Concept: Cue consciousness

Brief overview of concept:

In order to learn effectively, a student needs to be able to engage with the learning opportunities around them. These may be in the form of guidance from a teacher or educator, engagement with peers, or identification of useful material in self-directed learning activities. These opportunities may not always be clearly signposted, and so an effective learner needs to be receptive to the learning cues that signify effective learning opportunities (Evans & Waring, 2020). This **cue consciousness** is a hallmark of success in self-regulated learning, and requires both the active engagement of the learner, as well as conscious development and signposting by the educator.

Cues to learning will exist (both deliberately and serendipitously) within learning cultures (James, 2014). Learning cultures are social constructs around groups of learners and educators, engaged as a community in a discipline, or learning environment. As such, there will be deliberate learning cues provided by the educators, within a structured curriculum, or the learning activities and assessments embedded in a curriculum. There will also be opportunities for learning between members of a community of learners, through social interactions, co-creation of learning, and 'learning together' collaboratively.

Links to other concepts:

Evans and Waring (2020) highlight cue-seeking behaviours as key to **Contextual regulation** (the ability to influence the environment to support learning) and **Metacognitive monitoring** (the ability to monitor the development of one's own cognitive and motivational state). These authors observe that effective feedback seekers are cue-conscious for both extrinsic cues (learning opportunities provided by others) and internal cues (identifying opportunities to learn and resources that will be of use to learning. Effectively recognising and utilising these cues is key to building the strategies a learner needs to regulate their own engagement with the learning environment around them. The development of cue consciousness is highly dependent on context, and so sensitivity to context is an important consideration (Dargusch et al., 2017).

In terms of assessment, cue consciousness is important for a student to use assessment as a learning activity. A student who has effective cue consciousness will recognise the value of formative assessment opportunities, and will engage with those to the full extent. Similarly, they will be able to spot the learning potential of summative assessment, even assessments where the formal feedback from the educator is limited. A student with effective cue consciousness will be confident in using assessment situations to the best effect to support their learning and understanding.

Alignment with EAT

EAT's focus on student agency in learning and assessment is key to emphasising how effective assessment can support students in their development of cue consciousness. Key to this is understanding the requirements of a task, and being able to recognise important information and opportunities that will support learning. Assessment literacy is central to cue

consciousness; the understanding of what assessment is, and the requirements and responsibilities associated with it. It is incumbent on the educator to signpost learning opportunities to the learner, but that learner also has a responsibility (which underpins AL3) to develop the capability of spotting those opportunities for themselves. Developing an understanding of what a high quality outcome of an assessment looks like (AL1) as well as understanding the wider context of an assessment (AL2 an AL4) support the student in gaining those insights.

Effective feedback is also key to developing cue consciousness. In this regard, sub-dimension AF4 is of high importance, highlighting the impact of developing self-assessment and self-critical skills. By recognising the relative strengths and limitations of their own outputs, students will potentially learn the cues that will align with effective opportunities for learning. Interacting with peers (AF3) similarly will help develop an awareness of activities and resources that are of benefit to the student's learning. This awareness will then empower that student to be able to seek out such opportunities on their own. Learning which cues are beneficial to peers can be a powerful learning experience. Explicit, meaningful, and timely feedback from educators also helps build this understanding of potentially valuable cues, provided that it is phrased and timed in a way that encourages this awareness. Feedback that is overly directive, and merely points out strengths and weaknesses without a wider context, can potentially limit a student's cue consciousness, by making them dependent on the educator for learning opportunities.

Waring and Evans (2015) highlight the importance of promoting universal design-informed assessment practices (AD3) in the development of cue consciousness, by recognising individual differences, and providing opportunities for all students to engage with learning activities in a meaningful way. Finally, transparency in assessment procedures (AD1) also helps students recognise learning opportunities, and how to use them to their benefit.

Embedding cue consciousness in practice

Promoting the development of cue consciousness needs to be a fine balance between educator guidance and student independence. Without signposting learning to the student, the potential for them to recognise the hallmarks of useful experiences that can positively impact them. As a result, the student may not be able to realise the potential benefit of a situation for their learning. Equally, too much signposting risks the student becoming dependent on the educator, and not developing their own sensitivity to the context of their learning. So a middle path between these two challenges needs to be navigated. Taking a longitudinal view, supporting the student in recognising cues early on in their learning journey, and then gradually stepping back, is key. This links strongly to Boud's concept of 'Sustainable assessment' – and the progressive development of a student's ability to critique their own work, and support their own learning.

The promotion of learning communities and learning cultures also helps students develop cue consciousness, as the opportunities to interact with a range of other individuals promotes the sharing of experiences. By seeing others' perspectives on learning, the ability to spot learning cues can develop as a result.

References

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