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Evaluation of postgraduate healthcare professionals' learning in an outcomes-based curriculum.



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Introduction & Background

This study evaluated learning of postgraduate healthcare professionals. Their experiences, as insider stakeholders, are placed within the perspectives of their lecturers and external examiner, as external stakeholders.

Research Question

The research question examined in this study was:

How does an outcomes-based curriculum influence approaches to learning in a postgraduate programme for healthcare professionals?

Methods

Fourth Generation Evaluation¹ was the methodology chosen. Data was collected via interviews from students (n=11), their lecturers (n=4) and external examiner (n=1). This pluralistic evaluation also included curriculum analysis, allowing the findings to be understood in the context of multiple influences.

Curriculum Analysis

Using Posner's framework², the analysis revealed that key influences on the curriculum included Bologna, the Health Strategy and the National Framework of Qualifications. There was a strong orientation towards application of learning to practice and the alignment of learning outcomes with assessment.



Results

The conceptualisation of curriculum around 3 domains of acting, knowing and self (Figure 1)³ provided a framework to present the data.

A strong feature of the data was that there are variances in emphasis within each of these domains, from the stakeholders. The lecturers and external examiner give an external view looking inwards on learning while the students give an internal view looking outwards.

The findings from all stakeholders clearly demonstrate an emphasis on learning as doing (Figure 2).

Domains of Learning

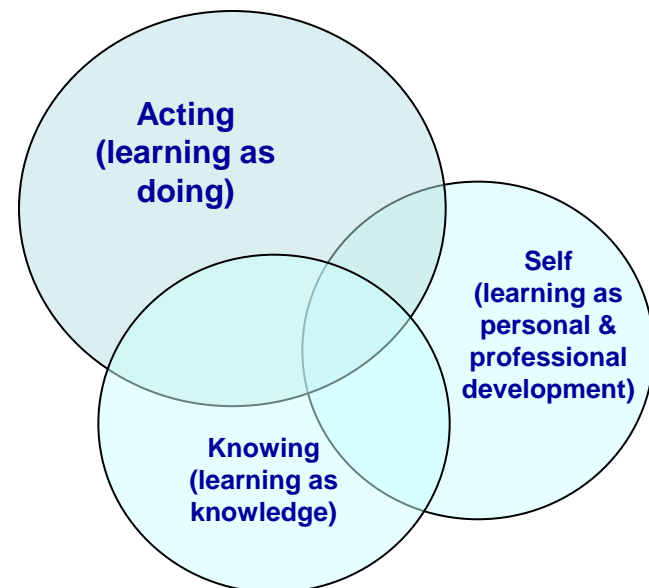


Figure 1: Domains of Learning

Outsider perspective

Insider perspective

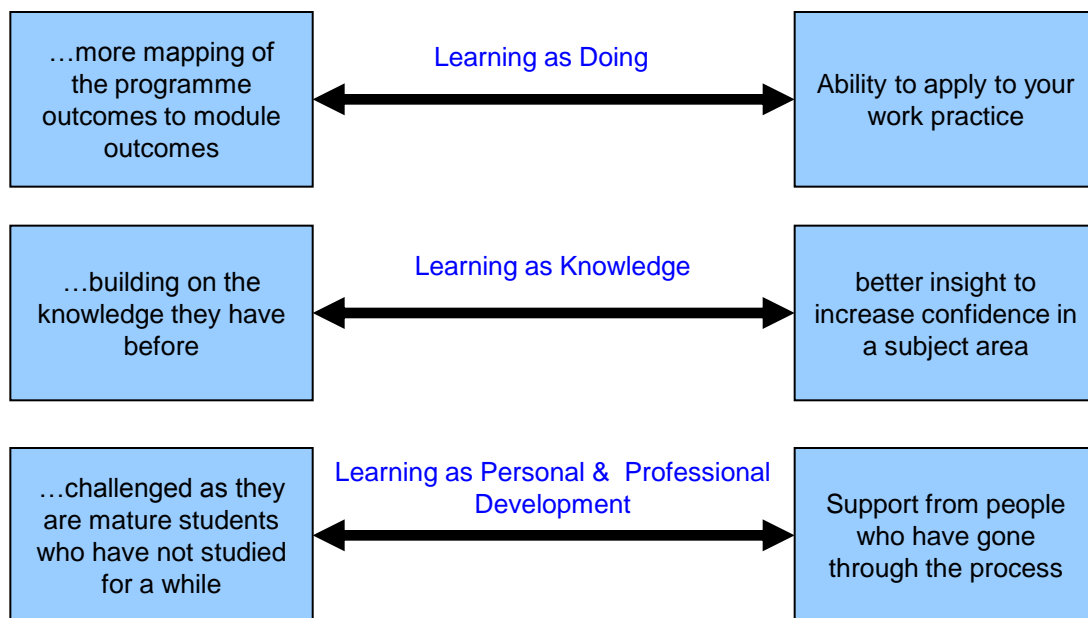


Figure 2: Outsider & Insider Perspectives

Conclusion

The findings suggest a need to better understand the dynamic nature of an engaged and living curriculum for postgraduate students with different learning agendas. The importance of a pluralistic evaluation in the context of the curriculum is highlighted.

References

1. Guba EG and Lincoln YS (1989) Fourth generation evaluation. Sage, Thousand Oaks.
2. Posner GJ (2004) Analyzing the curriculum. 3rd Edition. McGrawHill, Boston.
3. Barnett R and Coate K (2005) Engaging the curriculum in higher education. Open University Press/Society for Research into Higher Education, Buckingham.

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