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From the Editor:

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'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.



Principle 1

What Contributes to Quality in Higher Education?

The following six principles are extracted from Paul Ramsden's article 'Current Challenges to Quality in Higher Education' (*Innovative Higher Education* Vol.18(3), 1994).

Interest and explanation

A facility for giving clear explanations of complex subject matter is a mandatory part of a lecturer's repertoire. It is evident that this facility can be learned (e.g. Brown, 1978). Even more important than clear explanation would appear to be the related ability to make the material of a subject genuinely interesting, so that students find it a pleasure to learn it. When our interest is aroused in something, we enjoy working hard at it. We come to feel that we can in some way own it and use it to make sense of the world around us.

Principle 2

Concern and respect for students and student learning

Good teaching is nothing to do with frightening students, of showing toughness, stringency, and inflexibility in the face of student mystification; an approach which appears to be part of the educational culture of some disciplines, notably engineering and medicine. It is everything to do with benevolence and humility; it always tries to help students feel that a subject can be mastered; it encourages them to try things out for themselves and succeed at something quickly; it helps students to be adventurous in their learning by offering a secure emotional climate to come home to (Eble, 1988). Related to generosity are honesty and interest in teaching, versatility in teaching skills, and availability to our students. Teaching like this, therefore, requires developing a keen interest in what it takes to help other people learn; it implies pleasure in teaching and associating with students, and delight in improvising. It is futile to plead that these things are impossible to

achieve in a climate of tight resources and a requirement to be accountable. If we want high quality teaching and learning, we cannot do without them.

Principle 3

Appropriate assessment and feedback

Setting appropriate assessment tasks, as studies of students' experiences show, is a difficult but crucial skill. It implies questioning in a way that demands evidence of understanding, the use of a variety of techniques for discovering what students have learned, and an avoidance of any assessments that require students to rote-learn or merely to reproduce detail. "Quality of assessment procedures" was one of the key features of good teaching as perceived by students noted in Marsh's review of the student evaluation literature (Marsh, 1987).

Principle 4

Clear goals and intellectual challenge

Research into effective schooling overwhelmingly shows that consistently high academic expectations are associated with high levels of pupil performance. Lecturers in higher education should find this aspect of effective teaching relatively straightforward. What they are likely to have more difficulty with is explaining to students what must be learned in order to achieve understanding and what can be left out for the time being. Breakneck attempts to "cover the ground" in the absence of a clear structure focused on key concepts create student confusion and deaden student excitement.

Principle 5

Independence, control, and active learning

High quality teaching implies a recognition that students must be engaged with the content of learning tasks in a way that is likely to enable them to reach understanding. A consequence is that control over learning should reside both with the teacher and with the student.

The significance of independence and choice emerges repeatedly in research on student ratings and perceptions of favourable academic environments, at higher education and upper secondary education levels. Yet most prevailing systems of learning in higher education adopt mass production standards; they handle each individual students in the same way, even though we know for certain that they operate in different ways. Active engagement, imaginative inquiry and the finding of a suitable level and style are all much more likely to occur if teaching methods that necessitate student activity, student problem-solving and question-asking, and cooperative learning are employed.

Principle 6

Learning from students

None of the foregoing principles is sufficient for good teaching. Effective teaching refuses to take its effect on students for granted. It sees the relation between teaching and learning as problematic, uncertain, and relative. Good teaching is open to change; it involves constantly trying to find out what its effects are on learning, and modifying teaching in the light of the evidence collected.