

Quality education by means of a combination of distance education, co-operative education and community colleges

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A study was conducted how a combination of distance education, co-operative education and community colleges can function in an interactive model to enhance quality education. There will be a discussion of how the three modes of instruction, namely distance education, co-operative education and community colleges function. Special attention will be given to new trends in each teaching mode. Emphasis will be on how quality education takes place in each teaching mode.

An illustration of how the three modes can function in an interactive model will be explained. Quality education is an integral part of any institution. A discussion will follow of how quality education can take place in the interactive model. The question usually arises what is quality education, how is it measured and how is it assessed. In South Africa there are many students that could not complete their studies due to a variety of circumstances. These students must be accommodated. In the interactive model an illustration of how quality education can take place to accommodate these students will be discussed.

There are many definitions for quality education. Quality education has different meanings depending on who is defining the quality criteria and for what purpose. Harvey and Green (1993) made a systematic overview of quality definitions found in the literature on higher education. They distinguish five broad categories of definitions:

- Quality as exceptional
- Quality as perfection or consistency (zero errors)
- Quality as fitness for purpose (mission orientation, consumer orientation)
- Quality as value for money
- Quality as transformation.

There is no 'standard' definition for quality, but we need to choose a definition that fits into circumstances in which we want to use it.

It is often mentioned that educational institutions should be institutions of excellence. In the traditional view, excellence is often used interchangeably with quality. An analysis of how quality education and excellence can take place in the interactive model to accommodate the students that could not complete their studies will be made.

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1 Introduction

Educational institutions are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of quality considerations in proposals, delivery of teaching and research programmes. This is also due to the increasing numbers of students entering the education system and government funding increasingly tied to an assessment of the quality of the teaching and research programmes in question at educational institutions (Dowling, 1999:1).

In this paper there will be an explanation of the functioning of the interactive model that was developed and how quality education and excellence can take place in the interactive model. This is however part of a study that was undertaken to investigate the viability of combining different modes of instruction that usually function on their own. New trends in the different modes of instruction will be explained. The concept of what is meant by quality education will also be explained.

2 Trends in distance education

Distance education methods are used across all sectors of education and training - in general (school) education, further education and training, adult basic education and training and higher education and training. Contemporary trends in education, particularly the massification of higher education, are creating pressures for increased educational provision through distance methods. It is thus necessary that new trends do develop in distance education to accommodate what has been mentioned. Trends in distance education that have developed in South Africa will be explained.

The University of Stellenbosch has developed electronic classrooms to accommodate students who are studying by means of distance education (**Rapport**, 1998-05-17:4). These electronic classrooms are already in ten centres all over the country namely, Pietersburg, Pretoria, Midrand, Nelspruit, Randburg, Bloemfontein, Durban, Port Elizabeth, East London and Bellville. In the electronic classroom the students will see the lecturer who lectures to them from Stellenbosch on a television screen and they have direct audio feedback. In this way there is continuous contact with the students. In the presentation the focus will be on well structured learning activities, like selfstudy assignments and student interaction.

According to De Coning research that has been undertaken since 1960 shows world wide that there is no significant difference in performance between students that take courses by means of contact instruction and those that study by means of distance education. Besides the electronic classroom, distance education at Stellenbosch is also delivered by means of paperbased delivery, interchangeable television braodcastings and the Internet. It is however important that there are support structures in place for the students. This is only a brief outline of what is happening at the University of Stellenbosch.

3 Trends in cooperative education

Cooperative education is a teaching model that combines relevant work experience and study around preconceived aims by the application of subject content in the working sphere. At the same time the effectiveness and suitability of teaching is complimented by this integration of theory and practice. The academic and vocational

interests of the student is integrated with productive vocational practice (SAVKO, 1996). This explains briefly what is meant by cooperative education. Engelbrecht (1992:2) explains that cooperative education consists of two interdependent intertwined main components, namely an academic component and an in service training component.

Concerning the trends in cooperative education the following should be kept in mind. The educational institutions that offer cooperative education should keep in mind that the demands of the labour market (Laubscher, 1993:331). Experience training can be developed as entrepreneurship on the campus. More educational institutions, for example universities, should include facets of cooperative education in their training programmes. Improvement in the cooperative system can be achieved by compiling core curricula and the complementation of it by adding local content (Kleynscheldt, 1990:79). The role of the coordinator is of vital importance.

4 Trends in community colleges

Community colleges are community based and focuses on the local circumstances. They are bound to the needs of all the segments of the community that they serve. Community colleges are seen as critical needs resources for employers of businesses, industries and government services. Students make use of community colleges for training them for a better work opportunity or for promotion in their work.

Zuma (1995:123-124) mentions the following in connection with community colleges “colleges should offer lifelong education services for economic, social and

technological sectors through maximising and synergising a wide range of colleges, community-based education providers and specialised vocational institutes. According to Kellerman (1995:11) community colleges can be described as an important means to educational opportunities. Community colleges are not only a means to a better future but it also paves the way to a better future. Community colleges are an indication of a place in the community where people in need can be accommodated.

There are a number of community colleges that do cater for the needs of the communities that they serve. Only a few will be mentioned. Elgin Community college serves the Elgin-Grabouw-Vyeboom area. The aim of this community college is to empower the local communities. The programs that are offered are adult basic education, computer literacy programs, cooking skills (planning, buying and preparation) and the preservation of fruit. Bergzicht Training Centre in Stellenbosch concentrates on the training of students in the following courses, namely housekeeping, the caring of the elderly, catering and Educare. Protea Community college in Cape Town provides a range of courses for the community that it serves. These are only a few that make use of the community college concept.

5 The interactive functional model

This model consists of a combination of distance education, cooperative education and the concept of community colleges. The three have been combined to investigate how they can function together in an interactive functional model. The idea is that they should compliment one another. The study that was undertaken came up with the following possibilities.

5.1 Potential of the interactive functional model

The following possibilities were identified. The one possibility is where distance education and cooperative education function within a community college. This can be on the tertiary as well as the secondary level. The other possibility is where distance education, cooperative education and the community college concept can function as a unity within an educational institution. This can be an educational institution on the tertiary or the secondary level.

In the first possibility educational programmes could be offered by means of the traditional way of instruction, by means of distance education and by means of cooperative education. The programmes can be offered in cooperation with one another or interchangeable. Interchangeable means that for example for one semester of a course it could be by means of distance education and for the next semester it can be by means of cooperative education. It is important that the courses that are offered should cater for the needs of the community that the educational institution serves.

The second possibility is a model being practised to a certain extent in Australia and in South Africa. In Australia at the Central Queensland University the students in the engineering faculty are required to do certain courses by means of distance education when they are busy with their practicals at their workstations (Jancauskas, 1997:28). The students are given certain assignments that they must complete by means of distance education and at the end of their practicals, which are part of cooperative education they should hand in these tasks. In South Africa Technikon SA combines

distance education with cooperative education. Important is that thorough planning should be done. The student should be informed what is the aim of the course and how the different modes of instruction are connected to one another for the successful completion of the course.

5.2 Quality education in the interactive functional model

The question that arises is, what is quality education. Quality has different meanings, depending on who is defining the quality criteria and for which purposes quality assessment procedures are used (Verkleij, 1999:2). The traditional view on quality is 'something special'. Quality is related to 'distinction' or something of high class. This traditional view does not offer benchmarks for quality, as quality is recognised when one sees it. Quality can also be seen as transformation. There must be some kind of purpose for quality to take place.

Quality can also be defined as something special about an object that makes it what it is. Essential attributes about something to make it better. Quality education can be seen as education that is designed to appeal to students, serves the needs of students and is of such a nature that it will ensure that they complete their studies successfully in an academic sound atmosphere. Educational excellence for every child means quality integrated education (Barnhart, 1984:1703).

In the interactive model there should be flexible learning. Flexible learning is a cover-all term, inclusive of all forms of learning which, although institution based, do not follow a laid-down pattern but are adaptable (in terms of time , place, method) to

individuals or particular groups (Greyling, 1996:103). There is thus a combination of different modes of instruction. According to the **Distance Education and Quality Standards Framework for South Africa** (1996:41) there are nine elements of a total quality management system. There should be effective leadership, accessible resources, there should be policy and strategy and people management. The processes that take place should have an impact on society, there should be customer, that is the student, satisfaction and people satisfaction. At the end of all of this there should be results. It is important that all of the elements for quality management should be present in the interactive model.

For quality education to take place in the interactive model, quality instruction in the different modes should take place and there should be excellent study material available for the students. According to Rumble (1986:17) the study material systems and the student systems are linked to one another. Effective study material will assist the students in their studies and this in turn will give rise to success in the completion of their courses.

5.3 Quality assurance in the interactive model

At any educational institution there should be effective support systems for the students. These support system are contact courses especially for distance education, the availability of lecturers and counsellors . Holmberg (1995:104) emphasises the importance of effective support systems in distance education. He mentions that these support systems are necessary due to the composition of the student population who

are mainly people who combine work and study and still have other responsibilities such as families and other community duties.

There are different kinds of support systems, for example distance education institutions have learning centres where the students go for contact courses, lecturers also supply students with their telephone numbers, there is e-mail and the interactive electronic classrooms. Cooperative education has a mentor system, that assist students who have problems. The mentors also give advice to students when they choose their courses. The community college give support to students by offering courses that will be to the advantage of the students.

5.4 How the interactive model can accommodate learners who could not complete their studies

One of the aims of the interactive model is to accommodate students who could not complete their studies. There are different modes of instruction, therefore the students have a choice in which mode of instruction to take their courses. Distance education can accommodate students who are already working. In cooperative education they students have a practical component as well as a theoretical component. In their training they already gain practical experience in the industry. In South Africa there is need for students to be trained for vocations where they will be assured of a job at the completion of their studies.

The interactive model combines community colleges which means that the courses that are offered should cater for the needs of the community. The needs of the

community are taken into consideration. These students can thus take courses that will help the communities of which they are members. The interactive model should be flexible. There should be open access in the interactive model and prior learning should be recognised. This will make it easier for the students to complete their studies.

6 Conclusion

Currently there is a notion for the need for more effective means of education provision. SAIDE (1998:8) is often approached by institutions that want to move away from the conventional contact instruction to more flexible teaching methods of education provision included in this is resource-based learning (RBL). The interactive model is a means of combining different modes of instruction and accommodating learners who could not complete their studies. There should be quality education and quality assurance so that students can complete their studies successfully. According to the HSRC (1997:2) its mission is to facilitate problem solving and enhance decision making through conducting quality research in the human sciences. The HSRC mainly concentrates on research and development of human potential and this can only take place if there are sufficient educational possibilities for each inhabitant in the country. There should thus be accessibility to a variety of educational opportunities where there is a variety of modes of instruction and there should be quality education and quality assurance.

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