Title: Capturing Learning

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Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to: (1) Challenge the notion of assessment as a driver for learning and consider the alternative premise of learning being driven by student identity development in terms of 'being' and 'becoming'; (2) consider the role of a community of practice in student identity development; (3) look at ways to articulate that judgements on learning gain may be clouded by the possibility that students learn far more in higher education than is assessed

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are: This session will focus on two key topics within the context of higher education: (1) what learning means, and (2) the exact relationship between learning and assessment. Learning in higher education is predominately understood through the acquisition metaphor (Sfard, 1998) . An argument will be made for greater emphasis to be placed on learning through the participation – thus knowledge is not just something the student possesses but something a student does (Wegner and Nückles (2015). Thus double learning occurs – students learn subject matter (acquisition) and learn to become a professional (participation). The meaning of these metaphors will be explored and a case made that learning in higher education with the incorporation of both metaphors is best understood through the student's participation in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). An explanation will be given that students do learn within communities structures, and a lack of appreciation of this, means that drivers of learning – identity development, in terms of being and becoming, and finding belonging at university are not valued. The current terms, assessment of, for and as learning (Swaffield, 2011) are considered in terms of community learning. Illustration of assessment will be made that: (A) in terms of learning outside the curriculum and outside the institution, assessment as learning is how students, through negotiation processes, make sense of information and create new understandings. (B) Learning environments, such as personal tutorials, which involve working with students, and giving professional valued judgements to students on their learning, are discussed in terms of valuable assessment experience. Thus personal tutor meetings can be assessment events – but are not recognised as such. These considerations may bring a more nuanced approach to the concept of learning gain, and the case is made that students learn more in higher education than is assessed, and it is the role of higher education to make students aware of such learning.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The outline of the workshop is a follows;

Opening 5 minutes will outline how much learning in HE is understood – acquisition metaphor. 5 minutes for discussion in small groups on the participation metaphor and then 5 minutes exploring what a community of practice (CoP) may look like in a range of disciplinary areas. 15 minutes using a model to discuss in a small group how integration into a CoP might be characterised in the curriculum, using a model developed by the authors. Introduction to assessment– The remaining 10 minutes will consider breadth of learning and assessment both outside the curriculum and institution, aiming to end with the generation of ideas for working with staff and students to make identity development more explicit as an alternative lens on learning gain.

References

Sfard, A. (1998) 'On two metaphors for learning and the dangers of choosing just one.' Educational Researcher, 27(2) pp. 4-13.

Swaffield, S. (2011) 'Getting to the heart of authentic Assessment for Learning.' Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 18(4), 2011/11/01, pp. 433-449.

Wegner, E. & Nückles, M. (2015) Knowledge acquisition or participation in communities of practice? Academics' metaphors of teaching and learning at the university. Studies in Higher Education, 40:624-643.

Wenger, E. (1998) Communities of Practice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.