

# Capacity Building in Teaching Organisations: Innovative Peer Review Approach in Higher Education

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## ABSTRACT

Universities must be sensitive to the changing expectations of students and work-life continuum in the 21st century. Improving performance and teaching quality, enhancing learning experience and effectiveness create a more and more demanding environment for the universities, where students require better knowledge. It raises new kinds of needs for quality development. As an answer to the external threats and the internal opportunities concerning quality issues, the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics developed a new strategy, focussing on learning organisation and student satisfaction. We have identified “peer support review” as an essential process for reviewing teaching processes, ideas and identifying “catching mistakes”, as well as for improving the quality of the teaching service. We argue that a “culture of peer reviewing” is an important ingredient and a critical factor in order that quality improvement can be achieved.

## KEYWORDS

Change Management, Higher Education, Learning Organisation, Peer Review of Teaching, Review Process

## INTRODUCTION

Along with the widespread social and professional debate on LLL, a statistical indicator system aimed at the measurement of LLL has been under elaboration to deal with the support and accounting system of LLL within the EU without considering the social debate and its results (and as a consequence making the debate totally redundant) (EUROSTAT, 2001). The indicator system turns the notions formal/non-formal/informal into boxes where the different learning activities can be placed and those which cannot are considered as negligible.

It is generally agreed that education often has problems to handle the notions of formal/non-formal/informal in practice. The reason for this is that the notions of formal/informal are analytical categories while non-formal is an odd word logically. Practice does not concern analytical but empirical categories. Intramural education is an empirical category. Formal education is an analytical category which describes intramural education from a certain, maybe essential and determining, point of view – but not at all entirely. Intramural education ‘in the real world’ has several elements and characteristics which belong to the concept of ‘informal education’ but statistics will place it in the box labelled

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‘formal education’. Consequently, all that is not legally prescribed in the school could be forgotten or considered as ‘negligible’. In reality, the formal is inseparable from the informal though a number of people tried to transform reality, life and practice into a learnable list of rules.

Several other analytical couples of notions will be mentioned hereafter which are distinguishable but inseparable in one way (since the informal, or rather the pre-formal could exist without the formal, but there cannot be total formalisation). For example, every activity has intended and unintended results and consequences which are partially but never entirely predictable. Among the unintended consequences, there can be advantageous and disadvantageous ones, but the assuming of the unintended but inevitable consequences has always meant a dilemma for pedagogy, which, according to its definition, always aims at the improvement of learners.

Purposeful learning activity is also inseparable from learning as an inner and motivated changing process. Other purposeful activities are also inseparable from learning. Many different purposes could be attributed to human activities. With some specialisation, the accomplishment of some objectives can be improved but these activities can never be reduced to one single aim. We often say that work is not child’s play or learning is not for amusement, but even then, we mean that they are only partially different. (The Finnish LLL strategy is called the ‘Joy of Learning’). More precisely, the bad teacher fights windmills for this reduction while the good teacher builds this fact into the motivating system. And finally, teaching cannot be separated from learning.

## LEARNING INSTEAD OF EDUCATION?

The learning process is always a mutual effect, interaction and transaction between man and his environment. The environment is always the source of events and information (facts, instructions, interpretations, valorisations, etc.), which can often but not always be represented or simulated in models. If somebody learns to ride, sooner or later s/he has to mount a horse.

The only theoretically indispensable element of ‘teaching’ is validation (approval – disapproval), though selected and organized cases and information will no doubt speed up and ease the learning process (while raising other special problems). In this interpretation, ‘learning from nature’ and ‘history as a master of teaching’ are not only metaphors but also informal cases of education.

Of course, the school or a course is not the only source of communicative learning. Numerous are the professions and situations where many people make a deliberate attempt to inform, influence and develop others. When someone knowingly gives his/her mind to these ‘parables’, then all this is non-formal education.

Of course, teaching / learning intentions cannot guarantee the learning impact. There is always the possibility that ‘A’ does not want to teach and ‘B’ does not want to learn. Even then ‘A’ can lastingly mark ‘B’. But the opposite case can also happen, when common will and efforts are unable to yield a result.

And the suggestion that ‘random learning, i.e. learning occurring as an unintended consequence of other activities, should be excluded from informal learning’ sounds like the parable of someone who is afraid to pick up a ‘windfall’ because it was not within his or her plans. During the so-called ‘random learning’ (which is rarely so short that we do not notice it) at the very beginning, learning may be ‘unintended’, but at the very moment we perceive that we learn, we continue or finish it as a cognitive process.

The intentional can be distinguished but cannot be derived from the unintentional, like formal from non-formal, learning from teaching, work-purpose from non-work-purpose and learning-purpose from non-learning-purpose. Also, learning as a purposive rationality cannot be derived from learning as an inner process.

Example 1. let us illustrate the interpretations of ‘learning’ in Table 1 with the following examples (Grandstaff, 1974). This ‘early’ attempt, since then forgotten, finds obvious the mutual

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