

SEMINAR REPORT

“Innovating learning and teaching: the next phase of the Bologna Process“

HERE Annual Conference – Tbilisi, Georgia, 3-4 December, 2015.

Rationale:

Student-centered learning has been an important goal of the Bologna Process that has been supported and facilitated by the Bologna structural reforms. The 2015 Yerevan Communique, adopted by the Ministers of the 48 countries participating in the Bologna Process has put a renewed emphasis on it, and more generally on the innovation of learning and teaching. The recent Communique also confirms that change would have to go deeper than more structural reform: countries and institutions should enhance and mainstream good practice in learning and teaching and develop ways to evaluate it. This will require more collaboration with and between the higher education community, employers and other stakeholders but also awareness and sensitivity to the diversity of students. However, institutional practices, needs and opportunities related to the implementation of teaching and learning change vary and are dependent on the contexts in which institutions and countries operate.

The Annual HERE conference 2015 explored innovative teaching and learning practices, and what it takes to promote them within higher education institutions and systems. It also discussed how existing European and national instruments and structures support learning and teaching innovation.

Conference activities:

First day of the Annual conference was devoted to exploring many dimensions of the student-centered learning (presenters: Ramon Torrent – University of Barcelona and Manja Klemencic – University of Cambridge). During open discussions and very interactive communication with conference participants we exchange opinions and experiences of student-centered learning, also known as learner-centered education, which broadly encompasses methods of teaching that shift the focus of instruction from the teacher to the student. In original usage, student-centered learning aims to develop learner autonomy and independence by putting responsibility for the learning path in the hands of students. Student-centered instruction focuses on skills and practices that enable lifelong learning and independent problem-solving. Student-centered learning theory and practice are based on the constructivist learning theory that emphasizes the learner's critical role in constructing meaning from new information and prior experience.

The second panel making student-centered learning a reality and implications for the institution (panelists: Jose Gines Mora – UCL-Institute of Education, Sibylle Hellbrunn – Kinneret Academic College Israel, Mostafa Radwan – Fayoum University Egypt and Darya

Miron – Minsk State Linguistic University Belarus). The panel discussed the different educational approaches and changes in the classroom that need to be employed to make student-centered learning reality. This can mean new pedagogical approaches (e.g. problem-based and cooperative learning) or different types of learning spaces that will enable students to be more active learners, acquire disciplinary and transversal skills and develop into more autonomous learners. Student-centered learning puts students' interests first, acknowledging student voice as central to the learning experience. In a student-centered classroom, students choose what they will learn, how they will learn, and how they will assess their own learning. This is in contrast to traditional education, also dubbed "teacher-centered learning", which situates the teacher as the primarily "active" role while students take a more "passive", receptive role. In a teacher-centered classroom, teachers choose what the students will learn, how the students will learn, and how the students will be assessed on their learning. In contrast, student-centered learning requires students to be active, responsible participants in their own learning and with their own pace of learning.

During 'break-outs' sessions we had opportunity for rethinking learning and teaching in higher education institutions and to find of common understanding of pedagogic and didactic approaches which we used to enhance learning and how for in different countries does secondary education provide a solid basis for student-centered learning. Usage of the term "student-centered learning" may also simply refer to educational mindsets or instructional methods that recognize individual differences in learners. In this sense, student-centered learning emphasizes each student's interests, abilities, and learning styles, placing the teacher as a facilitator of learning for individuals rather than for the class as a whole.

Second conference day (first part) was more focused to ICT learning and teaching (presenters: Michale Gaebel – EUA, Ketevan Gurchiani – Ilia State University Georgia) and we had a chance to hear some examples on how ICT can support learning and teaching innovation. Among others, it was draw upon the results of the HERE Seminar held in Jordan and related Technical Assistance Missions. The high growth in education is increasing the demand for flexible and innovative approaches to teaching and learning in which information technology can play a crucial role. In an educational system "teaching" and "learning" are the two major activities besides "assessment" which is a coordinating activity. The Information Communication Technology (ICT) has a potential to transform the different areas of the educational system. During these sessions our focus was on identifying the challenges prevailing in our educational system and proposing the role of Information Communication Technology practices in its successful implementation. These sessions also provided some recommendations which could be used as a catalyst for promotion of information communication technology services in both teaching and learning. The second part of the conference day was focused on curricula design in the context of innovative teaching and learning.

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