2009 Conference

Paper Dialogue: Affective and Cultural Issues in Transforming the Academy

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Steve asked participants to share why transforming the academy is important.

New roles become possible when working on process education implementation, e.g., influencing the region as well as one's own institution, managing the affective side of faculty risk in trying a new approach (support from the college president and administration is critical), and learning how to support faculty as change is implemented. It is important to understand how to improve professional growth strategies at the institutional level, including insights about communicating to more audiences about process; Steve noted the resources found in the paper (in the notebook)references and in pcrest.com/LO.

The website learning objectives include "The Transformation of Education," which Steve reviewed. For example, the students in the new process education graduate courses offered through Northeastern brought extensive experience and inquiry about education-related disciplines in social sciences, etc. The current state is a starting place for moving to transformation of educators and learners in the system so these professionals bring out the reality of what is happening.

Fourteen dimensions (Table 1 in the paper) have been identified that are related to education transformation, e.g., changes in expectations, efficiency. Affective learning will be required as educator roles and knowledge evolve during the transformation. Personal dissonance (also cultural) occurs in relation to changes in expectations and differences in the educational processes used by process educators.

Joann and Steve described an expanded table from the learning object on pcrest.com/LO about how transformation of education is predicted to occur as the shift occurs from current practice to future practice. Assumptions must be identified and worked with.

Joann noted that "control" changes from an assumption that the faculty have the control to an assumption that modifications can be made to meet needs, including giving students decision power in some cases. This is common in effective facilitation, which will produce affective reaction that must be handled by faculty. If communication with students includes discussion of these challenges and sometimes misjudgments, it can create bonds with learners.

The table in the website learning object includes application examples that show mapping from simpler to more complex. Many links are present in the references in the website to make it easy to search for more information.

One comment was that the table is a good tool to review transformation issues and to discuss ways to influence change, e.g., at the beginning of the school year for faculty. The table gives the insights about what needs to be done in the classroom but more could be added about educator and student affective reactions—perhaps in the detailed version of the table. It also is a guide for design of professional development—some of which is already started here at Gaston. The table also should be viewed in terms of positive affective responses so the "Wow" factor can be captured—not just the negatives.

Educators may not agree with a lot of the transformation requirements as stated, so some kinds of compromises and small steps need to be considered. It's important to get the ideas out there in a way that matches how educators operate—they won't read all of this material during their busy days. How can the typical educator actually "get there"? Many of the future direction ideas were known and actually embraced decades ago but never happened.

A challenge from administration by "putting the carrot out there" to accomplish something important can motivate seeking out relevant professional growth activities.

Engineering perspectives have influenced process a lot but some of the old lecture approaches still help learners to understand what is worthwhile. Learning activities are important but many presentations were also valuable. Another fact to consider is that education used to be more "elite" than today when a greater percent go to college. On the other hand more arrive at college with computer usage and research skills--although these sometimes may be counterproductive, e.g., follow rote procedures while using technology. Some of the "story-telling" common in older professors was the "media" of the past. Education departments need to recognize the need to create change rather than trying to do the same thing with small variations.

There is a see-saw effect going on and it is important to open things up so multiple perspectives can continue to be shared. Some presidents and some institutions need to be "beacons" over an extended period of time.