WORKSHOP

The Many Faces of Quality Learning Environments

Dan Cordon & Steve Beyerlein

Abstract:

As educators, when we think about Quality Learning Environments (QLEs) we usually picture our ideal classroom. We may be picturing the physical arrangement of the classroom, with tables for collaborative activities, or state-of-the-art electronic aids. Or we could be picturing the student-teacher, or peer-peer interactions that are part of a vibrant learning community. This workshop will expose participants to the existing methodology for creating QLEs, and challenge them to assess their past performance across the 10 steps in the methodology. As part of a small-group activity, participants will use the steps in the methodology to identify key similarities and differences between a QLE in a traditional classroom, versus an online/distance environment. Additionally, each participant will leave with 2-3 personal changes they plan to implement to improve a learning environment that they will create/maintain, and they will be challenged to apply the methodology for creating QLEs in contexts besides a traditional classroom. A Process Educator should be skilled at adapting proven principles to new contexts.

Learning Outcome:

1. Develop shared understanding of each step in methodology for creating a QLE's
2. Identify similarities and differences in the creation of a QLE in various settings (i.e., traditional classroom and online environment)
3. Describe changes you plan to make in creating a QLE in a future teaching/learning setting that most interests you (i.e. a faculty meeting, or other atypical context)

Facilitation Plan:

1. Pair up with someone you don't know or don't know well. Share an insight about the learning environment in each of your classes. (3 minutes)
2. Pair up with another pair and identify a captain, a recorder, a reflector, and a spokesperson. (2 minutes)
3. Take turns reading through the steps in the QLE methodology. (5 minutes)
4. Formulate a burning question about the QLE methodology that you would like to have answered before completing the remaining tasks in this activity. (5 minutes)
5. Engage in a large group Q/A about the QLE methodology. (10 minutes)
5. Use the worksheet to analyze/compare steps in the QLE methodology for a traditional classroom and an online environment, noting which steps are essential and which steps are optional. (25 minutes)
6. Identify two unique insights about application of the QLE methodology that other teams might not think of and would benefit from hearing. (5 minutes)
7. Prepare your spokesperson to report out on one or both of your insights. Teams take turns in sharing insights. (10 minutes)
8. Do a free write about how you can use lessons learned about the QLE methodology in an unconventional teaching/learning setting of personal interest. (5 minutes)
9. Take turns debriefing the rest of your team about your application/lessons learned. (10 minutes)
10. Share your most novel application/lessons learned with other teams. (10 minutes)

Resources:

Available on the following pages:

Faculty Guidebook 3.1.1 Overview of Quality Learning Environments

Faculty Guidebook 3.1.3 Methodology for Creating a Quality Learning Environment

Quality Learning Environment worksheets

Notes

3.1.1 Overview of Quality Learning Environments

by Peter Smith (Mathematics & Computer Science, St. Mary's College, Emeritus) and Daniel K. Apple (President and Founder, Pacific Crest)

For more than ten years, a team of innovative educators has investigated and experimented with ways in which the learning environment motivates, sustains, and enriches the learning process. Creating and growing an educational setting helps faculty engage meaningfully with students. It is important, however, to distinguish the effort of establishing a learning environment from that required for facilitation, assessment, and curriculum design. The process of setting up a quality learning situation can be simplified by employing a clear methodology and using a set of well-defined principles and key skills. Such an environment is intricate and must be sustained through the use of assessment procedures and methodologies designed to enhance learning. This module shows how social processes, physical space, and learning tools must be combined using the "glue" of assessment to create a quality learning environment.

Need for a Quality Learning Environment

Most educators are aware that a collaborative, stimulating, and challenging learning environment can significantly enhance performance and growth for every individual, whether it be an infant learning to speak, a worker on the job, or a student in the classroom. It has always been important to structure temporal space, improve collaborative processes, and employ appropriate tools in order to help learners achieve desired learning outcomes. Every teacher is looking for those magical moments when "the lights go on" and transformational change occurs. A learning environment conducive to such breakthroughs definitely increases the likelihood that those satisfying events will occur.

Faculty and administrators are continuing to work at all levels of undergraduate education to find ways to improve the learning environment. Within community colleges, the learning college movement has illustrated the range of learning environments that are possible. Liberal arts colleges have consistently pioneered new and more effective learning environments to increase collaboration between students and faculty, using such approaches as cohort models, residential colleges, and paired courses (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990).

The Boyer report recommends that universities transform their learning environments to support inquiry-based learning, a collaborative effort among research faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates to address the following: "Many students graduate having accumulated whatever number of courses is required, but are still lacking a coherent body of knowledge or any inkling as to how one sort of information might relate to others. And all too often they graduate without knowing how to think logically, write clearly, or speak coherently" (Boyer Commission, 1998).

To achieve a quality learning environment in which the greatest growth is possible for all students, faculty need to follow a few key principles, as listed in Table 1.

Table 1 ***Principles for Establishing a Quality Learning Environment (QLE)***

1. Establish a high degree of trust and respect.
2. Make sure both learner and mentor are committed to the learner's success.
3. Get student buy-in very early in the process.
4. Challenge students.
5. Set clear and high expectations.
6. Encourage risk-taking.
7. Seek student feedback regularly by using assessment on a consistent and timely basis.
8. Measure and document progress and growth.
9. Create a collaborative learning space.
10. Create a balance between structure and flexibility.

1. **Establish a high degree of trust and respect between students and teacher—**Mutual trust and respect enable learning to take place. A successful learning environment must be learner-centered, knowledge-centered, assessment-centered and community-centered (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

2. **Make sure both learner and mentor are committed to the learner's success—**In order to persist in the face of failure, the learner needs to believe that the mentor is committed to his or her success. Conversely, a teacher is reluctant to invest in students who show no interest in learning. Thus, a signed commitment is often required at the beginning of the learning process.

3. **Get student buy-in very early in the process—**We know that students commit themselves to improving their performance through a number of different strategies (***3.1.5 Getting Student Buy-In***). A successful learning environment requires this commitment from each student before any content learning can take place.

4. **Challenge students—**As illustrated in ***The Accelerator Model (4.3.4)***, transformational learning requires a balance of support and challenge. There is a temptation for faculty to enable dependent behavior in students by an overemphasis on support. The goal is to provide an environment that will encourage and challenge students to live up to their potential and become self-growers.

5. **Set clear and high expectations—**Students' productivity is highly correlated to the expectations set at the beginning of the educational process in which they are engaged. In general, they perform to the level of these expectations, so it is important that they be challenged to achieve at the highest possible level (Wingspread Group on Higher Education, 1993), and that those expectations be clearly articulated for them.

6. **Encourage risk taking—**In an environment governed by high expectations, there is always the potential for students to experience failure on the road to success. When a less-than-desirable outcome does occur, it is important for mentors not to react adversely. When all parties involved in the learning process feel supported, they will be ready to take the risks involved in achieving genuine learning together.

7. **Seek student feedback regularly by using assessment on a consistent and timely basis—**At the initial buy-in session, after three or four weeks, after midterm, and whenever problems spring up, it is helpful to ask students for assessment feedback. This gives students ownership of the learning environment. It is just as important in a quality learning environment for faculty to regularly mentor and assess each student as it is for the students to provide feedback about the environment (***4.2.1 Overview of Mentoring***). Self-assessment is necessary for students to improve their performance.

8. **Measure and document progress and growth of both faculty and students—**The learning environment must include records that document growth and track the progress that has been made. Students need to see evidence that demonstrates that their performance is improving or diminishing. Otherwise, they will lose their motivation to work hard and put forth a quality effort.

9. **Create a collaborative learning space—**While the learning space in which we teach is often not under our control, whenever possible faculty should communicate to administrators plans for their ideal classroom. This is especially important when renovations are being planned. For instance, would round tables, rolling chairs, functional workstations, and state-of-the-art projection equipment enhance the environment? Even traditional classrooms can be transformed into collaborative learning spaces simply by rearranging chairs and tables or by leaving empty rows to allow the facilitator to move among teams.

10. **Create a balance between structure and flexibility—**The ideal learning environment is one that is well organized and conceived, yet flexible and responsive to the need for change. The objective is to support and encourage a free-flowing give-and-take between and among the students, instructors, and other people involved in the learning process, allowing for dynamic interaction (***3.1.2 Introduction to Learning Communities***).

These principles are helpful when addressing the following commonly mentioned learning environment issues. The first seven issues are explained, and the remaining ones are listed in Table 1 in the ***Methodology for Creating a Quality Learning Environment (3.1.3)*** with links to other modules.

Issues Regarding a Quality Learning Environment

1. **Shifting ownership of learning to the students—**While faculty would like students to be more independent, self-directed learners, many students come into their courses as passive, non-aggressive learners wanting the faculty to direct their learning. The quality learning environment is based upon learners' focusing on peak performance, setting their own learning objectives, and reflecting on their own learning performance to maximize both their learning and learning growth.

2. **Motivating students—**Many faculty are concerned that some students do not care about their learning; this attitude can demoralize their peers, as well as the instructor, thus degrading and depressing the learning environment.

3. **Diversity of learners—**Students today "vary considerably by age, gender, ethnic background, home country or region of the country.... "traditional" students are becoming hard to find" (Davis, 1993). A major goal of the learning environment is to set up a culture based on high expectations, challenges, and risk-taking which can support the learning growth of these diverse students.

4. **Administrative attitude toward valuing learning improvement—**Creating a quality learning environment often requires resources and encouragement that only administrators can supply. Lack of this administrative support can erode faculty motivation.

5. **Having students prepare for class—**Even the best learning environment will be rendered ineffective if students do not prepare for class. It is important to build into the environment a way to check preparation. Techniques include providing quizzes, integrating short in-class writing assignments into the course structure, and checking homework assignments at the door. Conversely, productivity is decreased by lecturing on previously assigned reading material, allowing students to use class time for preparation, ignoring work that students have completed for class, and issuing assignments with vague or unclear purposes, parameters, or due dates.

6. **Creating an assessment culture in your environment—**Recall that a learning environment maintains a balance between support and challenge. Assessment is often used to assist students as they struggle to learn course materials: it helps them to monitor their progress. Evaluation, on the other hand, is typically employed to challenge both students and faculty to higher levels of achievement. Ideally, the two processes are woven into the fabric of the course, used alternately to goad and encourage participants to greater growth.

7. **Who should teach which courses—**The conventional wisdom operating at many colleges is that the most qualified faculty teach the higher level and more content-heavy courses. Yet, research has shown the need to re-evaluate that thinking; assigning experienced faculty (as opposed to adjuncts and graduate assistants) to entry-level courses can help increase the retention of students, create a fully functioning society, and improve student success (Astin, 2001).

Quality Learning Environment Skills

The principles stated above set the stage for a quality-learning environment. Yet, participants in this process need to develop the following skills to monitor the effectiveness of that environment and continuously work to improve it.

Risk-taking—The self-confidence to put oneself into challenging environments that require an ever-increasing level of performance and possibility of failure

Following convictions—Consistently acting according to one's beliefs; this behavior builds trust, an essential component of a learning environment

Respecting—Feeling and showing honor or esteem for others in the learning environment; showing consideration for the different qualities they bring to it. Without mutual respect, creativity is limited, people avoid risks, and the likelihood of inducing quality collaboration lessens.

Committing to others—Pledging oneself to work for the well-being and success not only of oneself but of others in the learning environment. This is often done formally with all parties completing and signing a pledge or contract outlining the details of their commitment, listing the actions they will take.

Valuing process—Valuing the methods used to do something, as opposed to merely valuing the accomplishment itself. In other words, unless students actually see the value of the methodologies used (such as sharing, collaborating, and assessing their own and others' work) and openly engage in using them, it will be difficult for authentic learning to occur.

Quality Learning Environment Contexts

Although all student learning requires a supportive environment, the following contexts have proved especially important: first-year courses, entire programs (such as economics), academic skill centers, and faculty.

When one builds a quality learning environment, one must attend especially to students in first-year courses. Generally, they lack self-confidence, good study habits, and the ability to work together effectively. Each step in the ***Methodology for Creating a Quality Learning Environment (3.1.3)*** must be implemented for every class period of a first-year course, but especially during the first two weeks. Until students feel supported, respected, and ready to take risks, it makes little sense to expect them to learn in-depth content. A worthwhile goal for a first-year course is the significant improvement of learning skills and experience with all phases of assessment.

Once the learning environment has been well established during the first course of a program, it is much easier to recreate it in subsequent courses. Thus, it behooves program directors to help faculty value and actively contribute to this environment. Teachers of some courses, such as statistics for economics majors, find it particularly difficult to motivate students to buy into the material. It is best to treat such courses as first-year courses, and not expect that the program's quality learning environment will automatically overcome the lack of student motivation.

The learning environment in an academic skills center is different from that of a class in that the former depends primarily on one-on-one interactions. Thus, it is necessary to establish a positive learning environment

with each student from the start. It is important to work through the Methodology for Creating a Quality Learning Environment with each student, rather than hastily jumping in to address the immediate problem the student presents. Most students who seek help from the center need help not just with course content but with specific learning skills. Unless the center personnel focus on assessing and teaching students those skills, they are treating only the symptom and not the underlying problem.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to creating a quality learning environment in an institution can be found in dealing with the faculty. In some programs, the leadership has emphasized student-oriented teaching within their professional development programs, urging faculty to work as teams to build quality learning environments. In other programs, innovative faculty who are guided by the principles enumerated above are considered to be troublemakers, largely because they raise student expectations regarding the quality of their learning experiences. It takes great courage on the part of faculty, especially those who are non-tenured, to persevere under these circumstances.

Concluding Thoughts

Pressured by the demands inherent in designing courses and preparing classes, many faculty can end up neglecting or even totally ignoring the quality of the learning environment itself. Time spent incorporating the principles, considering the issues, and mastering the skills contained in this module will help streamline the teaching process and stimulate student learning growth. When attempting to implement the Methodology for Creating a Quality Learning Environment, the reader should proceed slowly, making use of supporting modules at each step. Much research has highlighted the importance of the learning environment, but we do not yet fully understand to what extent and in what ways this multi-dimensional factor affects student learning. By keeping that question in mind as we design, teach, assess, and evaluate our courses, we can report our experiences and expand the research base.

References

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3.1.3 Methodology for Creating a Quality Learning Environment

by Daniel K. Apple (President and Founder, Pacific Crest) and Peter Smith (Mathematics & Computer Science, St. Mary's College, Emeritus)

An effective learning environment has a strong impact upon a person's growth, development, and performance. In order to improve student learning performance, faculty must create an environment which allows for greater student ownership, responsibility, and control of the learning process. It is important to create this environment early in the course so that mutual trust and respect can develop. Against this background, judgment is minimized and quality assessment of performance is more likely to occur, ultimately leading to student success. This module describes a step-by-step process for creating a quality learning environment. It is presented first through a scenario depicting a summer orientation program and then followed by a step-by-step explanation. Other modules in this section provide techniques for implementing each of the various steps.

Table 1 ***Methodology for Creating a Quality Learning Environment***

1. Establish initial respect.
2. Start with no prejudging.
3. Obtain shared commitment.
4. Foster and support risk-taking.
5. Permit the learner to fail.
6. Set high expectations.
7. Establish clear performance criteria.
8. Implement a quality assessment system.
9. Document performance.
10. Continuously challenge performance.

Example of Using the Methodology

The context in this example is preparing a summer orientation session for new students to acclimate them to a learner-centered environment, as advocated by Bransford, Brown, & Cocking (2000).

1. **Establish initial respect.**

   It is important to arrange the group space where learning is to take place so that each student can readily contribute to the discussion or activity. Using circular tables or arranging chairs in circles works well. Another way to show respect is to set up name signs at each place that can be read by other participants. It is essential that no one thinks he or she is in an assembly process.

2. **Start with no prejudging.**

   When arranging activities, make sure all students are treated equally. For example, students from influential families, honor students, or athletes should not be singled out for special treatment; those eligible for significant financial aid should not be segregated.

3. **Obtain shared commitment.**

   Students commit to a strong performance on the obligatory placement and assessment exams provided as part of summer orientation. In exchange, program facilitators commit to completely answering students' questions and issues.

4. **Foster and support risk-taking.**

   Since students are averse to risk-taking, it is important to have them take initial risks within a small group. Use small group discussions with high performance criteria, but insert an experienced student as a mentor in each group.

5. **Permit the learner to fail.**

   Incorporate tasks that are challenging yet which allow students to fail, e.g., a scavenger hunt around the campus. It is important that the failure be turned into a learning and growth experience.

6. **Set high expectations.**

   Clearly state that you expect students to connect to the college, to carefully process the information and experience, and to come in the fall ready for success.

7. **Establish clear performance criteria.**

   Students will know they have met the orientation expectations if they complete the full registration process, give a strong performance on the placement exam(s), and complete a financial aid plan and package, if appropriate.

8. **Implement a quality assessment system.**

   Some components of this system include real-time monitoring as students work on the placement exam; pre-assessment of their readiness to complete the financial aid package; a process to assess issues that will cause problems in the fall; and an instrument to survey each student's interests and suggest to them opportunities to investigate campus programs related to these interests.

9. **Document performance.**

   The results of the placement exam should be communicated to students, ideally before they leave the orientation event, or as soon thereafter as possible. Students may be given a written exercise to plan their first few weeks of school. They should also be required to do a written self-assessment which includes the most important things learned and areas to focus on to improve readiness for college.

10. **Continuously challenge performance**.

    Most students could learn much more during orientation. Find ways to intervene so that students are challenged to perform the tasks more productively.

Discussion of the Methodology

Note that the Methodology to Create a Quality Learning Environment can be applied within the context of a single course, a cohort group in a program, a department, or within the culture of a college.

Step 1—Establish initial respect.

From the faculty perspective, it is important that each learner be recognized as an individual; for who he or she is, for what he or she can contribute, and, most importantly, to be respected for his or her potential to perform. Note that the focus here is on faculty respect for student potential to perform, as compared to respect earned through actual performance.

The more one facilitates student growth and sees individual successes, the greater one's belief that every student can be a star. As this belief is communicated to students through faculty actions and attitudes, they gain confidence in themselves.

When a faculty member is well organized, maintains a demeanor free of judgmental language and statements, accepts each student as an individual with unique value, takes on the student's perspective, understands his or her personality and learning preferences, and connects with his or her cultural values, he or she establishes an interpersonal relationship with students and earns their respect (Roscoe & Peterson, 1982).

Step 2—Start with no prejudging.

Nobody likes to be prejudged. People like to start with a "clean slate" that has no history or baggage that could negatively influence the building of a new relationship. This does not mean ignoring information that faculty might know about a student; it means not letting this information create a prejudicial attitude toward him or her. Do some form of pre-assessment to determine a person's knowledge and skill level before starting to work with him or her. Avoiding assumptions allows an instructor to approach the student with a clear and open mind.

In the case of a classroom learning community, the absence of prejudging helps relationships among learners, as well as between the learners and the instructor/facilitator. Defuse prejudgments, the more students are judged, the more they withdraw.

Also, realize that students are coming into the class with information they have gathered about the instructor—and judgments they have made about him or her. Students who are not prejudged are less likely to prejudge their instructors.

Step 3—Obtain shared commitment.

Best results will occur in a course when both faculty and students are "on the same page" with respect to their commitment to working together to achieve the course outcomes. A faculty member wants students to be committed to learning, to their community, and to hard work. Students want to know that the instructor is determined to help them achieve the course outcomes. This agreement should be made public so that there is no misunderstanding.

A quality educator must go beyond his or her devotion to his or her discipline and a strict emphasis on content to include a genuine desire to help students grow and develop as learners. He or she must get them to believe that he or she is committed to their growth, and to their success in the course and beyond, and that the faculty member has students' best interests at heart (***3.1.5 Getting Student Buy-In***). This is the beginning of creating an environment of trust, one that promotes growth without judgment.

Step 4—Foster and support risk-taking.

Most students are not risk-takers in the classroom. Past educational experiences have discouraged them from taking risks because of the negative reinforcement that often follows. In order to change this perception, it is important that faculty be supportive of risk-taking students from an affective or emotional perspective, immediately after an unsuccessful event occurs. For example, when a bad outcome occurs, an effective instructor congratulates a student for taking the risk and then provides constructive feedback to address the problem.

Faculty who care make it clear that risk-taking will be supported and not penalized in the course. They encourage students to "experiment and try it," not always doing what they think the instructor wants. Students need to understand

that their demands for affirmation, validation, and answers to every question will not necessarily be met. Working in a risk-taking environment also means challenging students to think critically, to affirm and validate on their own, and to generate possible answers to their own questions.

Share with students that entrepreneurial environments, such as high-tech firms, often encourage risk-taking in their cultures (SCANS, 1991).

Step 5—Permit the learner to fail.

Most faculty find it difficult to watch students struggle in a learning situation. Their natural tendency is to jump in and remedy the situation, typically with a content-related intervention. This serves to temporarily end the struggle and provide momentary success. However, be careful to avoid enabling behavior which does not allow for failure, and, in the long run, is not in a student's best interest.

It is emotionally difficult to watch someone failing in a particular situation. Yet the key question to ask in these situations is, "What action will produce the best long-term result for the person who is struggling?" Sometimes not taking action is best.

It is important that faculty not view a student's short-term failures as a reflection of the instructor's performance. Realize that when a student experiences these moments, it builds emotional resilience and increases his or her ability to cope and respond. Allowing failure to happen in small steps actually empowers a student. The "good learner experiments, discovers and is secure in his or her emotions, so he or she can take risks and accept failure as a frequent and productive event on the road to success at a new task" (Krumsieg & Baehr, 2000).

Step 6—Set high expectations.

Student productivity within a learning environment is highly correlated with the expectations that faculty set up for their students (***3.1.2 Introduction to Learning Communities***). In general, students will typically perform to the level of faculty expectations. Students will raise their level of performance accordingly, a principle advocated by industry representatives who examined the preparedness of graduates for the workplace (Wingspread Group on Higher Education, 1993).

As faculty observe students achieving at higher levels, expectations for their future performance increase, leading to setting higher standards. However, not allowing for failure often results in lowering standards to accommodate lower levels of performance.

Step 7—Establish clear performance criteria.

People in challenging situations which require high-quality performance want and need explicit and clear performance criteria. Students want explicit criteria so they know what an instructor expects: implicit criteria are of little use to students. Faculty need to avoid hidden or implicit objectives or criteria: lack of specificity erodes the trust built with students.

When expectations for student performance are high, it is critical to have clear performance criteria. Without them, students do not know what they need to do to be successful and are likely to rebel, stray off target, or disengage. Students want feedback that corresponds to the criteria so that they know how to succeed.

Step 8—Implement a quality assessment system.

Acting upon assessment feedback is the key to students' future performance (***4.1.1 Overview of Assessment***). Students want specific feedback to let them know how to improve, especially when performance does not meet the established standards. This information will have the greatest impact and benefit when given promptly. Over time this feedback can be replaced by self-assessment which then leads to greater student autonomy.

Assessment feedback should be given in a positive tone or manner and be limited to the most important points. An assessor should be consistent, complete, direct, and honest with his or her assessment. As an educator, be a "straight shooter" with your students; be genuine, not manipulative.

Step 9—Document performance.

A process-oriented course requires more effort on the part of students and faculty than does a traditional, lecture-based one. Faculty often think students are excited by the prospect of learning new subject matter. But in reality, students are far more motivated by experiencing and becoming aware of their own growth and skill improvement.

Students need to see evidence that they are making progress; otherwise, they will lose their motivation to work hard and put forth a quality effort. They also need to see tangible proof of their progress. Therefore, it is extremely important to document performance, both failures and successes, over time. By charting the trajectory of students' learning, faculty can help learners visualize their successes and learn to value the growth associated with these gains.

Step 10—Continuously challenge performance.

The implicit goal behind this methodology is to create learning environments that can facilitate quality outcomes. It is presumed that course outcomes include skill development as well as content mastery (Fink, 2003).

Growth occurs not when we are "coasting," but, rather, when we are challenged. For this reason, do not let students get complacent; continuously challenge performance. Keep students motivated by raising performance criteria and by challenging work that is mediocre or not commensurate with a student's level of capability. Realize that, by challenging the student to a higher level of performance, a faculty member shows respect and a sense of caring. Letting that person "slide by" with work that does not do justice to his or her potential is an insult to him or her.

Nobody can be at peak performance at all times. While it is important to challenge students, they cannot always be in high-performance situations. There needs to be some "down time" scheduled into the design of a course which can be used to celebrate individual and class accomplishments. Note, however, that providing such respites is different from lowering performance standards.

Concluding Thoughts

The learning environment created in most classrooms is often less than ideal; typically, it does not provide students with the optimal environment to support and nurture their growth and development. In courses that do, it may take the entire semester or term to achieve this result. Herein lies the problem: research shows that the key learning characteristics outlined in the QLE Methodology have a dramatic impact on student learning and growth. So, if faculty do not create an environment that incorporates those characteristics, and do so as early as possible within the course, they are missing out on an opportunity to reach and teach their students.

By researching questions such as those that follow, faculty can build knowledge about how to create and sustain a quality learning environment in their courses. This section provides a guide for translating this knowledge into classroom practice. It is recommended that practitioners focus on one question at a time.

1. Why is it important that we let students fail in order to set high expectations?
2. What is the difference between challenging students and badgering them?
3. What type of commitment does the student expect from the faculty member?
4. Why do students need and want clear performance expectations?
5. Why do students need to see documentation of their growth and development?

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Part 1: What do each of the steps in the Methodology for Creating a Quality Learning Environment mean to your group

Step in the Methodology	What does this mean to your group?
1. Establish initial respect.	
2. Start with no prejudging.	
3. Obtain shared commitment.	
4. Foster and support risk-taking.	
5. Permit the learner to fail.	
6. Set high expectations.	
7. Establish clear performance criteria.	
8. Implement a quality assessment system.	
9. Document performance.	
10. Continuously challenge performance.	

Part 2: Identify similarities in how each step in the Methodology for Creating a Quality Learning Environment is performed between: **A Traditional Classroom, and an Online Classroom**

Step in the Methodology	How is accomplishing this step similar in both environments?
1. Establish initial respect.	
2. Start with no prejudging.	
3. Obtain shared commitment.	
4. Foster and support risk-taking.	
5. Permit the learner to fail.	
6. Set high expectations.	
7. Establish clear performance criteria.	
8. Implement a quality assessment system.	
9. Document performance.	
10. Continuously challenge performance.	

Part 3: Identify differences in how each step in the Methodology for Creating a Quality Learning Environment is performed between:
A Traditional Classroom, and an Online Classroom

Step in the Methodology	What are key differences in accomplishing this step between the two environments?
1. Establish initial respect.	
2. Start with no prejudging.	
3. Obtain shared commitment.	
4. Foster and support risk-taking.	
5. Permit the learner to fail.	
6. Set high expectations.	
7. Establish clear performance criteria.	
8. Implement a quality assessment system.	
9. Document performance.	
10. Continuously challenge performance.	

Part 4: Making plans to improve a QLE for which you are responsible

The QLE I am going to try and improve this year is:
The step(s) in the methodology I plan to work on are:
The way I am going to do it differently from previously is: