

TEACHING IN A MULTICULTURAL SETTING

By

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Abstract

Technological advancement and globalization have created new complex problems that have to be included in the education systems. The learning practice and approach have to be tailored to creating intentional students who can meet emerging challenges in the complex world. Emphasis is now shifting to analytical and practical skills, and problem-based learning for the complex world. Though more colleges and universities are encouraging more in-depth investigative learning, schools and other universities still over-emphasize memorization of discrete facts at the expense of deeper understanding and application of learned principles.

University curriculum is fragmented into independently “owned” units indicating a serious lack of shared learning goals and clear expectations. The degree got thus only certifies completion of disconnected fragments instead of a student’s accomplishments. Further, promotion of University Professors is based on research, reputation and resources other than teaching and education success. This creates learners who cannot handle emerging challenges, and end up being frustrated and see no value to education. Students have their multiple burdens like family obligations, financial stress which complicate college life and leave them with very little time for studies.

There are numerous challenges to the education system such as: increased student enrolment, increased age of students, affirmative action that has increased minority student enrolment, promotion of adult education and distance learning. There is pressure on job market, with newly invented jobs requiring a higher level of education to use technology and information. New practices and approaches are emerging that seek to raise the level of student effort and learning, to make them problem-based. In Maseno University we have constructive action projects in the third and fourth year of study. Students are attached to community projects, disadvantaged families, industries and agencies or institutions for a semester. In the course of their work, there are consultations with lecturers and tutorials. From these work students develop portfolios in their respective areas of specialization. This experience provides them with an opportunity to translate theory into practical learning, and also the study of society service. Students reflect on life implications of ethical theory for the life of a professional, raising their self-expectations.

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Introduction

Higher education is changing to match the needs of the technological and globalised world with resultant multi-cultures in education. Globalisation and technological advancement has created new complex problems that must be included in the education systems for the development of intentional learners of the twenty-first century. Cultures bring together diverse backgrounds and attitudes to education and life as a whole. Educators have to understand and appreciate these cultures and their contribution to education on which basic principles have to be built. Teachers must identify what students should learn and what they require to lead fulfilling and socially responsible lives. Focus should be to create students who are purposeful, self directed and can meet the challenges of a globalised society.

More and more people from varying backgrounds, culture and age are seeking higher education. The age-old educational practices are now being disconnected from the needs of contemporary practices. Increased enrolment and ethnicity of students brings great vitality to campus and places more demands on faculty knowledge and skills. The mode of registration of students in campus has expanded to include full-time, part-time, course auditing, distant learning and parallel programs, with escalating tension between the different categories of students and thus requiring a review of the current education policy. Preparation should match increased enrolment and access to education. This paper considers the role of higher education and teaching approaches in a multicultural setting. Examples are drawn from Maseno University, School of Family, Consumer Sciences and Technology (SOFCONSTEC) programmes.

Appropriate Learning in A Multicultural Setting

Current technological advancement require self-reflection and creativity in defining the role of teaching approaches in multicultural setting both now and in the future. Globalisation has increased accessibility to education by multiculture. Individual seeking education come diverse background with different entering behaviours. Education needs of students are as diverse as the cultures there represent hence need for identification of learning needs vary.

Teaching in modules is likely to be more learner-friendly for students who may not be able to complete a program. Though teaching should focus on white-collar employment it should, above all seek to create leader, creative analytical thinkers. Identification of appropriate approaches aims and essential practices to learning. Higher education plays significant roles in all sectors of development of any community, through preparation of training of graduates for employment in various sectors economy, besides transmitting past culture and values. Higher education also seeks to create new knowledge by providing a base for scientific and artistic discovery. It equips students to redress the legacies of discrimination in a bid to ensure continuation of democratic principles. Education provided should be of lasting value, create students who have interest and seek to pursue life-long learning.

Access to higher education is limited, being unequally distributed to the poor and to people from disadvantaged areas in terms of culture, economic and environmental factors. Not all students going to campus succeed in completing their degree programmes and are thus not equipped to face the challenges in the world. Such students become frustrated and more often despair in life. Knowledge of alternatives to graduate education and existing opportunities can go along way in changing perspectives of such students. To be reviewed is the policy of acquisition of higher education for white-collar employment. In Kenya there are many graduates who are unemployed and are not ready to subscribe to jobs they deem inferior to their level of training.

Challenges to Teaching and Learning in Multicultural Setting

There are continuing patterns of cultural, environmental, social and economic discrimination affecting both quality and access to education. Cultural values of indigenous tribes to education are low even when they have the economic power. Wealth and prosperity are attached to culturally defined quantities of specific assets that do not give priority to education. The social structures promote practices other than education and communities are engendered to them. Schools lack resources necessary for quality education with development of skill needed to counter issues of the current technologically environment, in

developing countries. Learning approaches that cater for multicultures need to be developed to bring value to education system in the twenty first century.

The education policy seeks to enhance access, sometimes without careful evaluation of resources necessary for the attainment of education goals. The Millennium Development Goals MDG goals of education for all has been implemented without adequate preparation at high school and campus level. For example the introduction of free primary education in Kenya in 2004 has resulted in increased enrolment without expansion in resources or an increase in number of teachers and classrooms, nor equivalent increase in secondary and higher education institutions. Quality of teaching is poor, pupil-teacher ratio is low and also there is low student-teacher expectations increasing levels of frustration to both teachers and learners. Learners are not motivated to continue with secondary and campus education.

There is no acceptable interpretation of learning especially considering the varied backgrounds of learners. In campus the curriculum has been fragmented into independently owned 'courses' or 'unit' that do not have a smooth flow. A "course" or a unit" assumes a standard time in class. *A unit is one-hour lecture or two hours tutorial for 16 weeks* at Maseno University. The degree obtained then certifies a completion of a fixed number of these disconnected fragments. Students fail to see the value in education in their personal lives and even in the workplace. Curricula have to be planned for connected learning to that students see the value in education. Certificates are issued after completion of designed course units covered within a specified period of time. Such an approach fails to measure the level of learning attained because one can complete the prescribed program units without knowledge of given concepts. Learning focuses on simple acquisition of knowledge and factual recall through transformation of information into internal knowledge at the elementary level.

The education system is examination-oriented and passing of examinations due to memorization is taken as exemplary performance rather than knowledge application. Grading student performance brings about competition and unnecessary stress without actual learning ever taking place. In fact students have coined codes for principles and

concepts useful to them from institution to institution bringing about differences in exposure. There is lack of comparable measurements to assess students' learning outcomes. Global harmonized education policy and approaches vary from country to country such that one cannot transfer credit easily.

There is misalignment of school and campus expectations. In high school emphasis is on memorization of discrete facts rather than a deeper understanding of applications of principles learned. Teachers use the methods they were exposed to as students and possibly teach the same concepts they learned in the same way. Less emphasis is laid on analytical, integrative and practical skills. Students coming from high school to campus are usually disoriented with the existing learning environment in terms of methods of instruction.

Students learn at different rates, and may start from different levels of understanding, especially because of their given backgrounds and exposures. Parental involvement in student learning is not uniform for all students.

Faculty have the strongest attachment to their disciplines and more so to their courses or units and are weakly attached to the institution as a whole. The departmental structure further reinforces the fragmentation of the curriculum by dividing knowledge into distinct fields that are non-existent in life. Efforts to harmonize courses, units and departments have met the strongest opposition from possessive faculty. The need to work across disciplines by faculty is unavoidable in this era of globalization.

Multi-disciplinary approaches to learning for student empowerment are now very necessary. There has to be a means of training University Professor in the new methods to teaching, helping them understand the need for the multi-disciplinary approaches in creating empowered, responsible and informed student of the twenty-first century. This also applies to teachers at school level for continued learning. There are many Professors at campus/college level who have never learned any teaching methods, except for the content knowledge they have. Professors are rewarded for research rather than teaching. The research projects conducted by some professors is for personal development, prestige and

reputation rather than education success. The promotion criteria discourage professors committed to the development of students' intellectual skills.

Teaching Approaches in a Multicultural Setting

The teacher should seek to create an empowered learner who is able to integrate knowledge of various types and to understand complex situations, besides creative resolution of difficult issues using multiple tools. Teaching should enhance the learner's ability to derive meaning from normal life experience and gather information from making observation within (and without) their environments. Learners are therefore empowered to transform information into knowledge and then into action and can work in teams, resolving arising differences for the benefit of the team and challenging existing structures responsibly. They have to appreciate other cultures, and understand how a model natural, social and technical environments.

Model of Teaching Approach In A Multicultural Setting

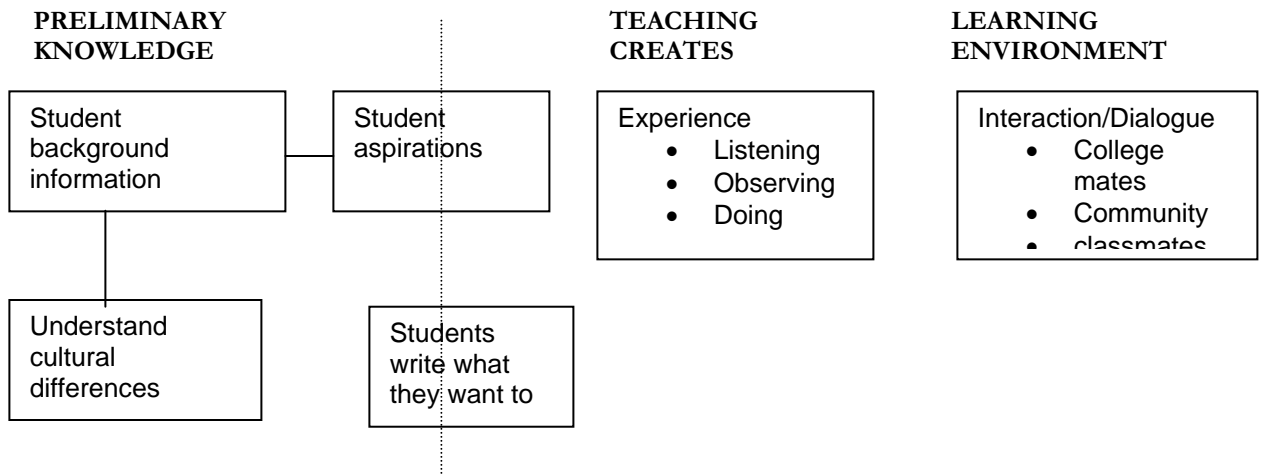


Fig 1: Involvement of students in learning

A student comes to class with some level of knowledge that should be identified to help the teacher know where and how to start [Fig 1]. The learners need to write down their aspirations to guide the teacher in the direction to go while seeking to achieve the objective

of education. As learning progresses a learner holds a dialogue with self-classmates, other college mates and the community. The learner reflects on the topic and writes down feelings about topic. The teacher should help them develop a journal or learning portfolio for the class to indicate what and how they are learning and whether it is any value in their won life. Observation occurs when learner listens to a lecture or watches a demonstration related to what they are learning. We send students to communities under community partnership where they observe life or show them videos of events related to what they are learning.

Practical learning allows practical learning allows students to put knowledge gained from theory and skills acquired from the classroom into the actual “doing”. The teacher allowing students to make observations related to what they have been learning or learnt conducts demonstrations. Teaching in multicultural setting therefore requires practical and more inclusive approaches to learning. Practical approaches consider societal and workplace issues that produce international thinkers who will actively participate in the public and private sectors, in a diverse democracy and global community. Learners apply their analytical skills and ethical judgement to concrete problems in their environments, connecting theory with insights gained in practice. Practical approaches develop capacities such as practical intelligence, effective communication, analytical skills, social responsibility, and also strengthens interpersonal skills.

The teacher has to use various learning experiences to add to reading text and listening to a lecture

- Organize practical classes that allow students practice what they have learned.
- Train students to keep a portfolio about their own thoughts about the topic and what/how they are learning. Encourage them to draw examples/parallels to own cultures.
- Find ways for students to engage in productive dialogue with other people in college/community who may have knowledge of the subject. It will help them see how different people think about what they are learning.
- Organize for opportunities for students to observe action they are learning.

- Organize group discussions focussing on the content of learning. This will promote expression, critical thought and analytical thinking.
 - fosters retentions of information, application of knowledge to new situations, and development of thinking skills.

Individuals experiencing a change process such as a new learning situation is likely to feel stress and confusion. The environment should encourage open exchange, sharing of opinions and problem solving strategies, and also foster trust and acceptance of different ideas/values.

The teacher should incorporate student' experience, observations of others and personal ideas/feelings/. Exposure to varied behaviour models/attitudes helps learners to clarify actions/beliefs that will aid in meeting their own learning goals.

Teaching approaches must be inclusive allowing learners decisions on important questions. This approach fosters social responsibility, building capacities for leadership. To make education inclusive, seek out varied cultures, consider cross-disciplinary lines, pursue wisdom from multiple cultures, and employ a wide range of teaching strategies. Learners must accept their individual and joint responsibility. Teaching approaches such as discussions, critical analysis and introspection can be used to create responsible learners who are actively in societal issues, and who are able to take responsibility for their actions.

Learners have to be taught to appreciate others and cultures different from their own while assuming accountability for themselves, their complex identities and their conduct. They should be able to discern consequences of decisions and actions and respect complex identities of other people, their histories and cultures. They participate as citizens in a diverse democracy.

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Group assignment help students nurture their negotiation skills, develop teamwork spirit, learn to resolve conflicts, and have a practical understanding of people from diverse cultures and backgrounds. The teacher creates small discussion groups of students from different backgrounds, and different levels of understanding to foster inter-cultural associations and appreciation. Students should be encouraged to interact with individuals who may not necessarily be classmates or campus students at all to broaden learning points and understanding of other people's viewpoints.

Students are attached to community projects, disadvantaged families, industries and agencies or institutions where they apply theoretical knowledge for a semester. During these times, their performance is assessed in terms of intellectual and practical skills and their ability to integrate in their community and workplace. They are offered a chance to translate theory into practice, appreciate other people and their work, and also understand existing societal problems. Project assessment has been done mainly for grading purposes, a negative drawback, because students work to improve their learning.

Evaluation of student learning should be an ongoing process that helps us answer questions of what, how much, and how well students are learning in order to make adjustments. Pre-testing students knowledge level enables us gauge the intellectual level of understanding of the student. Modes of assessment should be as varied as the teaching approaches used, and should be clearly stated in the course outline. Assessment must reflect classroom activities for us to identify strengths and weaknesses of either the course or our methods of teaching.

Lecture room assessment is an ongoing process that helps us improve the quality of students' learning. Students come from diverse cultures and should be assessed at the initial stage to see if they are starting from the same level of understanding, and appropriate interventions made to improve the knowledge level of those students who may be disadvantaged. The teacher decides what and how to assess, enabling the students to reinforce their grasp at the course content.

The teacher identifies the essential skills and knowledge that students need to learn, and ensures that they are actually learning. The objectives of the course are discussed in class to enable students know what is expected of them at the end of a course. Students have developed portfolios in the Interior Design course only. However, it is necessary that students develop portfolios in all our courses in which they keep a record of what they are learning and also state the value of learning to their lives.

Teaching approaches SOFCONSTEC

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|-----------------------|---|--|
| Lectures | - | Listening/writing skills |
| Group work | - | development of negotiation skills |
| | - | promote spirit & individual inquiry |
| | - | understand and appreciate other peoples views |
| | - | skills in conflict resolution |
| Community Projects | - | transformation of theoretical knowledge into action |
| | - | practical observation of societal problems & issues |
| | - | develop negative ability between society and workplace |
| | - | develop creative ability |
| | - | analytical skills |
| | - | promote active participation in social affairs |
| Field trips | - | break class routine with interesting sights |
| | - | widen scope of learning and interaction outside campus environment |
| Industrial Attachment | - | actual performance in the workplace |
| | - | learn expectations of employers |

- Research - develop analytical mind and critical thought
- article - develop problem solving skills

- Term papers - promote understanding of self
- & written - develop communication skills
- assignments - develop reading skills

Conclusion

The era of globalisation has witnessed increased enrolments of students from diverse cultures and age. Teaching approaches have to be varied to enable the creating of empowered, informed and responsible students who are able to tackle challenges of globalisation. Professors will need to be trained in appropriate methods of instruction and uphold the values of education. Education has to focus on teaching and learning because what is taught is not always what is learned. Emphasis has to be put on what a student should know, the sources of information, evaluation of accuracy of sources and what they can do with their knowledge to improve on the communities' settings.

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