

How can essential knowledge in higher education teaching and learning courses be articulated?

Sarah J. Stein, Rebecca Walker, Rachel Spronken-Smith
Higher Education Development Centre
University of Otago

Why is it important?

We are currently researching the effectiveness of our Post Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching to support the development of teachers in tertiary settings. Shulman and Shulman (2004) argue that there are five sets of attributes that may describe accomplished teachers: cognitive, dispositional, motivational, performance and reflective attributes. Like many PGCert-type courses, the intended learning outcomes of our course are bundled up into broad integrated statements and are not necessarily outlined as clear sets of knowledge, skills and attributes. Participants are expected “to be able to critique”, to “gain an appreciation of”, “reflect”, “articulate a rationale for”, “draw on relevant literature” etc. Evidence from our study suggests that, as a result of the course, some participants are more able to articulate their views about teaching and learning and talk about how they might alter their practice to better match needs of students, their discipline and their own skills and capabilities. However, the identification of the specific/ particular knowledge, skills and attributes the teachers have developed is proving a challenge for us.

What are the concepts that enable teachers to demonstrate these sets of attributes? Is there in fact a set of threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2003) that are pivotal or essential for tertiary teaching? If so, is it possible that those concepts can be arranged in a trajectory?

Answers to these questions will inform the ongoing analysis and reflection on our research data.

How the session will be run

After a short introduction to our research and some brief overview of some of the findings thus far, we will ask the participants in the group to consider what the essential concepts are that teachers in tertiary settings should develop. Brainstorming will be the major strategy used, either in small groups or as a whole group, depending on how many people are in attendance. A summary of all suggestions will be made. If time, the group will also be asked to consider whether and how the concepts they have identified can be put in some sort of logical order, perhaps as a trajectory.

References

Shulman, L. S., & Shulman, J. H. (2004). How and what teachers learn: A shifting perspective. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36(2), 257-271.

Meyer, E. & Land, R. (2003) *Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge: Linkages to ways of thinking and practising within the disciplines*. Occasional Report, 4. ETL Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses Project (Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh). Available online at <http://www.ed.ac.uk/etl/docs/ETLreport4.pdf> (accessed 1 December 2005).