Promoting An Enquiry Based Approach To Teaching And Learning Using The Philosophy For Children Methodology

What are the aims of this project?

This is a collaborative project across two subject groups (ASECC and Primary /early years), involving 5 tutors. The aim of the project is to help tutors trial an enquiry based approach in their teaching to encourage student engagement and participation.

Hence the objectives of the project are:

- To provide an opportunity for tutors to take part in an enquiry led by an external consultant.
- To develop student critical thinking skills.
- To give students opportunities to lead enquiries.
- To empower tutors to develop 'communities of enquiry'.
- To provide 'at elbow' support for participating tutors.

What is the background / rationale?

This project is based on the philosophy for children (P4C) approach. In this approach, participants are provided with a stimulus (photograph, academic article, or poem) and encouraged to generate questions about the stimuli. The group then chooses the most interesting question as a basis for the group's discussion. P4C has been used with school-aged children, teachers, with 2 groups of final year QTS students, and the findings have been shared from an EdD pilot study with colleagues in the early years research group. The rationale for this proposal is to address the apparent lack of student engagement and participation during seminars as experienced by colleagues and students. The P4C methodology is a simple, yet structured approach that can provide an opportunity for introducing and practising discussion skills in a supportive context. In addition, it provides a safe space for talking, listening to other's view points and developing critical thinking skills.

What are the benefits to student learning?

In line with the LTA strategy, using this enquiry approach can enhance student autonomy, because the process allows students to generate their own questions, decide upon the topic for discussion, and enable students to evaluate and make judgments about the content and quality of seminar discussions. In relation to student learning, participation in enquiry based seminars can help to develop students' enquiry and research skills, to practise critical thinking skills in meaningful contexts, and to begin to develop critical and reflective identities. Furthermore, staff will have the opportunity to embed a number of the LTA objectives: to develop pedagogic skills to motivate learning, embed

autonomy, increase dialogue around teaching and learning, communicate with students to inform teaching and learning approaches, and to use evidence from reflection and practice to inform teaching and learning (LTA strategy 2006/10). The project also has potential benefits beyond the two subject groups; it is a simple and flexible approach that can be used in any context where engagement is desirable. It can also be used in a variety of contexts, for example, when introducing new modules, assignment related discussions and when tackling controversial topics.

How will this project be evaluated?

Evaluations will be carried out at different levels and at different stages of the project. After each enquiry session, tutors will conduct an evaluation, and write a reflective account of the outcome and process of the seminar session. During the midpoint progress workshop, participation tutors will feedback evaluations from different student groups using questionnaires or informal discussions. At the second workshop in April 2008, tutors will present a summary of the impact of the programme on their own professional development and the impact on students' participation in seminars and other evidence of increased engagement and involvement. Finally, a focus group interview will be conducted featuring students form one participating group to assess the impact of the enquiry based approach on engagement levels within the module and critical and questioning skills.

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