

Title: Learning by doing: Faculty development for greater learner interaction

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What problem was addressed: In Cameroon, the predominant teaching style is didacticism, probably because a majority of the lecturers are either content experts or simply practicing professionals in their different fields. They teach the way they were taught and see their role as mostly about ‘furnishing’ students with knowledge. Didacticism has its place and it is “an economical means of transmitting factual information to a large audience, although there is no guarantee that effective learning will result” (Walkin, 2000). However, considering that teaching is “no longer seen as imparting knowledge and doing things to the student, but as facilitation of self-directed learning” (Tight, 1996), we need to develop in our students critical thinking, problem solving, and self-directed learning skills etc. The problem is exacerbated by lack of learning outcomes and the absence of a quality assurance system.

What was tried: A faculty development (FD) project was designed after conducting needs assessment using semi-structured interviews and an interactive workshop. A 9hour curriculum spread over 3 3hour workshops over 3 weeks was designed with objective to enable faculty acquire skills in the use of interactive teaching methods within the framework of quality assurance. The course had 3 units 11 topics, and was delivered using a variety of interactive teaching styles so that faculty learned by doing. Faculty conducted interactive sessions between workshops and shared their experiences at the start of the next workshop. They had to submit monthly for two months a reflection on one of their interactive sessions focusing on what was done, what went well and challenges faced. To evaluate our intervention immediate post workshop feedback comments on whether topics greatly increased participants’ knowledge and skills showed 71% ‘strongly agree’, 28% agree, 0% strongly disagree and 1% disagree. Analysis of participant reflections showed that interactive teaching styles were used, students were able to use different learning resources, learning outcomes were used and students were more active. Analysis of students’ feedback showed that there was more collaboration among students, teachers played facilitating role, there was better learning, students could make their own notes, communication skills and confidence improved and a variety of learning resources were used.

What lessons learned: Faculty in Cameroon eagerly embrace a faculty development method that emphasizes learning by doing. Reflection on their own practice was a challenge for many faculty, but one they were willing to try. The monthly reflections model created a safe environment for faculty to express their anxieties on use of interactive learning. We also recognized that we need to be sensitive to faculty concerns about using interactive learning with large class sizes, in rooms with immovable seats, and that students need more support for preparation for certain tasks. Follow up workshops to help faculty manage their preparation and in-classroom time are also needed. Finally, we recognize that units for FD and quality assurance must be identified.