Stephenson COLLEGE

THE USE OF EXTENDED LEARNING COMMUNITIES TO CREATE CURRICULUM RESOURCES TO SUPPORT OUTSTANDING TEACHING AND LEARNING

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PROJECT PURPOSE

The project aimed to:

- Enable teachers to engage with design professionals such as web developers to produce high quality learning materials.
- Review the use of these materials through peer observation.
- Evaluate the design process.
- Analyse the learner experience.

METHODS

The project used structured interviews with teachers and assessors who were involved in the design process. This allowed for qualitative analysis of the perceived value of design, functional skills specialists, and the production of vocationally contextualised learning materials.

Teachers' use of these learning materials was observed by their peers. Partners used their own internal process, documentation and protocols. Peer observation training was facilitated by the lead partner and focused on making judgements on the quality of learning supported by the use of evaluative language.

Learners were surveyed and attended a focus group to ascertain levels of satisfaction and to identify strengths and areas for design improvement.

PROCESS

January 2015

- Project coordinators in each college met. Matching of curriculum areas based on need and project theme.
- Project managers briefed curriculum staff on process and outputs. Template flyer and email sent to all partner colleges to gain interest in project from teaching staff.

CONTINUED...

February 2015

- Design template of standardised pre-teaching survey questions sent to partner colleges to evaluate.
- Project timeline of key activities shared with partner colleges.
- Lead college offer of roadshows at partner colleges to promote and assist with project and clarify information.
- Deadline for interested teaching staff to get involved and forward information to Stephenson College.

March 2015

- Partner colleges informed of training date for peer observation and standard procedures.
- Each partner college met with own team to discuss development of own teaching material with embedded theme.
- Practitioners met with professionals e.g. web designer/animation/film company/publishers.
- Partner colleges wrote and finished task/topic material.
- Email sent to all partner colleges with contact details of all specialists to contact regarding developments of their project.

April 2015

- Pre-teaching survey links sent to all partner colleges, in addition to login username and password to access results.
- Partner colleges used new teaching materials within teaching sessions. Peer observations commenced. Partner colleges were sent standardised questions to collate quantitative and qualitative evidence within the peer observations for focus group with learners and the internal review with the teacher.

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

Our partnerships involved three colleges and a private training provider to ensure good coverage of different subject areas, types of qualification pathway and modes of delivery.

- Bilborough College
- Central College Nottingham
- Burton and South Derbyshire College
- The Derbyshire Network

EMERGING IMPACT

Developing learning materials to embed mathematics and English within vocational curriculum is a successful strategy to engage learners. However, peer observation feedback demonstrates that unless due consideration is given to learners' skill development in this area, vocational teachers do not have the prerequisite knowledge to address a vocationally based mathematics and English question.

Vocational teachers therefore need further training on teaching and assessment strategies to be able to give learners the 'tools' to acquire literacy and numeracy skills. Equally, the design of learning resources must include steps or worked examples that show processes to be followed and build learners' skills base if they are to be used independently.

Students generally enjoyed using IT based resources. Resources were highly interactive and were a source of reference for students, both within the lesson and in subsequent learning activities. The design of mobile apps to support learning was problematic due to cost and the type of platforms used. The different phases in development of such resources could be time consuming and are likely to hinder roll out on a wider basis. Where there was a mass market for resources to promote English and maths, economies of scale enabled a more generic resource with some vocational context and increased functionality.

Peer observation was effective in supporting and encouraging teachers and assessors to be reflective practitioners and to learn from each others' experience. Observation training was effective in ensuring that observers gave constructive and evaluative feedback. Several discussions took place around the balance between constructive criticism and the need to be supportive in this type of observation.

Desk-based evaluation of peer observations showed that well designed resources used in the sessions as a result of the project were a contributory factor in developing a high quality learning experience. Survey evidence from learners showed they enjoyed these sessions and valued the type of resource.

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CASE STUDY

Resource development meetings - involving both vocational teaching practitioners and commercial design professionals - were highly productive in creating suitable resources. Design professionals were able to give specific guidance on product functionality that led to further discussion on how each resource would meet student and organisational needs. For example, the various platforms available to develop mobile apps were considered and constraints highlighted. It was suggested that a web based product might be more cost effective, and changes in content would be easier to make. Practitioners spoke of the "energy" created by this process and the ability to "influence the development of teaching resources from the design stage" or rather to control "bespoke" solutions where current materials proved insufficient to support learning. These meetings were constrained by the time available and further discussion took place after each meeting.

Staff were actively engaged at all stages of product development. Staff were observed reclaiming the creative space, and ideas flowed throughout these meetings; for example, they suggested a humorous approach to developing a guide on progress reviews for work-based students and a video to show learner characteristics of both unsuccessful and successful reviews. All staff highlighted the benefit of allocated 'thinking time' in order to create high quality learning materials.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Learning materials were developed with due consideration for the active promotion of equality and diversity. For example, the Beauty App produced as an interactive tool to show the structure of the skin referred to pigmentation of various skin types. Equally, materials developed to embed English and maths using vocational scenarios were written and designed to challenge social and cultural stereotypes. An inclusive approach was taken to the organisation and management of the project. For example peer observation training was delivered at an accessible time to part-time assessors with childcare responsibilities.

For more information about this project please visit:

emfec.co.uk/services/our-projects

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