

Seminar "Research-Based Education at BA, MA and PhD level", Yerevan, Armenia, 9 - 10 July 2012

<http://yerevan2012.bolognaexperts.net>

Firstly, it is a pleasure to report on the very good organization of the local NTO and hosts. It was also more productive than most previous seminars in that we share a common education/research culture with the countries represented at this event, though not without our differences. The two-day seminar, of which I missed much of the first day due to a problem with the flight, included good keynote speakers, interesting presentations/panels and a few sessions on the interesting Armenian history and culture. As usual there was insufficient time for structured discussion.

Rather than report on individual sessions I present here my collective reflections, in no order to the sessions. I will be happy to expand on any point as needed.

Overall, speakers attempted to see how the traditional Humboldtian model of research and education fits into the Bologna model. In particular speakers sought to examine to what degree are students taught to be responsible people, well prepared in human studies; world learning, global citizens? Do they possess skills in scientific and critical thought; problem based learning via integrating teaching and research? Are we providing integrated learning?

It was felt that students attitudes towards bologna may be characterized as being too rigid, over specialized; lacking of interest; lacking in flexibility; lacking of support by faculty and administration and exemplified by fragmented programs. As far as professors are concerned there is a perceived lack of student motivation; students come to university ill-prepared and they are job-oriented. In these senses Bologna goes against strict Humboldtian thinking. Regarding official university posturing, it was reported (from the University of Vienna) that many students do not take exams, or pass them; master students take much longer than two years to complete their studies; increasingly, phd students are not serious about study. Humboldt is core to professors' desires. Students too want Humboldtian freedom, independence, discipline, motivation and autonomy in study programs. Students and professors do not like Bologna.

It was stressed by many that students at the BA level must know the how and why; the reasons things work. They need to know how scientists reach conclusions. At the MA level, students must engage in research; problem-solving skills need to be acquired; the capacity for independent work must be established.

At our institutions we need to develop communities of knowledge via communication technologies. Students should be integrated into the university research work force; they need not intern outside of the institution. This could be internal community service. Internal internships would be productive. Individualized education is needed; it is a coming trend.

I stressed the concern about Bologna as Individualization vs Bologna harmonization; Innovation vs rigidity, conformity. I suggested that in Israel we would be slow to adopt the rigid elements of Bologna; perhaps quick to adopt some of the specific mobility-facilitating tools. I asked if there is open debate on these issues. I also asked if this is what Europe needs in a time of lagging innovation and financial vitality. My concerns were appreciated. A lack of open debate/discussion was acknowledged.

There is consensus that learning must be experiential, rooted in the real world.

More and more we are education towards career-driven education.

We are outcomes-based, needing to provide different and varied skill sets; competencies are keys to success. Evaluation must be ongoing. Student feedback is critically important.

Research-based education is central to our missions.

With all the talk about research, skills and competencies I asked where does human sciences fit into this discussion? It was agreed that these disciplines should not be ignored and that they may be found in the need to teach the skills of argument, debate, language, logic and more.

I asked whether or not we were limiting the discussion by terming it "research-based". Is research-based learning and experiential learning the same thing I wondered? At undergrad level? All stressed the need for creativity asked if that could be learned or at best nurtured? Similarly for Improvisation and Imagination. By stressing experiential learning I posited we could foster an environment that stresses process and procedure; Team work, peer work; Critical thinking; Risk taking and also Independent work. Do we need only researchers in this field, I asked? What about practitioners; The do'ers – industrial stakeholders. I posited that, for example, I could not imagine an MBA program with only PhD-holders teaching the courses, or a law program without practicing lawyers and judges.

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