Integrating the SDGs into Tertiary Assessment

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The 3700 L&T leaders from 160 universities around the world involved in the FLIPCurric project (Scott, 2016) confirmed the need to develop work ready *plus* graduates for an uncertain future and emphasised the importance of giving more focus to the moral purpose of our universities, including the values embedded in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In particular, these L&T leaders and the 19,000 subsequent users around the world of the FLIPCurric good practice site we co-created have emphasised that, before we look at ensuring the fitness for purpose of what is learnt and assessed - for example, before we make sure that assessment and learning align with course and unit level outcomes or ensure there is no cheating on assessment, we need to first confirm that what is being learnt and assessed really matters – that is, we need to focus first on confirming the the fitness of purpose of what students are to learn. All these practitioners say that it is a waste of time to focus on constructive alignment and assuring academic integrity if what is being learnt or assessed is irrelevant. If you are interested in how how best to ensure the fitness of purpose of your HE courses see the Program Level Outcomes Section of the FLIPCurric site.

In giving more focus to assuring the fitness of purpose of our higher education programs these higher educators and leaders say that, in the current age of acceleration (Lockwood, 2019), we need to be developing not only graduates who are work ready for today but graduates who are work ready *plus* for an uncertain tomorrow (Galbraith, 1977). So, what is a work ready plus graduate?

Work ready *plus* graduates not only have the set skills and knowledge (competencies) for performing effectively in current, predictable contexts they are in addition:

- sustainability literate;
- change implementation savvy;
- inventive, socially not just commercially and
- clear on where they stand on the tacit assumptions driving the 21st century agenda (assumptions like growth is good for everyone; consumption is happiness; ICT is always the answer and globalisation is great)

The key capabilities that enable the work ready *plus* graduate to successfully navigate with moral purpose those moments when things go awry or an unexpected opportunity pops up have been identified in our studies of successful early career graduates in 10 professions over the last two decades (Scott, 2016: pgs 38-39), and most recently in a study of successful early career family doctors in Canada currently being led by the University of Toronto.

The top ranking personal (P), interpersonal (IP) and cognitive (C) capabilities in all of these studies are, in rank order:

- wanting to produce as good a job as possible (P);
- being able to set priorities (C);
- being able to remain calm when things go awry (P);
- being willing to face and learn from errors (P);
- being able to identify the core issue in complex, wicked situations (C);

- being able to work productively with senior staff (IP);
- being willing to take responsibility for projects (P);
- being able to work in a team (IP);
- being willing to persevere when things go awry (P);
- the ability to empathise and work productively with diversity (IP); and
- being able to develop and use networks to solve workplace problems (IP)

As can be seen from these results, a large proportion of the key capabilities of the successful work ready plus graduate are personal and interpersonal. All of these capabilities cannot be taught but they can definitely be learnt and assessed by giving focus to them in real world practicums, projects, case studies of the most common dilemmas of daily practice in each profession and in simulations.

It has been observed that these top ranking personal and interpersonal capabilities constitute a set of values in their own right.

As noted earlier, being sustainability literate has been confirmed by the 3700 L&T leaders as one key dimension of being a work ready *plus* graduate. And we have empirical evidence that students want more focus on this in their courses. For example, UNESCO's research with students around the world in 2018 found that 81% students want more focus on SDGs & 25% say SDGs haven't been covered at all in their course

In the first session in this series, when we looked at the key lessons on change management identified by those academics who have been effective in embedding the SSDGs in their courses and assessment, I noted that 'good ideas with no ideas on how to implement them are wasted ideas' and that 'change doesn't just happen but must be led, and deftly'. What goes for successful ESD change leaders in universities and colleges goes equally for successful graduates in their workplace – both have to be not only sustainability literate (know what the good ideas for addressing the SDGs are in their particular profession) but they also have to be change implementation savvy and inventive.

Professional work is not undertaken in a moral/social vacuum; and we know our professional capability is most challenged not when things are running smoothly or predictably but when when things go awry or an unexpected opportunity crops up. Our research shows that the effective navigation of these dilemma moments requires all four dimensions of the work ready *plus* graduate and the top-ranking capabilities to come into play.

When we say every work ready *plus* graduate needs to be clear on where they stand on the tacit assumptions driving the 21st century agenda we are led to directly look at the key values that underpin the 17 SDGs. These include a commitment to practicing the golden rule (do unto others as you would have them do to you); achieving equity including gender equity; ending poverty; providing decent health care for all; caring for the environment; ensuring quality education for all; practicing responsible consumption, fostering peaceful and harmonious societies, and adopting a 'why don't we' approach not a 'why don't you approach' to collaborative change. And as Covid-19 has shown the SDGs don't operate in isolation but interact. This suggests that we need more focus on STEAM not STEM.

Furthermore, the key values underpinning the SDGs have much in common with the key values of the world's religions (Bouquet, 1969) and the top ranking capabilities in our studies of successful early career graduates.

I will now highlight what universities and colleges around the world are currently doing to build the SDGs and the work ready *plus* capabilities into their curriculum and assessment.

A key insight from all our work over the last 20 years on this area is that it is assessment tasks which show what students will learn not subject outlines because, for most students, it is assessment that drives what they focus on and learn.

So, what are some of the highest ranked examples of 'powerful' assessment that directly address the work ready *plus* capabilities graduates now need to successfully implement the SDGs and navigate the age of uncertainty and acceleration? They include:

- Social entrepreneurship capstones (relevant SDG projects can be identified by the local Regional Centre of Expertise in Sustainable Development). These typically involve transdisciplinary groups of students addressing real world SDG challenges – see The Enactus Plus site for thousands of examples.

- Capstones focused on the dilemmas identified by successful early career graduates in specific professions and how they have successfully navigated them.

- Practicums/simulations that focus on the top-ranking capabilities of successful graduates in the profession concerned.

- ePortfolios focused on co-curricular work around the SDGs.

- Undertaking SDG audits for the University's partner NGOs or companies.

- Interviews with successful SDG change leaders using the frameworks discussed in this paper as a guide.

- See the bottom of the search page on the FLIPCurric site for 200 exemplars x Field of Education

All of these forms of 'powerful assessment' are much less open to cheating or the use of online essay mills.

References and Further Reading

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