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How do they align?

EDITORIAL

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Mary Gobbi

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Student and Teacher perceptions and experiences: How do they align?

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“Just because you are right, does not mean, I am wrong. You just haven’t seen life from my side.”

Anonymous

Our last editorial debated the importance of viewing the world from different points of view and engaging with a range of stakeholders. This theme is continued by considering the issues related to the perceptual alignment of students and their teachers/supervisors in the day-to-day working of the institution/programme of studies. Of particular interest is managing the alignment during times of crisis or challenge. The first question is when, and whether, we would normally expect such alignment to occur. Programme designers speak specifically about curricula alignment, the alignment between programme mission/vision, pedagogy, assessment, competences, and outcomes for example. Significant attention has been paid to the concept of the ‘hidden’ curriculum and how students may experience something different to the espoused curriculum. It is also expected that available resources should be deployed in alignment with the mission, priorities, policies, and procedures of the institution or programme. These factors may be considered as forms of structural alignment, namely the visible and invisible signs and signifiers of the educational endeavour. However, we are also aware, as the quotation above points out, that students and teachers may not have exposed their respective ‘*life from my side*’. Consequently, there may be untold influences upon the experience of both: these may then determine not only their current and subsequent experiences, but also their interpretations and actions.

Many papers in this edition, like their predecessors, explore student/teacher experience and expectations. In so doing, they elicit perceptual differences and gaps. From a learning perspective, we are aware that perception changes, or is influenced by, culture, time, knowledge, experience, capabilities (intellectual, psychomotor, and sensory), attitudes, values, beliefs and conscious or unconscious bias. What has been evident in the papers investigating forms of online or virtual learning during the pandemic, and the transitions that are now emerging through hybrid learning, is that the domestic realities of learning and studying at home can cause new misalignments and inequities: raising questions about the deployment of resources for those with impoverished digital access for example.

Educational evaluation frequently captures the perhaps inevitable differences of perception from students at various stages of their programme. Academics may similarly be on a novice to expert trajectory with respect to their roles in education, research, and leadership. ‘*Life from my side*’ becomes a new reality with development over time - whether as student or staff-particularly when acquiring new responsibilities. Our challenge is how to interpret and respond to the qualitative and quantitative data that emerge from satisfaction surveys, educational evaluations, audit, quality assurance and research. For example, is it reasonable to expect ‘alignment’ of perspective when the trajectories of students and teachers are perhaps inevitably not aligned? Furthermore, as we now reflect critically on the organizational and educational responses to the pandemic, then perhaps we should look for guidance from implementation science. One example is Normalization theory which has been applied to complex situations. Earlier studies, summarized in a systematic review by May et al.,¹ focused on health care interventions; but recently developments by Wood have taken place in education and the model may offer some potential for planned change in complex educational situations.² However, as we remarked earlier, the programme team or institution, still needs to discern when to be concerned about a lack of alignment between student and teachers, and more importantly, what actions to take to prevent unnecessary misalignment and to mitigate inevitable perception differences.

¹ Carl R. May, Amanda Cummings, Melissa Girling, Mike Bracher, Frances S. Mair, Christine M. May, Elizabeth Murray, Michelle Myall, Tim Rapley, and Tracy Finch, “Using Normalization Process Theory in feasibility studies and process evaluations of complex healthcare interventions: a systematic review,” *Implementation Science* 13, no. 1 (June 2018): 80, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-018-0758-1>.

² Phil Wood, “Overcoming the problem of embedding change in educational organizations: A perspective from Normalization Process Theory,” *Management in Education* 31, no. 1 (2017): 33–38, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020616685286>.

The next edition in November 2023 is our tenth anniversary edition. In addition to the usual ten or so articles, there will be some commissioned papers reviewing the Tuning developments over the past ten years, with a guest editorial from my predecessors Paul Ryan and Luigi Filippo Donà dalle Rose. It is an exciting time as our new century engages on its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, with many learning points for the future. While the virus is still very much with us, let us emulate the caterpillar, perhaps it is our time to emerge from the chrysalis and become the beautiful butterfly.

Let us look forward to the second decade of the Journal and 2033 with a sense of hope and optimism.

Editorial Team
May 2023