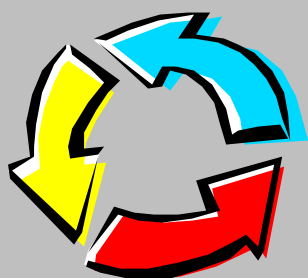


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From the Editor:

20 February 2002

'Learning Matters at Lingnan' are short papers that aim to promote a dialogue on teaching and learning. I encourage all staff to consider this as a vehicle for sharing thoughts on educational issues as they might affect us at the University. If you feel you have something which might be appropriate for inclusion in an issue of this publication, then please forward it to the TLC. I would be delighted if staff (and not only academic staff) from outside the Teaching and Learning Centre were to be prominent or even occasional contributors.



Transforming Higher Education

For the last decade, Hong Kong higher education has been under attack for failing to produce graduates with skills required for success in the workplace and with a capacity for rehearsal, reflection and reviews that enables them to perfect their response to the changing issues they confront. What has gone wrong with our system? Perhaps it is now time for us to review and reflect on what we need to do to transform our higher education system in order to make it more responsive to student and societal needs.

The suggestion of transforming higher education implies rethinking and reculturation. It suggests re-examining the ways of conducting the business of higher education and altering fundamental aspects of its structure and operation. Central to higher education transformation is to reconceptualise the learning process. There is a need to move the emphasis from teaching to learning; and to see students as participants in a process who are to be enhanced and empowered.

Seeing students as central to the achievement of universities and colleges mandates a conceptual change of what higher education is about. The shift from teaching to learning, from faculty to learners, and from instructional development to learning development calls for rethinking the very fundamental business of higher education in terms of educational delivery, academic processes, functions, and structures.

Peterson and Dill (1997) recommend the 'contextual planning' approach to help higher education institutions rethink the nature of the system and consider the need for major institutional adaptation. The approach requires the institution to ask the following questions:

- 1. Redefinition:** What is the nature of higher education, and what is the institution's role in it?
- 2. Redirection:** How should the institution's mission be changed to reflect these new realities, what new external relationships should be developed?

3. *Reorganisation*: How should the academic processes and structures be redesigned, and the management functions reorganised?

4. *Renewal*: How will the academic workplace and institutional culture be renewed or re-created?

Implicit in the planning process is the concern for both structures and culture. Changing the management structures alone will not produce the kind of transformation that is desired in higher education. Substantial change will not take place until everyday teachers start talking about it and doing something about it. Teachers need to be constantly thinking about how students in their classes are learning and developing and how their teaching is, or is not, enabling the students to learn.

It is not structures alone that will create a sense of cohesion. What really holds teachers together is a sense of shared values: the institutional culture. Changing culture involves a change of perspective or a shift of mind. In designing a course and in determining the curriculum, teachers need to remind themselves that the principal educator is the student; staff and institutions are supportive players in the proceedings. To think in this way accounts, for most teachers in higher education, to nothing short of a change of perspective in the way in which they think of their roles and their relationship with their students.

This emerging direction for teaching and learning is well served by instructional strategies that reflect the emphasis on the student as learner, with the teacher as mentor rather than sage. The development of problem-solving skills, both as an individual and in collaboration with others, is essential to this pattern, as is cooperative learning in its many forms. Teachers' choices of instructional methods therefore ought to reflect this learning-centred, intensively interactive approach.

Unless all or most of the teachers in higher education undergo a shift of mind from teaching to learning, there is no likelihood for higher education to become transformed into a system that is student-focused.

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Reference:

Peterson, M.W. and Dill, D.D. (1997) Understanding the competitive environment of the postsecondary knowledge industry. In M.W. Peterson et al (eds.) *Planning and Management for a Changing Environment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

This issue and the back issues of 'Learning Matters at Lingnan' can be retrieved from the following URL – <http://www.ln.edu.hk/tlc/level2/td.htm>.

