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COMMENTARY

Avoiding assumptions: A simple exercise to create shared vision in the classroom

Justin T. Scott

Pensacola Christian College
Corresponding author. Email: scott.justin34@gmail.com

Kath et al. (2021) address a timely question, asking how I-O research can aid teachers with their students. After proposing four areas of research that could enhance the classroom environment, the authors offer a three-tiered process whereby teachers can implement new teaching methods. Although I agree whole heartedly with the authors' intent and applaud them for initiating this critical discussion, most of their suggestions are restricted to what teachers *think* students want and need. The suggestions are not wrong at all; however, they may not be as powerful as teachers would like, as they are limited to the assumptions of the teacher. I address this concern in the current commentary by proposing one simple activity to be completed prior to the implementation of Kath et al.'s suggestions. In fact, without the exercise, teachers could develop even worse relationships with their students than they had before implementing Kath et al.'s suggestions.

In this commentary, I explain how one brief exercise can enable teachers to use the tips offered by Kath et al. (2021) more effectively regardless of one's teaching area or mode of instruction. Because the timeline and delivery format of class instruction can differ greatly and I-O psychology courses encompass a myriad of content areas, the recommended exercise is described in its simplest fashion, with the hopes that those reading will envision how the exercise could unfold in their own classroom.

The moving target

Before determining what changes are necessary to increase the quality of classroom instruction, it is important to understand that quality outcomes are relative to the students in each course. How universities define quality of higher education depends on "current social values and scientific norms" (Hammarfelt et al., 2017, p. 409). To narrow that definition to something more operational, universities might conceptualize the quality of higher education by measuring the processes and outcomes (Harvey & Green, 1993) of a given course. For each class, teachers should ask themselves whether the processes in place help students develop the necessary competencies from the course. Without knowledge of the students' current norms and values within each course, teachers will be hard pressed to deliver a quality experience because the processes and outcomes will be hindered by expectations set by previous methods and learning outcomes. In other words, teachers are trying to hit a target that moves in every course, with respect to both their students and intended outcomes. Capturing students' expectations prior to instruction can equip teachers with the tools they need to apply catered processes and pursue quality outcomes.

As Kath et al. (2021) stated, teachers can easily slip into routinized behaviors, using the same template for each course. This behavior can result in attempts to condition students for the content, as opposed to applying the content to the students. The inevitable outcome then becomes a restrictive environment, which Fuller and Unwin (2004) found to be detrimental for employee

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development, and such an environment may negatively affect students' development as well. To dismantle these restrictive tendencies and equip teachers with the information they need to arrive at the destinations endorsed by Kath et al., I recommend the following two-step exercise.

The exercise

The exercise is possible whether the course is offered face-to-face or online. For in-person courses, it is ideal to complete the activity when meeting together for the first time. For online courses, the exercise should be offered as one of the first opportunities for engagement.

Ask students to provide responses to two questions:

Question 1: What do you want to get from this course?
Question 2: What do you believe my role, as your teacher, to be in this course?

This exercise provides a space in which students must articulate their expectations. To borrow from her work on aligning employee and employer perceptions, Rousseau (2001) discussed creating idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) that satisfy employees' expectations regarding employers' responsibility to fulfill psychological needs. When employers offer i-deals, a space is created, for employers and employees alike, to realize greater future benefits, or developmental opportunities (Hornung et al., 2008). Identifying student expectations for the course offers objective goals that can be paired with learning outcomes. Additionally, expectations about the teacher's role help identify optimal processes whereby quality outcomes can be reached. Kath et al.'s (2021) suggestions could be implemented regardless of the target in mind; but for teachers to offer students a quality classroom experience, the appropriate processes and outcomes should be targeted. Targeting what teachers assume to be students' desired methods of development, inclusion, and teamwork implies that teachers already know the exact outcome that students want to obtain. Peering into students' expectations and perceived obligations helps slow down the moving target that teachers hope to hit. Students' responses to question 1 illuminate objective outcomes, and their responses to question 2 highlight invaluable tips for devising processes to reach those outcomes. Both are detailed further below.

Expectations as outcomes

When students offer their expectations for a course, teachers can frame learning outcomes in a more congruent fashion. Kath et al. (2021) encouraged teachers to create a shared vision with students, which implies that students take part in creating at least a portion of the vision. This "cocreation" process (Dollinger et al., 2018) depicts the critical role for which teachers *and students* are responsible. Without input from both groups, students' and teachers' mental images of course outcomes may lack the congruence necessary to be described as a shared vision (Antonakis et al., 2011). Teachers understand the learning outcomes and are responsible for meeting those outcomes. However, before teachers can cocreate a vision with students, they must understand the outcomes that students wish to obtain by the end of the course. Additionally, although many undergraduate courses have some form of prerequisites, students have unique skillsets and diverse backgrounds that affect their classroom performance (Dahlke et al., 2019). Uncovering what students expect to learn indirectly reveals what they *do not* want to learn, which offers insights into the areas that teachers should or should not emphasize. To assume that all students pursue a singular outcome with a singular method ignores the diverse capabilities represented by the students in each course. Therefore, students' answers to question 1 provide teachers with not only a gauge of students' desired outcomes but also the unique origin point for pursuing those outcomes, which enables teachers to create a truly *shared* vision of the outcome that students can—and want—to cocreate during the course.

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Obligations as processes

When students offer their expectations for the teacher's role, teachers can organize the class processes more effectively because they understand more about the specific students in the course. DeRue and Ashford (2010) theorized that the leader–follower relationship is a process of cocreation, and Olencevicius and Dilling-Hansen (2019) found that employees' perceptions of how managers should treat them significantly affected employees' satisfaction and perception of feedback. Stretching that phenomenon to students is not difficult. Simply assume that successful student development depends, at least in part, on how students *expect* the teacher to help them develop. Without hearing those expectations from the student, teachers can only guess what students expect. For example, one student might expect regular feedback, whereas another student might feel agitated by regular feedback. Using the same method to give feedback to those students might yield different results. If teachers know how and when students expect to receive developmental guidance, they can provide a feedback-rich environment, which significantly affects students' perceptions of the validity of the feedback (Kinicki et al., 2004). Similarly, because opinion-seeking increases employees' perceptions of procedural justice (McFarlin & Sweeney, 1996), the same gesture could help teachers navigate the challenges that are associated with pointing out students' opportunities for growth. Instead of trying to transform diverse students using singular methods with which a teacher is most comfortable, teachers can use students' answers to question 2 to gauge what the students need throughout their growth process, thereby equipping the teachers with the tools that are necessary to meet those needs.

Conclusion

Kath et al. (2021) started a critical discussion and offered exceptional tips for creating more congruence between what we practice and what we preach. However, as helpful as the tips are, their success might be constrained by teachers' routinized behaviors that are limited by personal preferences. To truly realize the benefits of Kath et al.'s tips, teachers must tap into the wealth of information in front of them: students. By collecting responses to the two questions mentioned in this article, teachers can take better aim at the moving target of quality instruction and develop processes that guide students to appropriate outcomes. If teachers perform the brief exercise at the beginning of each class, they can use students' responses to help implement Kath et al.'s tips. In short, teachers should

- Avoid the guesswork that is associated with "feeling out" each new group of students.
- Ask them what they expect, then exceed those expectations.

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