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Research on quality criteria in didactics and pedagogy

Partner 4- European Learning Network Ltd, UK

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Research on quality criteria in didactics and pedagogy

There are a number of sources available for open education resources across the UK. The largest perhaps is the Open University (OU) platform which also has branches and training facilities around the world.

The OU as mentioned on its website provides at least 5% of all its materials free as Open Education Resource (OER) and has around 8000 hours of learning materials in 12 subjects. Since its launch of Open Learn OU has had some 35.5 million visitors across 196 countries. It has some 600 courses available as free resource on its website and also has a course for designing an open learning resource.

The UK plays an important role in the OER debate because:

- the UK has some of the largest OER projects in the world, including Open University's 'Open Learn'
- the UK also has an extensive commercial educational publishing sector
- along with the US and Canada, the UK is a large exporter of e-learning services (http://www.unesco.org.uk/open_educational_resources_%28oer%29)

The debate about quality criteria in didactics and pedagogy is an ongoing issue among educators in UK and as Birgit Pepin (1999) pointed out the main underpinning philosophy of the English education system is humanism, with its associated principles of individualism and morality, amongst others. English education is said to be child-centred and individualistic, and the interaction between teacher and pupil is greatly emphasised. Furthermore, in order to understand the issues related to and the quest for 'quality criteria' a number of items need to be considered in the context of education philosophy that permeates across the UK. As Chris Husbands and Jo Pearce reported in their "What makes great Pedagogy? Nine claims from research" (2012) there is a strong consensus that high performance in education systems is dependent on the quality of teaching. Barber put it simply: 'the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers' (Barber & Mourshed, 2007:13).

In their "TLRP's Ten Principles for effective pedagogy: rationale, development, evidence, argument" Mary James and Andrew Pollard seem to corroborate the point that pedagogy is important and especially 'effective pedagogy'. As James and Pollard explained in their "TLRP's Ten Principles for effective pedagogy: rationale, development, evidence, argument", the effectiveness of educational provision needs to be evaluated by reference to the goals and values of the society it serves. Within contemporary Western democracies, three major strands of philosophical and political thinking on educational purposes are well established. The first concerns teaching and learning linked to *economic productivity* – and has taken various forms

historically as labour market needs have evolved. The second concerns *social cohesion* and the inclusion (or control) of different groups within society – this remains important within our unequal and diverse communities today. The third concerns *personal development*, fulfilment and expression – with a contemporary manifestation perhaps in the term ‘wellbeing’. The three are, of course, deeply interconnected. Indeed, the view taken here conceptualises ‘effectiveness’ as a mutually beneficial synergy among the three.

James and Pollard in their “TLRP’s Ten Principles for effective pedagogy: rationale, development, evidence, argument”, further highlight Brain Simon’s point which he published in his paper titled ‘Why no Pedagogy in England? (1981) that to develop effective pedagogy means starting from the opposite standpoint, from what children have in common as members of the human species; to establish the general principles of teaching and, in the light of these, to determine what modifications of practice are necessary to meet specific individual needs.

In terms of Quality criteria related to OERs there have been a number of studies and as Camilleri, Ehlers and Pawlowski (2014) point out when reviewing a set of definitions of OER and in particular quality issues they all:

- cover both use and reuse, repurposing, and modification of resources,
- include free use of these resources for educational purposes by teachers and learners,
- encompass all types of digital media.

Further, as Camilleri, Ehlers and Pawlowski mention due to the widespread use and access to OERs that the distinguishing feature of OER when compared to other resources is the freedom with which it may be used, reused and repurposed thanks to its open licence. Camilleri, Ehlers and Pawlowski (2014) continue that in addition to this freedom, however, the traditional lifecycle of a resource, particularly with respect to the processes of creation, editing, evaluation and use, is significantly disrupted. Due to this disruption in the steps needed for the creation of a resource and, the freedom granted by OER leads to a blurring of these boundaries making it difficult to pinpoint a definition and in particular Quality aspects of the OER. Camilleri, Ehlers and Pawlowski conclude that the involvement of many more actors in each step therefore means a federation of responsibility for each step, and as such need to include a wide spectrum of stakeholders who are involved in an OER lifecycle, especially for the Quality aspects of the OERs.

Husbands and Pearce (2012) in their review of research literature advanced the nine strong claims about the characteristics of highly successful pedagogies. They referred to pedagogies instead of pedagogy in order to capture the variety of successful pedagogic practices which differ across the age range and between subjects. These are:

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1. Effective pedagogies give serious consideration to pupil voice.
2. Effective pedagogies depend on behaviour (what teachers do), knowledge and understanding (what teachers know) and beliefs (why teachers act as they do).
3. Effective pedagogies involve clear thinking about longer term learning outcomes as well as short-term goals.
4. Effective pedagogies build on pupils' prior learning and experience.
5. Effective pedagogies involve scaffolding pupil learning.
6. Effective pedagogies involve a range of techniques, including whole-class and structured group work, guided learning and individual activity.
7. Effective pedagogies focus on developing higher order thinking and metacognition, and make good use of dialogue and questioning in order to do so.
8. Effective pedagogies embed assessment for learning.
9. Effective pedagogies are inclusive and take the diverse needs of a range of learners, as well as matters of student equity, into account.

In his “Talking about quality: Massive misalignment the challenges of designing and accrediting MOOCs” Brabon (2014) feels that in their current form, there is a clear disjunction between the purpose and suggested application of MOOCs. This has been exacerbated by media hype that has often framed debates about MOOCs in the context of either their 'massiveness' or lack of fees. However, what might be conceived here as their potential to foster low-end disruption and within a UK context, to challenge a £9,000 fee model, is misguided because the majority of MOOCs are not in their current form easily identifiable as part of an undergraduate curriculum. Brabon (2014) further argues that in the rush to open up higher education to new markets, MOOCs may be involved in exporting a specific brand of Western education that may not be as rigorously scrutinised as on-campus provision.

Discussions on quality in education is likely to remain a contentious issue mainly because there are many dimensions and as Gibbs (2010) identified quality in education has shaped both the politics of higher education and institutional priorities. In his ‘Dimensions of Quality’ (2010) Gibbs attempts to identify variables that could be validly used when comparing institutions, departments and even subjects. However, as Husbands and Pearce (2012) identified classrooms are complex, multi-faceted and demanding places in which to work and successful pedagogies are correspondingly sophisticated. Highly successful pedagogies develop when teachers make outstanding use of their understanding of the research and knowledge-base for teaching in order to support high-quality planning and practice. The very best teaching arises when this



research base is supplemented by a personal passion for what is to be taught and for the aspirations of learners.

Quality criteria in didactics and pedagogy might be a relative concept. What matters as Gibbs (2010) pointed out is what institutions do with their resources to make the most of whatever students they have and enhance educational quality. And as concluded by Husbands and Pearce (2012), truly effective practices depend on teachers making active connections between the ideas from research. The most effective successful classroom practices work these ideas together in systematic and sophisticated ways, and the best teachers are active in building relationships between them promoting learner engagement and enhancing quality in the pedagogical practices.



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