DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION SKILLS: A CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT APPROACH

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PRESENTATION

• Introduction
• Setting the theoretical context
• Co-ordination
• Intervention
• Feedback
• Conclusion
Introduction

• Student Profile
• The promise we make
• The continuous improvement cycle
  – Co-ordination
  – Intervention
  – Feedback

Theoretical Context

• How theory can inform practice
  – Reflection
  – Critique

• Action Research
  “planning, acting, observing and reflecting more carefully, more systematically”
  (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988, p10)
Theoretical Context

- Develop a plan of critically informed action to improve what is already happening;
- Act to implement the plan;
- Observe the effects of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs;
- Reflect on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent critically informed action and so on, through a succession of cycles (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988, p10).

Adapted from Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p11)

Continuous Improvement
Theoretical Context

Mills (2003) suggests that to gain full insight into a situation that requires change or improvement “focusing on who, what, when, where and how …will clarify the area for the action research”

(Mills 2003, p27).

Theoretical Context

- What evidence do we have that the development of communication skills is an issue that should be reviewed?
- Which students does this involve?
- How is the College making decisions about communication entry requirements?
- How are we teaching and supporting the development of communication skills?
- Who are the key stakeholders in this process?
- What outcomes do we want for our students?
Theoretical Context

Language cannot be seen as an isolated event, but as a ‘conduit’ which is used to transmit and consolidate values and knowledge determined to be important by any one society or sub culture of that society, for example an academic institution.

Theoretical Context

- Question and formalise our perception of English proficiency;
- Review/re-assess and determine English entry levels;
- Review decisions/policies about entry levels;
- Review the development of curriculum for core units;
- Review the development of content for support programs;
- Refine monitoring and intervention strategies of student performance.
Key Elements In Cycle

Coordination
Feedback
Intervention
Continuous Improvement

Co-ordination

Communication Skills Coordinator (CSC)

Students
Lecturers
Academic Department
Admissions & Marketing
Co-ordination

1. Curriculum Development

- Core Communications Units
  - View of language as ‘discourse’

  "A socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, behaving, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful role" (Gee 1990, p43).

  - Acquiring language is a developmental process.
Curriculum Development

- **Core Content Units**
  - Embedding language in discipline-specific units
  - Professional development for core unit lecturers
  - Development of teaching materials
  - Individual assistance of students

- **Support Programs**
  - English Development Program
  - Study Skills

- **Individual Assistance**
  - Supports skills taught in content units
  - Provides feedback on student needs

Building the Relationship with Admissions and Marketing

- Consistency of English Pathways
- Placement – Letter of offer conditions
- Systematic approach to language support
- Review & Reflection
- Students Academic Performance
- CSC
Intervention

Student-focused

Initial intervention
- Diagnostic Exercise

Intermediate and ongoing intervention
- Tracking of students via ENGTRAX
Feedback

• Involves observation and reflection

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) state that “observation has the function of documenting the effects of critically informed action – it looks forward, providing the basis for reflection now, but more so in the immediate future as the present cycle runs its course” (Kemmis and MacTaggart 1988, p13)
Types of Feedback

Colleagues
- Academic staff and lecturers
- Formal and informal discussions
- Marketing notes
- Reports from ENGTRAX
- Online communication

Students
- Students
- College portal
- Student surveys
- Attendance
- Performance reports

Continuous Improvement

Co-ordinator

Conclusion

- The development of communication skills is a focus and concern of all involved key stakeholders, both administrative and academic;

- All these staff are engaged in discussion on how communication skills are best developed;

- These interactions feed back into discussion of admission policies;

- The level of understanding developed between staff across administrative and academic areas has been invaluable

- Feedback from students and lecturing staff is encouraging and indicates that we are on the path to achieving the continuous improvement we are seeking.