
Fostering Student Partnership in Education – A New Model of Curricular Design.

Parvathy Krishna Krishna Pillai Sathidevi & Lori Goff
Research Summary

Abstract

Current research in the field of pedagogy focuses a great deal on the significance of student participation in the learning process. Often, this can be accomplished by giving students the opportunity to propose their learning goals, facilitating their learning experience through instructor assistance and enabling them to reflectively assess their own performance while garnering a sense of accomplishment from their work. Here, a new model of student wellbeing in learning is proposed as a toolset for course design that ensures active student partnership. A psychological model is transposed to a post-secondary education setting and its efficacy is demonstrated. The proposed model envisions student wellbeing as a construct wherein attributes such as superior learning outcomes, higher degree of role satisfaction and happiness for all parties involved are conducive.

Introduction

Engaging and partnering with students in education is an emerging research field of higher education pedagogy with four key areas of focus – learning, teaching and assessment, curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy, subject-based research and inquiry, and scholarship of teaching and learning.¹ Student partnership is a relationship which involves the development of a system wherein all participants are actively engaged and benefits are reaped collectively.² In fact, the idea of curriculum design gains pivotal significance in this regard as the creation and execution of educational curricula that encourages active partnerships from students would make learning more student centered and enriching. In this paper, a new model for curriculum designing which focuses on fostering active and deep learning of students through their constructive partnership is presented.³ By transposing these ideas to a post-secondary education setting, a novel model that materializes effective student partnerships wherein student wellbeing is accomplished could be developed.

Seligman's Model - PERMA

Seligman's model describes the attainment of a sense of wellbeing and happiness based on the involvement of 5 pillars that have the property of exclusivity by being measurable and definable as independent factors. **Positive emotion** is one of the major pillars in the framework that is about the "feelings of pleasantness" one gets out of an activity.³ Additionally, **engagement** denotes the 'flow' of an activity making one completely absorbed and engaged in that activity to the extent that all the emotional and cognitive resources that would have given rise to thought and feeling get used up in the process of being in the flow.³ **Meaning** is about having a sense of purpose and existing for the pursuance of it. **Accomplishment** focuses on the idea of achievement and satisfaction, wherein making progress towards attaining one's goals forms a pivotal aspect.³ Finally, **positive relationships** which form the last of the 5 pillars focus more on the concept of societal integration wherein the pursuance would consider the idea of becoming socially accepted to effectively connect with others which enables constructive interactions to be important.³

Method and Results

A seminar course that was administered to fourth year life science students at McMaster University serves as a model of an innovative course design that brought about a paradigm shift in students' learning approach and experiences. The course encouraged active participation from the students and ensured their thoughtful contribution at all levels of course administration. This course has been very successful in accomplishing a change in the mindset of learners about their own learning and teaching. In this course, student participation was ensured through surveys that facilitated truthful responses, in-class discussions, peer and self-evaluations of one's own performance and timely feedback sessions to collect information on what worked and what could be improved. In this course, the instructor took the role of a facilitator who timely prompted in-class discussions both in smaller groups and as a larger group by asking thought-provoking questions about students'

 Fostering Student Partnership in Education – A New Model of Curricular Design.

Parvathy Krishna Krishna Pillai Sathidevi
 Research Summary, *cont'd*

perceptions of their own learning and encouraged students to relate the information back to their own undergraduate experiences.

Discussion

The New Model of Post-Secondary Education – PRRA Model of Student Wellbeing

When translating the themes presented in Seligman's model of positive psychology to a post-secondary education environment, changes that reflect transition become indispensable. In this paper, a model of education in the post-secondary system that would ensure the wellbeing of students is devised as a four component system. The four components are *Positive emotion, Relationships, Reflective thought processes and Accomplishment*.

The idea of **positive emotion** is vital to any educational activity as the focus is on attaining happiness by being positively emoted. In the case of student wellbeing, it is about constructing a classroom atmosphere that fosters the development of positive emotions which promote optimism and positivity in students. This involves recognizing the hurdles that students face in experiencing such an emotion in their classrooms and changing them to make it better.³ Sometimes, the fundamental hurdles that students face in their classrooms have to do with the power relationships in the education system that they have become accustomed to over the years which make them passive recipients of information presented to them, instead of engaging with the material actively by thinking deeply and asking informed questions. By encouraging and ensuring active collaboration from the students, a shift from this authoritative and passive classroom environment becomes feasible.

In addition to this, **relationships** are another strong contributing factor that could ensure student wellbeing in the classroom. Often times, the design of the course might not permit opportunities to engage in team based learning through group projects or assignments. Instead, the focus will be on individual learning which would be assessed through exams and assignments that test the ability

to recall and regurgitate information. By facilitating more information exchange sessions in the classroom, development of positive relationships between the students and between the instructor and students becomes feasible.²

Additionally, the idea of **reflective thought process** demands significant attention. In fact, this idea encompasses Seligman's proposed ideals of meaning and engagement, and extrapolates the notion to include reflective analysis. In many courses in the post-secondary learning phase, students encounter large amounts of information in a rather short span of time which makes it hard to indulge in deep learning in an active fashion.⁴ Oftentimes, students end up engaging in 'pseudo-learning' which involves shallow and superficial mastery of the material with very short retention time. Here, the idea of reflective thought processes gains precedence as it presents the students with opportunities to reflectively and critically think about their own learning, find and analyze their sense of meaning and better engage themselves in the learning process.¹

Finally, the notion of **accomplishment** forms the last part of the model design. In many classroom environments, students' sense of accomplishment is confined to receiving a good grade in the course which can deceive the student to associate their grades with their mastery of course material. In this model, the sense of accomplishment that is being proposed involves fulfillment and satisfaction that each student ought to experience in the classroom and retain for a long time.³

Conclusion

A revitalized system of education that focuses on student wellbeing and active student partnerships could bring a change for the better. The proposed model of curricular design is adopted from the theory of wellbeing by Martin Seligman, wherein the notion of wellbeing is discussed as a conceptual framework based on five major pillars - positive emotion, engagement, meaning, relationships, and accomplishment which has been modified based on pedagogical research findings.

Fostering Student Partnership in Education – A New Model of Curricular Design.

Parvathy Krishna Krishna Pillai Sathidevi
Research Summary, *cont'd*

References

1. Students as Partners Model [Internet]. Macblog.mcmaster.ca. 2016 [cited 26 August 2016]. Available from: <http://macblog.mcmaster.ca/summer-institute/wp-content/uploads/sites/74/2015/12/SaPModel.png>
2. Students as partners. Higher Education Academy [Internet]. Heacademy.ac.uk. 2016 [cited 15 August 2016]. Available from: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/enhancement/themes/students-partners>
3. Seligman M. Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being. New York: Free Press; 2011.
4. Anderson W, Mitchell S, Osgood M. Gauging the Gaps in Student Problem-Solving Skills: Assessment of Individual and Group Use of Problem-Solving Strategies Using Online Discussions. Cell Biology Education. 2008; 7(2):254-262. doi: 10.1187/cbe.07-06-0037