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The Essentials

APRIL 2024

TEACHING DURABLE SKILLS: AN INTENTIONAL APPROACH

Durable skills are universally valued but not universally taught.

There is no disputing the value of durable skills, which include competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. By definition, durable skills are transferable across contexts, and resilient regardless of technological and sectoral evolution.

Over 70% of executives surveyed by LinkedIn last year said skills like communication and critical thinking were more important to their organizations than highly technical skills. Communication, specifically, is the most in-demand skill across 1 billion LinkedIn users.

As AI continues to disrupt the labor market, durable skills will become even more important for students to thrive. Rapidly evolving technology will render many of the technical skills students learn obsolete by the time they enter the workforce. In addition, young workers are spending less time in each job, reducing their ability to amass role-specific experience.

Most higher education leaders say that their colleges and universities teach durable skills. Yet, most educators find it difficult to show precisely where these skills are taught within the curriculum. The imperative is clear—durable skills need to be prioritized and taught in systematic, integrated ways.

To facilitate learning across contexts, durable skills must be integrated and reinforced throughout the curriculum.

Decide which durable skills to teach based on institutional values and educational goals. Intentionally focus on skills that are useful in a rapidly changing global context, including social, political, environmental, economic, and technological shifts. For example, understanding the core principles of data structures and algorithms is more important than fluency in a particular coding language.

Define specific skills and organize them in a hierarchy. Articulate a learning taxonomy, which is a hierarchy of the skills students will learn, accompanied by short definitions for each. Teaching critical thinking requires clearly defining the components of how to think critically (e.g., decision-making and reasoning). Crucial skills should be introduced early, so that all students have a foundation and shared language they can build upon with more specialized skills.

Create a curriculum map and the internal infrastructure to support it. A visual representation helps ensure that skills appear multiple times throughout the learning journey, being introduced, reinforced, and applied as learning progresses. By intentionally integrating durable skills across the learning experience, knowledge application can be tracked across departments, courses, and experiences.

Train faculty to rethink how they develop lesson plans and assignments. Consider integrating six to ten learning outcomes in each course per semester, and developing assignments aligned with those outcomes. Use this as an opportunity to reframe the instructional approach to be student-centered.

Develop a system of assessment that directly evaluates durable skills. An effective assessment system for durable skills ensures that learning outcomes are formatively evaluated in context and uses clear learning outcomes and scoring rubrics that repeat across courses. When skills are assessed instead of assignments, instructors can provide multiple pieces of feedback within each course, giving students more detailed advice on how to improve their application of durable skills.

Contributed by Minerva Project. For more information, download the full white paper, Teaching Durable Skills: How Universities Can Intentionally Build Critical Competencies or visit http://www.minervaproject.com/. Contact Megan Perpich (mperpich@minervaproject.com) to connect with Minerva's learning innovation team.