RETHINKING EPISTEMIC VIRTUE
A Practical Example from the Leiden Pre-University Excellence Program

Jan Sleutels and Annebeth Simonsz (Leiden University, The Netherlands)

Abstract for Re:thinking Giftedness. Giftedness in the Digital Age. 14th International Conference of the European Council for High Ability (ECHA), Ljubljana, Slovenia, Sept. 17-20, 2014.

Academic skills and attitude are commonly understood in terms of epistemic virtues pertaining to individual students, as qualities of individual cognitive performance to be cultivated by students (e.g., accuracy, logical rigour, knowledgeability, independence, lucidity, critical sense). Over the past decade, however, traditional virtues seem to be losing their appeal for younger generations. To members of the Net Generation the value of qualities such as knowledgeability or independence is no longer self-evident.

We argue that changing technological landscapes call for new epistemic virtues. In the context of individual agents trying to maximize return on private cognitive capital, teaching strategies for stocking up the individual made sense. The Net Generation's context is different, however: shared cognitive capital is created in a process of communication and collaboration between changing groups of agents pursuing many different interests. This calls for a recalibration of epistemic virtue, which no longer pertains primarily to individual agents, but rather to groups of collaborating agents.

We applied this theoretical perspective ('cognitive integration') when redesigning part of the curriculum of Leiden Pre-University College, a two-year excellence program for qualifying students in Dutch secondary education. The program's final module, aimed at fostering academic attitude and enhancing reflective skills, was redesigned to step up its effectiveness. The old format focused on cultivating individual excellence and assessing individual performance. It was replaced by a system of learning activities for cultivating communication and collaboration, with students working in groups, in pairs, and individually, using a system of formative and largely autonomous assessment. Moreover, students were explicitly challenged to reflect on the nature of science in a digitalizing world ('Science 2.0'), thus enhancing their self-awareness as members of the Net Generation.

We will share our experiences with the new set-up, which had its first two runs in 2013 and 2014.

Literature

Brown, S., & Glasner, A., Eds. (1999), *Assessment Matters in Higher Education. Choosing and Using Diverse Approaches* (Buckingham, UK, reprint 2011: SRHE & Open University Press).

Bryan, C., & Clegg, K., Eds. (2006), *Innovative Assessment in Higher Education* (London: Routledge).

Lombardi, M.M., *Authentic Learning for the 21st Century. An Overview* (Educause Learning Initiative, Paper 1, May 2007). URL: http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI3009.pdf

Menary, Richard (2007), *Cognitive integration. Mind and cognition unbounded* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

Tapscott, Don (2009), *Grown up digital. How the Net Generation is changing your world* (New York/London: McGraw Hill).

Correspondence: Annebeth Simonsz, Honours Academy, Leiden University, P.O. Box 331, 2300 AH Leiden, The Netherlands. Email: a.simonsz@iclon.leidenuniv.nl