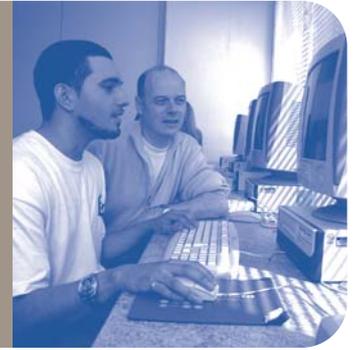


Embedding Essential Skills

Article No. 2 - The Cross College Training Programme

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The role of Teacher Development

In spring 2005, Teacher Development was given a remit to develop a training programme to embed language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) across the curriculum. Drawing on models from pathfinder projects (NIACE conference, June 2005 and Tower Hamlets College events), it was apparent that a one-off intensive training course would be insufficient and certainly fail to meet expectations. For example, there would be no opportunity for teams to apply ideas to practice, let alone planning. A longer term programme tailored to each division was seen as the way forward.

A number of trainers were required to deliver this programme and we were keen to develop skills within the college. Our Skills for Life (SfL) trainers sought out existing good practice within the college and they found some innovative and effective developments operating in isolation with no co-ordination, so the benefits were rarely shared beyond the immediate participants. The experience of these tutors gave a foundation to an expanding delivery team. A SfL or Additional Learning Support (ALS) teacher/trainer was paired with each vocational/academic team to deliver training sessions about embedding essential skills on staff development days each term.

Key characteristics of the training programme...

- Specified date and time for the sessions to be delivered across college on all sites - decision supported by senior management team
- Money for additional trainers - secured by senior management bid
- One trainer for each programme area - consistent relationship and chance to share good practice between Skills for Life and vocational/academic areas
- Whole teaching team included (budget available for sessional tutors to attend)
- Consultation between team and trainer built into evaluation of every session and led to action planning
- Bank of standard resources (developed by SfL teacher trainers) which could be adapted to match specific team requirements
- Support for trainers - meetings on use of materials, problem sharing/solving
- Named contacts in Teacher Development for co-ordination of programme, materials development and delivery



...Key characteristics of the training programme

The content of the sessions

The initial standard session used language awareness to help all teachers explore the range of reading and writing skills students may need in their studies. The final part of the session was given over to action planning (immediate work to be done by the team and agreeing the focus of the team's next training session)

Subsequent sessions have focused on a range of topics including:

- Problems students have with assignments
- Strategies for improving spelling
- Comprehension skills
- Mind mapping techniques
- Building numeracy skills
- Building students' vocabulary

Developing the resources

- A bank of standard materials for trainers to use, provided by Teacher Development SfL trainers. These sessions have a training plan, trainer's notes, resources to be used and additional optional resources
- All resources placed on a dedicated area of the intranet and also made widely available through www.talent.ac.uk²
- Trainers have developed their own resources and sessions to add to this bank
- The huge variety of resources, both published and tutor-generated, have been made more accessible. The Head of the Design Team was tasked with developing these resources by mapping and streamlining the mass of links to LLN materials on the intranet

Monitoring

Embedding essential skills was placed on college-wide agendas and senior management wanted regular updates on the programme backed by concrete statistical data. Feedback has been sought and used in a range of ways:

- Individual evaluations collated after each session provided concrete data on satisfaction ratings and staff participation
- Interviewing divisional managers 1:1 about the programme
- Using focus groups
- Responding to feedback in planning of subsequent sessions and materials

Response to the training

As many people are reluctant to be critical on feedback forms, a focus group was added to provide greater objectivity to our evaluation to date.

The expected resistance from some teaching staff was most commonly expressed in one of two ways:

"I'm not an English (Maths) teacher. It's not my job to teach them how to write (add up)."



And...

“Our students don’t need this; they have been assessed for these skills as a condition of joining the course.”

These views were taken seriously as they are thought to reflect three main difficulties; teachers’ own worries about their personal competence in these areas; a wider concern that they do not have the skills and knowledge to teach communication or numeracy; and concern about an increased workload. The trainers have addressed these concerns by:

- Emphasising long-term savings in addressing students’ LLN needs
- Demonstrating quick and easy ‘tips’
- Adapting materials to meet specific needs
- Responding to requests for particular sessions
- Using the team’s vocational/academic materials as the basis of sessions
- Staff can also access a range of teacher training courses in college to improve their own skills and knowledge

Some staff acknowledged that the training meets a real need and have welcomed the initiative:

“I will be more aware of comprehension when producing materials and handouts”

“This input will be very useful in the classroom for assignment work”

“Now we can put together a standardised approach to reading and writing skills.”
(...in our curriculum area.)

Specific findings

- We have trained 317 staff to date - a real achievement
- Training clearly works better when the divisional manager is involved, both in providing subject specific materials and participating in the sessions
- The sessions were best received when they showed teachers how to adapt their own subject specific materials
- Reception and application by staff is wholly dependent on a number of factors, including:
 - perceptions of this being an extra workload
 - not within their area of expertise or even responsibility
- Poor experience of Key Skills led to the embedding of LLN being treated with great suspicion and resistance

It was evident that we needed clear communication on what the strategy involved and its purpose. Where staff have seen it as something that is specifically designed to help improve retention and achievement in their subject, it has had more immediate impact. Conversely, where staff still see it as an imposed and irrelevant policy, little has changed in practice so far.

What next

The training programme is moving forward. Staff concerns are noted and session introductions now include a standard review of the strategy emphasising that the problem stems from our students' needs, not teacher inadequacy or some abstract bureaucratic whim.

Two significant sessions remain to be delivered in the Summer term (2006), the last of which will facilitate the development continuing within the divisions.

Further training from Teacher Development will be available but in response to divisional training plans. The continuation of the work in general from Teacher Development will be delivered through their website:

- Pro-forma and templates with interactive guidelines
- Quick teaching tips e.g. Building Vocabulary
- Online training resources

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² www.talent.ac.uk you will need to register but this is a simple process of providing a logon name, password and email address. Replies are instant. Then go to Resources search on Level 3.