
MINDING THE GAP BETWEEN SCHOOL AND HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: It's known that each person has their own personality, characteristics and needs. That's why in recent years educational systems worldwide try to answer them by focusing on each individual in the classroom. It is a slow and difficult process, especially in countries with more conservative traditions. However, it's visible that a lot of people are making steps in that direction. If the quality work in school is done, not only the quantitative, and the student is familiar among with the school material, also with his strong and weak sides, with his learning styles and skills, the transfers between the different structures, allowing him to continue his education, will be quite more easy and productive. But on the other side if there are some blind spots that role is passed to the institutions and the self motivation and control of the individuals. The biggest challenge here is in the universities which is being increased by the demographic characteristics and cultural specifics on national and international level. People from different schools, cities, countries with different interests, backgrounds and even religions get together to form student groups in which they have to follow their dynamics but also to chase their own goals. To do so they have to know how to do it and have some learning habits and mechanisms. To help their development or formation, various universities have set structures, devoted to the support of students' learning needs. They could be in the form of informational centres offering consultations, psychological support mixed with professional and career orientation. The services can be free or paid, on a daily basis or with advanced booking and confirmation, individual or in group activities, with professionals or volunteers. There could also be learning groups from students to students combined with individual tutors and in places even mentoring programmes. In some big, international universities they expand their support by helping with the accommodation in the local environment and offering up to one year assistance for getting used with the city, language, food, etc. These practices allow the students to identify and overcome barriers in short periods of time. Additionally, they could make their studies more focused from the very begging, reducing the time which the average people spend in their first weeks at the university to get in the daily routine, norms and traditions. In order to do so the good practices in that area should be promoted and used as a starting point not only for universities but also for all institutions and organisations connected to the field of education, encouraging the self-awareness and the need of life-long learning.

Keywords: education, higher education, learning skills.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015, 11 984 432 students have enrolled for Bachelor degrees or equivalent level of education (Level 6 of International Standard Classification of Education) from European Union countries according to Eurostat. They have been signed in programs of their choice and end up with unknown people and academic representatives with whom they are going to share the next three or four years of their life, in case they don't drop out along the way. In order to prevent that and make the transition to higher education smoother and also the blending in the new environment, some universities set specific structures and create organizations, to support the students in their learning and other skills.

INFORMATIONAL CENTRES

Besides a general information about the university, its structures, programs, deadlines, contacts, etc., in these places there are also services connected to the learning needs of the students. Although there could be and are differences between each institution, there are some common practices:

- Providing information connected to the activities for first-year students
- Keeping database of student organizations working with the support of students in their studies – general or particular for the scientific areas
- Offering meetings with professional advisers for consultations concerning their learning or psychological needs or their contacts
- Professional and career orientation
- Advertisements for interns and job opportunities
- Support for the selection of courses to sign in

They could be combined in one or function as separate centres or laboratories. The main idea is that they are there for the students and are open for their needs, ready to collaborate and work for the development of the individuals.

PROFESSIONAL ADVISORS

As mentioned above, they could be under the hat of some institution or be independent and offer their services only when they are needed.

√ Learning needs

In that case the advisor could help the student identify his strong and weak sides, draw his learning strategies, help to make a plan of their development or improvement, support them with the implementation of new ones and monitor the whole process. They could concern the student's general learning skills but could also be specific to his studies.

√ Psychological needs

Most often here the consultations are connected to the stress which students often face. It could be generated from the new everyday routine, exam sessions, peer students, academic representatives, institutional stuff, accommodation, etc. Managing that stress is very important because it affects student's personalities and influences their learning performance. Again here the role of the advisor is not only to facilitate the overcoming but to also help with elaborating new ways for dealing with it in the future.

The advisors can be free of charge or paid, they can have daily offices or be available only with appointments. They could keep only their advisor role but also reduce the barrier between them and the students, stepping into the shoes of mentor or coach and engage into long term relationships when needed. But above all, their main responsibility is to support the students in finding their inner motivation and potential and navigate them towards their development and independence.

STUDENTS' ORGANIZATIONS

The objectives of the student organizations could be and are very diverse. When it comes to learning skills, they usually exist in the form of tutoring and mentor programs. What is common between them is that the leading role is given to a student, rather than a professional. If it's tutoring, the student should be from the same or similar area of studies and support could come in the form of help with the curriculum but also with the different methods on how to handle it. The mentoring organizations expand the assistance by covering daily topics like going through administrative procedures, submitting papers, applying for scholarships, accommodation, etc. Most freshmen take advantage of services provided by students' organizations because in general the communication between peers is much more easy, comfortable and ice-breaking. What is more, it is also cost-effective because almost everyone in the cycle is there on a voluntary basis.

The work of these organizations has a huge impact on both national and international level by supporting foreign students studying or spending some semesters in countries different from their origins. In 2015, 206 413 students studied abroad with the help of Erasmus+ programme alone. They had to adjust not only to a new city and new people, but also to the culture, language, etc. The activities which are taking place could be in groups or individual sessions, depending on the actual needs and potential of the students participating in them.

FILLING THE LEARNING SKILLS GAPS

The practice shows that the belief in the capability of graduated students to know how to study, and that after school they only have to update and expand their knowledge in the areas they've decided to continue with, turns out to be only a belief. This leads to more students who are not aware of their learning skills and who engage in deepness with academic studies only when pressured. Along with the different output and incoming requirements accompanying the transfer between institutions to turn the above listed examples as vital for meaningful studies from the beginning. Usually they work for the development or formation of learning skills such as:

- Research skills
- Skills required for working with text like reading, taking notes, memorizing
- Writing skills – essays, reports, avoiding plagiarism
- Presentation skills
- Skills for learning from experience – from lectures, group work
- Skills for preparing and successfully passing exams
- Skills for evaluation and development of the learning skills

Which are the needed base to step on entering a new level from the educational system. By acquiring them,

the student could calmly focus only on their expansion and association with study or professional field and to focus their attention to the new educational content.

CONCLUSION

The proficiency in these skills not only helps for a smoother entrance and successful completion of studies in higher education, but also for personal and professional growth. Nowadays, in this digital and dynamic society, it is obligatory to quickly adapt to the changes which determine the role of constant individual progress through life-long learning. Having a variety of learning strategies and skills, combined with professional competences and awareness of the need for constant development, will assist the individual in facing new challenges and also to in answering the requirements of the future labour market.

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