insights on learning within the same LLP. The focus of their reflective piece is on team teaching by teachers from different disciplines in facilitating a reading circle, which is an informal co-academic activity at the residential college. Despite challenges in coordination and ensuring coherence, the experience was enriching for both the students and the teachers, specifically in enhancing their appreciation for multi-disciplinary perspectives.

Wrapping up this issue is a reflective piece by Lam and Ip that highlights the misalignment between belief and actual practice. Based on a list of transferable skills, they asked faculty members to indicate the importance of these skills, whether undergraduate students lacked them, and if these were incorporated into their respective modules. Lam and Ip found a mismatch between importance for undergraduate students to be equipped with these skills and the teaching of these skills. To address this gap, they propose embedding these skills in the curriculum in two ways—incorporating them into modules and making explicit the rationale, and having parallel/corresponding complementary workshops or resources. Lam and Ip's query, namely if transferrable skills which are fundamental to student learning are part of what we teach, serves as a timely reminder for us to re-examine what is significant that we want our students to learn.

We hope that these articles will inspire critical examination of the concept of significant learning and quality learning experience in discussing what we teach, how we teach, and how and what we assess.

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