
Quality

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?

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An activity taking on more interest and relevancy in current times in the teaching arena is that of assessment. Following up on the assessment theme presented in the Fall/Winter *Reaching Through Teaching* edition, this article is oriented towards a parallel topic - quality. The premise here is that those things to be assessed are the assumed good or desirable attributes of whatever is rendered. These positive attributes are collectively called quality. Indeed, the terms assessment and quality are so closely coupled from an evaluative or analytical standpoint that we generally think of them in their collective form, quality assessment.

An obvious question arises about the placement of responsibility for quality assessment: Why attempt to place responsibility? My response is that the subsequent assessment or evaluation scheme is dependent upon where the responsibility is placed. In the parlance of management theorists, the scheme can be focused, supported and accomplished in either a top-down or bottom-up manner. My assertion is that a bottom-up manner is preferred, because this approach does not connote an imposed set of requirements and actions.

Rather than focus on quality from an analysis perspective, which is essentially a vantage point from which one would expect to determine how to do quality assessment, the current perspective is one of determining who is responsible for quality. The assumption is that once the basis of an activity to be performed is determined and the key players identified, the evaluative process is rather straightforward. It should be noted at the outset that the approach taken here is somewhat different from one taken by those of us in management/decision science, in that we usually accept as givens the processes (reasons for being) associated with an activity, and subsequently set about analyzing and evaluating the effectiveness and/or efficiency thereof.

The following two examples philosophically explain how responsibility may be placed for the quality of an entity (element, enterprise or activity). The first example looks at quality from an organizational survival perspective. In this case the emphasis is on the customer who is required for survival of the organization. The second example is in the more traditional level of service vein in which the customer evaluates the processes of an entity and is subsequently the determinant of the quality. Both examples use hospitals and colleges as service-oriented entities in which the assessment of quality is highly desirable.

Organizational Survival Perspective: Colleges and hospitals have gov-

erning bodies (boards of directors, regents, advisory groups, etc.) which direct the entities. Assuming that the entities are indeed well-founded and have survival objectives, maintaining professional staffers is paramount. The more specialized the entity, the more critical the professionals. With respect to the relationship between the governors and the professionals, the professionals can be considered as customers of the governors. Clearly, in the case of a hospital (with the exception of a medical emergency) a person requiring medical attention will first of all summon a doctor, who determines if subsequent medical services may require hospitalization. Thus, the focus in terms of customer satisfaction, from the perspective of the governors, may very well be on the doctors, without whom there would be no patients. Similarly, governing bodies of colleges might well perceive high calibre faculty as a prerequisite to high calibre students. It should be noted that this example considers faculty as customers rather than as process. The implications and impact of this abstraction are discussed forthwith.

Level of Service Perspective: The second example is more traditional, in that it considers the customer as being anyone who pays for the service rendered. For hospitals, the obvious customers are patients. Excluding recipients such as not-for-profit agencies, small businesses, municipal agencies and the like, typical benefactors of col-

lege services are its students, and they are thus generally considered to be the customers. A key point for consideration here is the determination of who is responsible for the assessment of quality. It is generally accepted that the person paying for the service holds the provider of the service responsible for the associated quality. From a teacher's perspective, an argument can be made that the responsibility should be equally shared: teachers are always prepared to teach and the students are ready and prepared to learn.

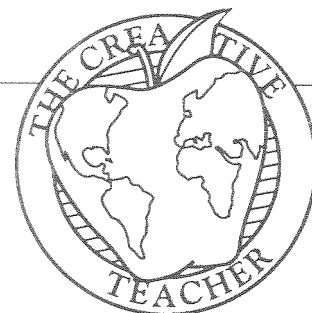
Placing the Responsibility: Both examples place the teacher as the focal point with respect to the assessment of quality issue. The first example focuses on the teacher because the teacher is required for survival of the organization. The second example casts the teacher in the role of deliverer of services. In a nutshell, quality, and the assessment thereof, becomes more of

an expectation issue than one of merely describing and/or reporting on what is being done or what probably was done. It is not quite as simple as the old axiom of building a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door, which can loosely be paralleled to a concept of preparing your students well, and they and your institution will be recognized. It is more like a concept of doing what is expected and the associated reporting of what was done is easier. The expectation here is quality, either from the survival or service perspective.

Placing the responsibility for quality on teachers is by no means a unique perspective. Indeed, it is a natural association in that when one thinks of an educational institution, generally the first thought is of teaching. Thus, the question should arise from teachers, "If I am responsible for quality and any associated assessment, what are the ex-

pectations?" Aside from discipline-specific guidelines, this question is a difficult one to answer. College, school and departmental mission statements offer general guidelines as to what type of students we should be producing; however, in an environment with as many diverse offerings as KSC has, it is extremely challenging to identify a "typical" KSC graduate and the associated quality thereof.

The focus of this article has been to support the concept that assessment, as it relates to quality, should be a bottom-up approach with the focal point being on teachers as the ones responsible for quality. This responsibility should be based on some well-defined expectations. Thus, yet another challenge is offered. That challenge is to go beyond existing mission statements and define what is expected of a KSC graduate. 🍎



THE EXCITEMENT OF BEING A SCIENTIST

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If I have been successful in my teaching at Kennesaw State, I believe that it is because of my approach to my subject. I do not think of myself as a teacher of chemistry, but as a trainer of chemists. I want my students to approach every topic in chemistry as yet another tool to use later in their profession. Most importantly, I want my students to revere the tools given to them. This, of course, is a "tall" order.

Physical chemistry is a highly mathematical branch of chemistry and, as such, is dreaded by most students. The traditional approach to teaching physical chemistry is simply to present it as a series of life's works. One of my pastimes is reading biographies of scientists and reading profiles of scientific discoveries. I use this pastime as a resource in my teaching.

I begin each new topic in physical chemistry by talking about the people who were instrumental in developing

the topics to be studied. I set the stage for the time. What was the world like then? How were the laboratories equipped? How accurately could measurements be made? I take my students to the edge of science in that day. What was known then? What results went unexplained? I introduce the scientist. How many years did he/she have to spend chasing his/her hypothesis? Who were his/her scientific allies? Who in the scientific community was against this new idea or theory? Now, I am ready to present the work of the scientist's life! Perhaps three pages in a chapter is all the text devotes to this work. But now the theory is not a series of dry equations, it is a creative, live piece of research.

Many of my students will spend their lives in research of a basic or applied nature. The greatest gift I can give them is a sense of the excitement of discovery—the excitement of being a scientist and of doing science. If I can communicate this excitement to my students, then I have filled a "tall" order. 🍎

CULTIVATING CLASS DISCUSSIONS

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Encouraging students to share their understanding and express their opinions of assigned reading allows them to take a more active part in the learning process, and promotes class discussion. I sometimes give students impromptu assignments which ask them to 1) report the findings of a portion of the material; and, 2) give their opinions of the material. Usually, the end results are a lively and controversial discussion and a learning event. This assignment can be adjusted to fit different disciplines, teaching styles and the students' learning styles. 🍎