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2006

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TYSTYSGRIF UWCHRADDDEDIG ADDYSGU MEWN ADDYSG UWCH

POSTGRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Cylch Dysgu 3 | Teaching Cycle 3

Developing Reflective Practice - Implementing APPR

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5 Report - Developing reflective practice: implementing APPR

5.1 Objectives of the learning cycle
This cycle was undertaken with the following aims in mind:

- To explore and set my teaching practice in the context of my new role as Undergraduate Programme Team Leader (UGPTL)
- To gain experience of developing and teaching materials that develop reflective practice in students
- Linked to this, to gain a better understanding of Personal Development Planning and Learning through Reflection (particularly as I had recently undertaken a CPD session which had helped me to gain a much greater understanding of this)

I felt it was particularly important to undertake this task because (as noted in Chapter 1) I had had a much more traditional experience of learning as an Undergraduate myself, and certainly carried with me understandings of what teaching in H.E. was all about, that were linked directly to this. I feel that my understanding of and attitude toward different teaching and learning practices have developed to a considerable extent over three years, and it is in this cycle that it is most clearly reflected.

The report is specifically focussed on two sessions that took place early in the autumn semester of 2005-2006, but it is first necessary to spend a few moments discussing what APPR is, and how it is put into practice in the context of UWA.

5.2 APPR at UWA
The 1997 Dearing report recommended, amongst other things, that students should be provided with a way of monitoring, reflecting upon and developing their personal development. This structured and supporting process is widely called Personal Development Planning (PDP) and being implemented in various forms across many H.E institutions currently (UWA 2005).

At UWA, PDP is known as the Academic and Personal Progress Review (APPR), and it was first implemented in 2004-5. Amongst other outcomes, the scheme is intended
to enable students to ‘become more effective, independent and confident self-directed learners’ as well as ‘improve their general skills for study and career management’ (UWA 2005). Clearly involved in such a process is the development, and crucially awareness of, transferable skills – how the skills and knowledge they learn or develop at University can be applied beyond graduation and how students can become involved in a process of lifelong learning, where it is possible to see many areas of life as a learning experience. Key here particularly is to develop the ability to relate skills and experience to a wider context, and how they might be useful and applicable in other quite different situations. Similarly skills learnt through pleasurable experiences, such as hobbies or voluntary work can be seem as important assets when it comes to job hunting and it is important that students are able to understand these links. This is where a process of reflection – which does not always come naturally to every person – is important, and one of the strengths of APPR is that is encourages students to develop this habit.

APPR was introduced into DIS in the 2004-2005 academic session. The agreed sector-wide date for implementation was 2005-2006 (Ward et al 2005). As this then was the pilot year, it was implemented largely as it had been developed by the Careers Advisory Service, who provided a wide range of tools and materials for staff and students to use. For the following academic year, however, it was decided that we would strive towards a more bespoke version that directly addressed the needs of our students. DIS is a profession-oriented department, and as such has various systems already in place for professional development, for example a mandatory work placement module and visits by recruitment agencies. Thus it was felt that these aspects could be integrated with APPR quite successfully. The professional body CILIP, also has an existing outline of key areas of skills or attributes (CILIP 2005) which could usefully be drawn upon.

The focus of this report is my involvement in the development and facilitation of this scheme, in my role as Undergraduate Programme Team Leader (UPTL) and as a lecturer and module coordinator of a key first year module. Thus APPR had a strong learning and teaching element for me, as well as a role as personal tutor. The rest of the report therefore focuses on how I was involved in developing the APPR in the context of DIS, and specifically in how it was implemented for students through face
to face sessions over two weeks early on in the autumn semester. I consider this to be a good example of both teaching and engaging in reflective practice for staff involved as well as the students, and for this reason I chose to focus on this for my final learning and teaching cycle. It also demonstrates the combination of my role as UPTL with that of lecturer, and has helped to consolidate what I have learnt – about reflective practice and also about the value of active teaching.

5.3 Developing APPR
As a department we discussed over many months our experience of APPR as it had thus far been implemented at DIS. Towards the summer I took over responsibility for developing it in a departmental context, along with another member of the programme team. Together we researched the concept of PDP, including investigating how it had been implemented in other environments. This, in combination with an assessment of the career needs of our students and what was already available to them, was used to build on and refine the existing APPR materials, which we drew on heavily as a prototype, to suit the context of our field.

This included the development of two new documents/tools for student reflection – the writing of a new introduction to APPR as students would experience it, and an Academic and Personal Progress Record. This document was adapted from material that was already available to Open and Distance Learning (ODL) students (as an insert in their programme handbook, to record their academic results and reflections on this). Although very simple in format, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that students value and enjoy this method of recording their progress. As such we adapted it to suit both academic and personal/vocational achievements, and included an example ‘entry’ to demonstrate the use to which it could be put in terms of recording progress. Both of these documents can be seen in Appendix 5, items 2 and 3.

5.4 Introducing APPR
APPR was introduced in this revised form during the first two weeks of term (i.e. induction week and the week following) over two hour-long sessions. These were group sessions which the whole undergraduate first year attended (as we have a small full-time intake it was possible to do this in an informal and relaxed atmosphere).
5.4.1 Session 1: ‘reflecting on your first week at University’
This session took place during the last day of induction week, to encourage students to take stock of everything that they had learnt during induction and to introduce the concept of the process of reflection through simple exercises. Working together in small ‘buzz groups’ and using a simple set of questions as a focus (see Appendix 6, item 1) they were encouraged to think about and if possible identify the following aspects:

- Most important thing learnt in the week
- What they were most looking forward to in the coming term
- What they were most worried about
- List one or two goals that they hope to achieve this semester

Students appeared to work together effectively, and many common themes were identified during feedback. The tutors (myself and my Programme Team colleague) utilised the whiteboard to list student suggestions and draw them together into categories or themes – often centring on common worries such as ability to complete assignments, worries about coming back into education after a long gap, or presentation skill/nerves. The value of this session, in terms of issues raised but also in sense of group identity, will be discussed in the Conclusion.

5.4.2 Session 2 – APPR
This session introduced the concept of personal development planning more comprehensively – it had only been referred to conceptually before – and followed a similar, now established format of in-class discussion and reflection. The emphasis this time was more on solo, personal reflection however, as it was anticipated that students’ assessment of their strengths and weaknesses (which is a part of the UWA documentation that we utilised and of PDP schemes in general) was likely to be something they would wish to keep private. They were encouraged to feed back only if they so desired, and that they might prefer to discuss these issues in more detail with their personal tutors. I and my colleague also spent more time discussing the concept and process of APPR itself, how it might be beneficial for future career planning and personal development, and talking through the material that the students would be able to make use of.
5.5 Discussion and outcomes
There are several aspects to this process that I consider to be successful – both personal to myself and for the students that were involved in these sessions. However I hope it will be clear that we are as yet, only half way through the current academic year and as such in a position to draw only tentative conclusion about the success of the scheme, as implemented within DIS. However I feel I can draw firmer conclusions about the value to me, of undertaking this role, in terms of learning and teaching developments. Both of these aspects are discussed below.

5.5.1 The student perspective.
Although, as noted, the implementation of APPR is in its early stages, some conclusions may be drawn at this point (albeit open to re-evaluation as the year proceeds). It seems there is a value in encouraging students to interact in a reflective manner, early on in their association with each other. This cohort is noted by those who have taught them so far as a ‘good’ group of students, by which it is understood that they are active, interested and engaged. Although this is clearly a very subjective and unsubstantiated point of view, (and may in fact be an inherent characteristic of the group) they do seem very and happy to discuss ideas in class, and there is very little reluctance when they are asked to ‘buzz’ or otherwise interact and discuss issues in a group situation. I do not wish to dwell on this excessively without further observation and evaluation but I am hopeful that one of the ‘unexpected outcomes’ of reflective sessions held at an early stage may be in a sense of group identity and cohesiveness.

5.5.2 My learning and teaching perspective.
As related to a final ‘learning cycle’ I feel that this endeavour has been very successful. It has allowed me to combine my role as UPTL with my identity as a lecturer and teaching practitioner, and has enabled me to put into practice some aspects of teaching that I have been trying to develop over three years. That is, it has enabled me to develop my teaching in very ‘student-centred’ direction, and I have seen the value of this in the quality of students interaction with each other and their resulting learning. I was able to carry this over into active teaching of the first year module which I coordinate (IL10110) and I hope that this is reflected in the comments made in one of the later teaching observations (see Appendix 1 – 7th December 2004)
5.4.3 Progress, problems and future practice
The major problems in the development of the programme were related to time – as DIS is a very busy department over the summer, due to the several study schools that take place, it was a challenge to spend time and intellectual effort on the development of appropriate materials. However both I and my colleague were committed to providing a workable and holistic programme for the students that could take account of their vocational orientation, a mandatory study skills module within the Department and other voluntary activities that occurred throughout the year. The tools referred to here apply to new students only and particularly the period around Induction – there is a wealth of material supplied by UWA in order to facilitate (or form a prototype for) future work. In terms of evaluation, the earliest stage of this will be the continuation of the APPR sessions and review of students’ progress so far, at the start of Semester 2. Personal tutors may also be able to provide information in that regard, as to how engaged in the PDP process they feel that their tutees are. I have endeavoured to provide some indication of progress so far but this can be complemented by more structured processes in future, including student end-of-year feedback. The whole experience will be reviewed again in summer 2006, including student feedback as to the benefits and future directions of personal development planning.

I consider this to be very much a work in progress, and quite deeply linked to my development as a teacher and facilitator of students’ learning and particularly reflective practice. As will be noted in the discussion in Chapter 6, I was not ‘naturally’ inclined towards Active teaching, primarily due to my own educational experience (see Chapter 1) combined with a lack of confidence. As such this experience has been invaluable for me as a part of my learning and teaching development, and I feel that it is already a benefit to me in terms of my approach to general class teaching.

5.6 References

Ward, Rob, Norman Jackson and Janet Scrivens (2005). *Progress files: are we achieving our goal? A working paper.* HEA: Centre for Recording Achievement, 2005

University of Wales Aberystwyth (2005). *Academic and Personal Progress Review.* Available at: http://www.aber.ac.uk