Matching – reflecting on strengths for excellence

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Excellence requires autonomy

In Honours College Geosciences students are free to discover and follow their passions and ambitions to evoke excellent performances. Students thus need to develop their reflective skills to make choices that match their ambitions.

Matching

Each year staff and students evaluate whether students and programme still match. Do students still align with the vision and educational attainments of Honours College Geosciences and can students identify all opportunities to follow their interests and ambitions? Students therefore submit a reflective portfolio that demonstrates their progress.

Intervention: workshops

Context: small groups (10-15 students), individual and peer feedback, skills training, 3 workshops a year.

Workshops focused on three topics:

1 Learning to reflect and communicate with a focus on personal leadership: the ability to make adequate choices.

2 Gaining knowledge and skills about developing one's strengths.

3 Matching personal strengths to personal ambitions and matching one's contribution to the Honours College Geosciences.

Focus on personal strengths

Workshops based on two principles:

1 Each individual's greatest room for growth and **excellence** lies with improving strengths instead of investing in weaknesses. [Gallup Organization]

2 Discovering coherence between personal strengths and ambitions addresses **intrinsic motivation** (autonomy, mastery and purpose). [Self Determination Theory]

The workshops focused on supporting students in **matching** who they are to how they (re)act (mastery), to what really matters to them (purpose) and to the choices they make as a result of this (autonomy).

Results

1 Students appreciated the focus on their strengths and talents. For many of them this meant a new perspective on reflection and personal growth: from weakness and failure to success and to facing challenges relying on strengths and talent.

"I did not know that you can look at it from this perspective", "Usually I focus on what I can *not* accomplish", "I did not know that one can use one's talents to learn skills or to gather new knowledge". (quotes from portfolios)

2 Their portfolios demonstrate that students learn to reflect on their future from the perspective of their strengths and with a focus on their personal ambitions, values and beliefs.

"Students can point out their strengths and say what they want to achieve. They do this in a very convincing way I do not usually come across." (teacher's quote)

3 Students learn to set tangible and practical learning goals that both matter to them and relate to who they are.

"As an honours student I have learned to expand my horizon and follow my ambition. I no longer sit back and wait but let my eagerness to learn guide me. I translate my dreams into (research)projects. By being decisive and by taking initiative, I grow personally and can add value to my environment. I want to create an ambitious setting where enthusiasm grows and where cooperation and mutual appreciation flourish." (quote from portfolio)

"Judging from their portfolios it seems that the workshops have helped students with their reflective skills. When describing who they are and what their strengths, their aims, planning and personal growth were, they refer to the experiences and outcomes of the workshops." (teacher's quote)

4 Students appreciate personal supervision and (peer) feedback, it stimulates not just their quest for self awareness but contributes to community building as well.

Conclusion & Discussion

· **Reflection stimulates involvement and leadership.**

· **Reflection provides coherence between personal strengths, ambitions and educational attainments and opportunities set by Honours College Geosciences – a twofold match.**

· **Matching is a process of continuous reflection.**

· **A community is necessary for reflection - practising with reflection and peer feedback will strengthen the community.**