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TRANQUIL WAVES OF TEACHING, LEARNING AND MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Exploring aspects of: Teaching, Learning and Management at one of the leading Sino-Foreign Universities, The University of Nottingham, Ningbo, which relate to an Art and Design Tutor, and Academic Lead for History and Social Sciences within The Centre for English Language Education (CELE) Department, from 2014-20. This paper looks at aspects of: Design and planning of learning activities, teaching support of learners, assessment and feedback, the development of effective learning environments (and approaches to student support and guidance) and also at continuing professional development relating to research and scholarship. It also reveals aspects of two case studies pertaining to leadership and coaching.

Keywords

Teaching, Learning, Management, Art and Design, Design and Planning, Teaching Support, Effective Learning Environment, Continuing Professional Development

1. Introduction

This paper explores the teaching practice and management activities of an Art and Design convener for creative CELE modules, and an Academic Leader for CELE History and Social Science subjects, at the University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China (UNNC).(see Fig.1).



Figure 1: *Nottingham University, Ningbo, China*

The course modules pertained to in this paper are: (ADGA) Architectural Drawing and Graphics A. This introduces students to basic fine arts and design skills. (ADGB) Architectural Drawing and Graphics B in the second semester builds on the fine arts and graphics skills learnt in Semester one, with an emphasis on architectural drawing and representational skills, in addition they produce 3D models and project work. Principles of Design (PD), which is also completed in the second semester, introduces students to the principles of design and their purpose in the development of design ideas within a range of disciplines, including architecture.

Many of the topics, which are taught on these modules, are influenced by a course handbook, *The Architectural Drawing Course, Understanding the Principles and Master the Practices* (Zell, M. 2010). At first the topics in this book were considered challenging to teach, as many students arrive to this course, with very little drawing or basic art and design experience or knowledge. This is very different from the UK, where students would have arrived at this stage, with a GCSE and an A-level in Art. These students at UNNC are also converting from a Chinese structure of working into a British System. So they also have some problems with English comprehension and they also have difficulties adapting to student led methods of working. Also as Chinese students they sometimes have issues with passivity and difficulties with interaction. (Fry et al. 2001)

2. Design and Planning of Learning Activities

The Art and Design courses mentioned here were modernized and re-wrote because originally they had no proper structure. Also, because many of the students on arrival had little or no drawing experience, it was decided that there needed to be a balance between *in-classroom drawing lessons*, starting at a very basic level and *homework studies* where they would draw architectural environments, such as buildings and interiors. Previously the students had been working on lots of unrelated projects,

which often had no relation to Architecture or the course handbook, so this aspect was amended (Zell, M 2010).

In Semester 2, the material that was devised is more advanced. More developed art and design skills were devised and taught with an emphasis on 3D skills and project work. Previously there were lots of unconnected projects and it was felt that these modules needed more coherence and progression. So a focus on the Biggs and Tang constructive alignment method (Biggs and Tang, 2011) was needed. Small lectures were constructed explaining and discussing ideas relating to the skills based workshops. These are followed by the application of this knowledge, where students learn relevant skills. Also regular peer reviews were instilled, where students are able to formulate conclusions allowing them to understand the work they have made. Also a final project was devised in relation to Kolb's experiential learning theories (Kolb, 1984), because it was understood that students needed to experience a full (Creative) learning cycle. (see Fig. 2) This involved creative processes such as: Abstract Conceptualization (brainstorming & mind maps) Active Experimentation (creating concept drawings), Concrete experience (making models), and finally Reflective Observation (analysis).

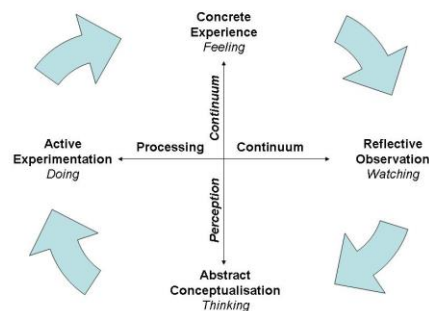


Figure 2: Kolb, Learning Cycle

3. Teaching Support of Learners

Teaching activities are varied to account for different individual and diverse learning needs, and a mixture of pedagogic tools are used. (see Fig. 3)



Figure 3: Group Making Activity

Equity in the classroom is maintained. (Guo & Jamal, 2007; Jones, 2004) In this respect, gender-neutral language is used and students are praise equally. Also, because the students are mainly non-native speakers, they often have difficulty understanding English. Therefore, it's important to use clear and slow speech. Here, students are constantly asked if they comprehend what is being said, and if lectures need to be given at a slower pace. Also they are encouraged to request clarification if needed. This doesn't always work at first, as the majority Chinese students at UNNC are quite passive, however when the students gain more trust towards the end of the academic year they often feel more comfortable in asking to repeat things that have been said, and during *office hours* they are encouraged to seek further confirmation about subjects they may not have understood.

Modules consist of -Powerpoint lectures, where students are informed about the background of the work they are doing. This is supported by critical suggestions and one to one guidance, with encouragement, advice on how to correct their mistakes, how to use materials and relevant technical advice. Also group work and peer reviews are a very important factor (Nilson 2010). As well as having group projects and seminars, there are peer review tasks at the beginning of workshops to discuss their homework tasks. Here students sit in small groups of 4-5 students and discuss the work they have done. This is a productive method for reviewing work and helps build positive interpersonal relationships. These reviews also help to ascertain student interest and are a deciding factor on whether learning themes or methods are varied/changed, dependent on the relative success of the objective outcomes.

4. Assessment and Feedback

The assessment of modules takes the form of mid-semester and end of semester submissions where students are required to submit project assignments. For the mid-semester submission, this is a

sketchbook of art and design assignments incorporating project work. Students also have an end of term submission, which involves them submitting a portfolio of work. On the Principles of Design Course, this assessment takes the form of a Mid-term group presentation on an iconic building and at the end of semester there is a review of a local building, which takes the form of three poster panels. The assessment interrogates a process, which considers that the students understand the language that is used and how it may help them understand their expectations, (Fry et al. 2001) and the general exam feedback closely matches that of the corresponding grading band.

5. The Development of Effective Learning Environments

Teaching practices on the Art and Design courses at UNNC incorporate various different learning environments: Lecture rooms, arts studios and seminar room spaces. Also students work outside on self-study-tasks and also during some ‘out of class-time’ module activities. During lectures there is a rule that students can’t use mobile phones, as this can distract learning. This was put in place as a response to research, which strongly correlates with this (Beland & Murphy, 2015).

In the workshops time, music is used in the arts studio. This is a response to a considerable amount of research, which supports the beneficial results of playing music in educational settings and the positive physiological effect (Domorest & Morrison, 2000) and the use of music has been a great success in classes. Music was introduced in 2014/15 and students have responded really warmly to it, setting a positive mood that makes students feel more comfortable and engaged.

6. Continuing Professional Development Relating to Research and Scholarship

At UNNC it’s considered (as many staff are also Art and Design or Architecture practitioners) that professional development activities in these areas are important to inform best teaching practices. In regards to the ADGA, ADGB and PD courses, in the last six years this has involved the tutor/convener participation in many exhibitions and a series of public talks at: The Chinese Academy of Art, 2018, Xiamen University, Xiamen, China, 2015 and Yale University (NUS), 2014.

The participation with exhibitions, has allowed for: the development of the highest quality drawing skills that are taught, and also for the presentation of creative work internationally. The Talks/Conferences, have allowed for research into - new trends in art, design and architecture. Also the tutor/convener participation on artist residencies allows for essential travel and work in a number of creative environments and provides an opportunity for them to see - important art and design, as well as architectural events.

E.g. The tutor/convener was encouraged to participate on a leading international residency with the

Emily Harvey Foundation, Italy, and this included spending time researching- the prestigious Venice Architectural Biennale. Therefore, this abled for the creation of lectures/seminars at UNNC about the Biennale, allowing students to learn about - new architectural trends and leading contemporary projects.

Professional activities like these have helped with: the further understanding of the creative industries, learning new art and design skills, researching new architectural developments and also with the expansion in the awareness of current presentation skills. Ultimately all these elements feed into teaching at the highest possible level, of - relevant, up to date, art, design and architectural creative skills and concepts.



Figure 4: *The University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China*

7. Leadership

This section pertains to the Management role of: The Academic Lead for Faculty History and Social Sciences (FHSS) subjects in CELE. This role member, co-ordinates and administrates the day-to-day duties of members of a CELE FHSS team of 5 staff members. They are also responsible for the Line Management duties in this team. Carrying out biennial classroom observations of teaching, and conducting annual staff performance reviews.

As an Academic Lead in in this post the duties also include: Gathering and reporting on data from the team to help inform/sustain CELE growth and policy, and general administrative duties (effective communication; organizing regular team meetings and compiling reports on the operation of the team).

As a content course convener in CELE, CELE FHSS conveners are responsible for planning and delivering foundation feeder courses for the FHSS degree courses at UNNC. The CELE FHSS tutors, teach in the following disciplines: International Studies (for Politics and History courses),

International Communications (for Media Courses), Linguistics (for English courses) and Economics (for Economics courses). These CELE content courses also have specific CELE English Courses, which run alongside them, which are specifically aimed at teaching ‘second language students’ the academic English content they need to cope with, and understand the FHSS content strands that they study on.

Here, the Academic Leader, stressed the importance of considering the *needs* of the ‘TEAM’ and to find ways to facilitate the *invention* of any changes that they, and this team, thought were necessary for the smooth running and success of their courses, relating to respective EAP and FHSS Degree courses. To do this in September 2018, the Academics Leaders *aims* therefore were to find out:

- How Tutors were doing in their CELE FHSS roles? and to ascertain any problems they may be facing regarding their relationship with their specific FHSS schools and with their related EAP conveners/courses. ^{[[L]]}_{SEP}
- To understand the relationships of the different FHSS Schools relating to the matching CELE FHSS tutors/courses? ^{[[L]]}_{SEP}

When talking to the CELE FHSS tutors about how they thought their courses and teaching were progressing during meetings, generally, it was found that they believed that they were doing very well. That their courses were running smoothly, however regarding the students and the parallel CELE EAP (English for Academic Purposes) modules, the following issues were identified: ^{[[L]]}_{SEP}

- There was a need for students to have more English Language listening practice, as students often struggled with their listening skills. ^{[[L]]}_{SEP}
- Students were not providing subject/personal ideas and opinions when making presentations. ^{[[L]]}_{SEP}
- Some CELE English Teaching staff thought that students should write essays in a style, which was sometimes not suitable for the FHSS Content Courses. ^{[[L]]}_{SEP}

The Module Conveners for the CELE EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and LSAC (Listening and Speaking in Academic Purposes) courses were fortunately, at the time of discussions, in the process of developing/updating their courses. Therefore, regarding these matters, as a team useful/needed changes were proposed, regarding the problems that were identified above and also various other suggestions were collated by the CELE FHSS Team which were presented to the Module Conveners of the CELE EAP modules, and the impact of this process meant that many important

adjustments were implemented.

Regarding the Academic Schools ideas/views, a ‘questionnaire’ was devised, which was sent the various representatives at the beginning of the academic year, to gather information on how well they thought: the CELE FHSS courses and the degree courses were communicating with each other. From this it was gleaned that everyone at this time was, on the whole, satisfied with the current situation, however one significant problem was flagged, as there were concerns regarding the Economics student’s levels of Mathematics. Regarding this issue, Nottingham University fast-tracked the approval of a new *Mathematics for Economics (FHSS) Module* in response to CELE’s/our request. Consequently, the Mathematics department within CELE agreed to design this new module, to being piloted in the 2020.

8. Coaching

Here, the Academic Leader, stressed the importance of ‘mentoring’, in it’s different forms, which would take place during: team meetings, content related meetings and performance reviews. Therefore, the Academic Leader began by establishing - What the CELE FHSS Tutor’s formal and informal *needs* were?

E.g. Did they need help with workloads/class sizes and how did they feel about their roles/employment at UNNC?

This process began with a series of meetings, where the tutors were asked about these factors. As mentioned before, there was desire in this role to work very much as a ‘TEAM’, as it was felt important to encourage and empower the CELE FHSS Tutors to take on new responsibilities, which may suit their interests. So a ‘mentoring style’ mixed with a ‘coaching style’ was adopted to do this. This was very much driven and influenced by ‘coaching training’ that was received at UNNC (Based on Sir John Whitmore’s books on Leadership), (Whitmore, 2009). As a consequence, a system was developed to facilitate a process that allowed for each-member to, identify how they could contribute towards the team aims, in the hope that this would enable self-empowerment and that the tutors would feel like they were valued members of a team that had shared goals.

8.1 Performance Reviews and Teaching Observation

Also during the Performance reviews a ‘coaching/mentoring’ style was used, and a ‘GROW’ coaching tool was referred to, which focuses on: Goals, Realities, Options and Will. This is this useful because it provides tutors, and Academic Leaders, a platform to understand what the tutor’s goals are

and how to achieve them. Tutors were also asked to think about focusing on the department's benchmarks, which identified higher levels of achievement. E.g. delivering staff development sessions, conference presentations, publications.

During this Academic year, Teaching Observations were conducted by the Academic Leader who was also responsible for the performance review processes. Here, during the teaching observations feedback sessions, tutors were initially given the opportunity to express their thoughts about how their teaching session had gone. Primarily, they were complemented on the successful aspects of their teaching and then secondarily, critical feedback was given.

At UNNC, in the beginning of this academic year 2018-19, there was some useful UNNC training: regarding Inspirational teaching, Professional development, Small group teaching, Curriculum design & Feedback. This was useful and was a great set of refresher courses, to help with the understanding and re-enforcement of what constitutes successful teaching. Therefore, what was learnt here, impacted and contributed towards critical feedback.

9. Conclusion

This article has discussed aspects of: Teaching, Learning and Management. It began by looking at aspects of - Design and planning of learning activities, and explores the redevelopment of courses, stressing in this instance, the importance of - the Biggs and Tang constructive alignment method and Kolb's learning cycle. It then explores teaching and support of learners, relating to 'second language students' and the essential use of equity in the classroom. It also discusses assessment and feedback, and the development of effective learning environments. Here it points out common problems, and looks at ways of improving student learning. The article also expresses the necessity of professional development relating to research and scholarship. Finally, it explores aspects of Management pertaining to leadership and coaching. Looking at the use of coaching and mentoring skills, whilst also stressing the importance of 'TEAM' building.

10. Research Limitations and Future Challenges

As Educators our TASK should be to constantly look for new ways to improve Teaching, Learning and Management -To Aspire to the highest standards, that also to create the best possible student experiences. This paper can be seen as an introduction to various threads of research that are aimed at attaining of this TASK. Tutors must weave their way through many important aspects, relating to teaching and learning, which in turn, should directly influence their managers coaching and mentoring methods.

As such, it's important to develop innovative approaches to education, that in turn should be constantly assessed to verify their effectiveness. Therefore, regarding this study - courses should constantly be reconstructed, which have in themselves been redeveloped. Better environments for student learning should be endlessly cultivated for student activities. Ground rules should also be re-evaluated. E.g. Mobile phones, could also be thought of as tools that are useful in lectures, if they are used in innovative ways. Also here, Management: Coaching and Mentoring activities, which have been previously successful should also be tested for their continual effectiveness and we should also persistently think about new professional development activities, which in themselves promote higher standards of Management, Learning and Teaching.

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