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INNOVATIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODOLOGIES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Conventional assessment methodologies in higher education are increasingly under the spotlight and it is uncertain in certain circles, if traditional methods are in fact as effective as they are believed to be. Since the quality of education is critical to a nation's success, it is important to interrogate a number of strategies and methods. The application of innovative teaching and learning methods is critical if we are to motivate and engender a spirit of learning as well as enthusiasm on the part of students, for learning while at universities and indeed for lifelong learning. The role of education is to ensure that while academic staff do teach, what is taught should also be intelligible to students emanating from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and that they rapidly become familiar with the expected standards. It is more often than not the case that students underachieve because of the fact that they have not grasped an awareness of the level of assessment or what it is that the lecturer expects from them. Lecturers should thus apply themselves to utilising innovative methods so that the students' learning process is as free-flowing as possible and that the methodology they adopt is conducive to learning. Innovative teaching and learning methodologies such as short lecture, simulation, role-playing, portfolio development and problem-based learning (PBL) are very useful in addressing the rapid technological advances and developing workplaces that will be required in the foreseeable future. This article which is important in the broader transformation debate in higher education, focuses on skills that can strengthen language acquisition and content knowledge for students. PBL inter alia, is promoted as an innovative teaching and learning methodology that is highly relevant and meaningful and worth utilising. Special instructional prorammes such as Tutorials, Remedial Coaching, Ward System etc., are being tried in almost all the colleges to guide slow-learners and under-achievers, mostly who are first generation learners. In NAAC assessed colleges Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQAC) are established to monitor and review the academic progress

Keywords: Innovative teaching and learning, short-lectures, role-play, simulation, portfolios, problem-based learning.

INTRODUCTION:

Education is a very powerful instrument for social change and transformation and innovative teaching practice is the only way to enhance the quality of our education. The problems which society faces are essentially the problems of educational institutions which are required to be innovative as they teach new skills and develop new insights and approaches towards the solving of social problems which the nation faces. Students must be empowered to be able to withstand the global challenges of the 21st century. The Oxford Dictionary defines innovation as "the introduction of novelties, the alteration of what is established methods" which is what this article strives to do. A key performance indicator of any education institution is the education quality in especially teaching and learning areas. As the destiny of South Africa is currently being shaped in the lecture room, education has a number of important aims. In terms of the social constructivist paradigm, learning is a social process which is neither limited to an individual, nor is it passive, Meaningful learning only takes place once an individual is engaged in social activities (Jackson et al., 2006). These include developing the capability of students to use ideas and information, testing of ideas and evidence, generation of new ideas and evidence, facilitation of personal development and development of a student's capacity to plan and manage their learning experience. Critical faculties are thus developed so that students begin to ask important questions rather than simply answer questions. The level of teaching effectiveness is a question that plagues higher education for a number of decades (Braskamp, and Ory; 1994). Centra (1993), defines effective teaching as "that which produces beneficial and purposeful student learning through the use of appropriate procedures" which is an aspect that this paper is seeking to address. What constitutes effective teaching? Braskamp and Ory, (1994) include both teaching and learning in their definition: "creation of situations in which appropriate learning occurs; shaping those situations is what successful teachers have learned to do effectively".

Lecturing is a communication between two or more persons who influence each other by their ideas and learn something in the process of their interaction with one another. Lecturing is thus a complex, exciting, challenging and interactive skill whose main aim is to create a learning situation in which knowledge is imparted and in which understanding and skills are developed. Students are motivated to explore the discipline they have

selected. Unfortunately many students fail to complete their studies at university but may still benefit from skills that are developed while at an institution, especially the confidence they obtain from new life experiences (Quinn et al., 2005). What is required for all students, even those that drop out, is deep rather than surface learning.

PRESENT STATUS:

Sadly, many lecturers have adopted conventional method of teaching and learning. The teaching is mainly based on the syllabus and prescribed textbooks. In many lecture rooms, teaching and learning techniques are outdated and theoretical knowledge is still disseminated through the technique of talk and chalk. Learning is a process which should produce desired changes in the behaviour of students. Consequently, the learning situations utilized in the lecture rooms are important for the understanding of the concepts taught. Learning occurs place when insight is gained, and when the processes are understood, in short when interaction has taken place between the lecturer and the learners and between learners and their peers. Some lecturers still believe that knowledge is transferred to their students, but in reality students learn by doing and this is reinforced by the use of innovative teaching methodologies. However, it seems that when lecturers try to be innovative in the learning environment, many fall short, and students thus often prefer to be assessed in a conventional manner. Innovative methods are thus perceived to be a stumbling block for them. Students complain that some assessments do not in any way measure their real learning and what they are assessed with is irrelevant to the real world of work (McDowell and Sambell, 2003). It is the task of a lecturer to facilitate learning and to motivate, encourage and mentor students to achieve academically with the use of innovative methods and to generally promote interest in their subject which should go beyond the our walls of a lecturer room. Students need ample opportunity to share ideas with the lecturer as well as with their peers and this becomes difficult if nigh impossible especially with large groups of students in one class.

INNOVATIVE SHORT LECTURE METHODOLOGY:

An innovative teaching and learning methodology which is not often utilised in hospitality and tourism education is a short lecture introducing a problem solving case study, of say 20 minutes, followed by vigorous debate and discussion on the part of

students who are organised into groups and who interrogate the responses of fellow students. Student involvement is essential if learning is to be successful. The lecturer as the facilitator is tasked with guiding and promoting student interaction. In classes where I have utilised such a methodology, students become active team-players and role-players. There does need to be prior knowledge on problem-solving and critical thinking techniques in order for this approach to work. It has been shown that interactive teaching is superior to didactic teaching and that the former greatly improves academic success and promotes the inclusion of students who generally feel like outsiders (Crosling et al., 2008).

Students need student-centred and active learning that is associated with experiential, problem based and project based learning. Collaborative learning is desirable and there should be far less reliance on the large lecture format that is followed by most lecturers. In fairness to many academics, the institutions often accept more students than they should so as to obtain greater state funding and the result is huge classes that only large lecture formats can accommodate. Nothing can however replace the vital aspects of staff-student and student interaction. Individual learning is however still very important. Lecturers should also not fail to focus on developing tourism and hospitality students' social skills, especially as they will be working with guests from across the globe. Ethics, social and cross-cultural skills, in the context of the tourism and hospitality professions must assume greater importance in teaching content.

Simulation and role-playing:

Simulation of scenarios and interrogation of case studies, involving staff and guests in hotels and other tourism operations, are useful in problem-solving and in developing the argumentation and analytic skills students that students require in the world-of-work. Such exercises promote understanding and deep-learning that are the prerequisites for long-term knowledge acquisition (Denbo, 2005). This methodology does require planning by the lecturer who must have clear objectives regarding the learning outcomes. Student preparation may be required for certain simulations and role-playing. Lecturer assessment as well as peer and self-assessment may be used to evaluate student understanding. It is important to note that these techniques allow for greater student selfrefection while simultaneously also enhancing other areas of the learning process. Lecturer and peer

feedback are important in assisting students to develop their problem-solving skills and strategies.

THE LEARNING PORTFOLIO:

Portfolio assessment and peer marking promotes self directed learning and improves the quality of student learning. According to Cole (1995), the greatest benefit of portfolio assessment is to allow students to assume greater responsibility for their learning. Belanoff (1994) states that this modality of assessment motivates students, provides them with feedback, is diagnostic in that it shows students their strengths and weaknesses and finally sets the student's level of attainment at the end of any given course. This is an accepted innovative assessment tool and a way of learning that is utilised in South African education. Students are tasked with collecting, analyzing and select representative samples of their work which are relevant in their course for evaluation purposes. They compile, maintain and submit a personal portfolio according to prescribed guidelines, accompanied by a reflective short essay of roughly 500- 1000 words along with their portfolio. The items in the portfolio that they create in the course of the semester, includes what is learned in theoretical lectures as well as practical classes and in some cases during Workintegrated Learning (WIL) which is often over a six month period in industry.

PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING (PBL) FOR TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTIONS:

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) for students is a flourishing approach to learning that is extremely useful in promoting critical and analytical thinking, and in addressing the rapid technological changes and dynamic workplace of the 21st Century. PBL is founded on an unconventional pedagogical model when viewed alongside the conventional didactic one and it offers greater benefits to the quality of student learning (Greening, 1998). This approach to education suggests a strong role for factors such as authenticity, as well as student independence, and is principally associated with the encouragement of deep learning (Sutherland, 2009). In this approach, a range of selected constructive problems are designed by the lecturer to address the desired learning outcomes. These problems may be influenced by community and contextual factors. It is assumed that most students already have basic conceptual knowledge. PBL is an approach to learning that incorporates

relevance and complexity of thought and it also provides an opportunity for self-assessment and continuous improvement on the part of the students.

Figure 1. Innovative practice model
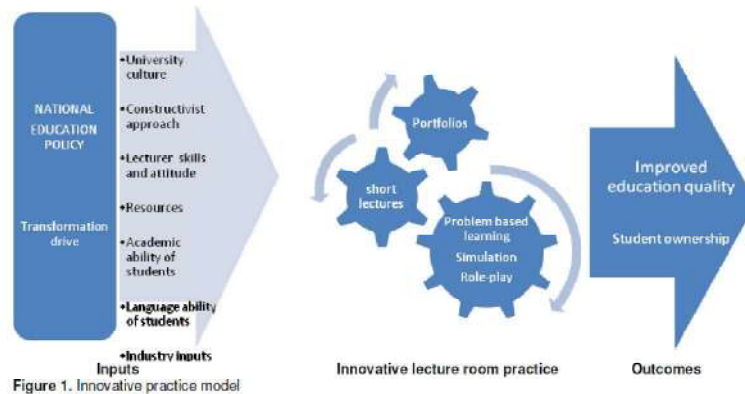
CONCLUSION:

Any innovative teaching and learning method is not a quick fix or universal remedy. It cannot replace a traditional teaching methodology in education but rather supports it. However it is clear from the literature, that innovative teaching methods do provide students with greater experience in dealing with the world of work related issues they encounter. Innovative teaching methodologies will lead to a learning society in which the creative and intellectual abilities of students will allow them to meet the goals of transformation and development.

Where students claim to experience problems with assessment, the general argument is that the lecturers have not adequately explained what is required of them. Other student problems include excessive workloads and insufficient feedback. Lecturers need to consider these aspects when adopting any methodology. Given the constructivist nature of the PBL approach, there is a larger retention of knowledge and students enjoy their learning experience far more than in traditional approaches-course content is understood more thoroughly. Bauer et al (2008) found that students enjoyed the real world of work issues and teamwork aspect of PBL. They also and felt welcome in the classes and stated that their learning was enhanced as PBL augmented their ability to consider, evaluate, and respect diverse viewpoints. Foreign language students also learn more during

PBL activities. PBL is indeed a model that meets the needs of society by enabling our students to make positive contributions to society through a collaborative approach to learning that spotlights problem-solving and communication skill development through a number of self-directed learning strategies and teamwork as highlighted above. By integrating skills, students are able to become self-motivated and develop an ability to think independently, while working with others in a team. Problem-solving strategies are interrogated and developed.

The use of the short-lecture, simulation and roleplaying, and the submission of individual student portfolios, undoubtedly support traditional methodologies and should also be utilised more. Education for the future requires that we explore as many varieties of models and teaching methodologies as possible. We need to remain cognisant of the culturally and other specific needs of our students and must not underestimate the influence of technology such as the internet in promoting quality teaching and learning and in enhancing education in general. Given the nature of our students, we should seek to pursue an agenda of social justice to guide all teaching methodologies and practice. There is no Eurocentric or other blueprint for South African education which can be passed around from nation to nation, but we hopefully possess enough knowledge to understand that an educational system based on the equitable treatment of all students in the cultural melting pot that is South Africa, is a moral necessity, but is also politically, socially and economically beneficial for our nation.

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