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Abstract for the 4th European Conference on the First Year Experience 13-15 May 2009

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This abstract is for a paper presentation

Reflect, Connect, Understand and Plan, An Integrated Learning Portfolio

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This presentation describes the approach taken, on the BA(Hons) Textile Design course at the University of Huddersfield, to enhance the student first year learning experience by re-designing the curriculum to encourage students to make connections between all modules in the year.

It had become apparent to the course team and the Learning Development Team Leader, through periodic reviews, that there were issues impacting on the first year student learning experience. Firstly, it was noticeable that the students viewed each individual module too much as a discrete study element rather than an holistic programme. This fragmented view of learning can be a generic danger of a modular course system (Hardy, 2002). Secondly, the delivery of academic support for the programme through a stand alone Study Skills module was causing concern in that the 'bolt-on' experience did not readily encourage the students to apply the knowledge and learning skills in

this module to other modules in the programme, engendering perceptions of student deficit rather than the enhancement of learning.

Non-embedded skills teaching tends to be perceived negatively by many students Wall (2006, p.xii)

It was concluded that the effectiveness of the first year programme and the student learning experience would be greatly enhanced if the Study Skills module, previously delivered over one term, was replaced by a year long Integrated Learning Portfolio (ILP) module acting as a spine into which all the other modules linked. This module would address issues of academic skills, students understanding of their own learning and the holistic nature of the first year programme. It was also decided that it would be necessary to integrate to the activities in this new module to 'live' assignments in other modules in the first year programme. The module would be assessed by a reflective portfolio, including the use of blogs within a VLE, in which students articulate and evidence their learning development and are encouraged to recognise connections beyond a modular structure.

The reflective and critical thinking underpinning the ILP encourages students to consider how their learning experience will influence future learning and Personal Development Planning; a model that strongly reflects Kolb's view of experiential learning:-

...experiential learning theories which emphasize that effective learning takes place when learners experience a problem and take action, reflect on the action, form concepts on the basis of their reflection and apply these concepts in new situations.

Wingate (2006, p.458)

These changes have been implemented for the academic year 2008-09 and this presentation will outline the integrative nature of the restructuring of the curriculum, the progressive nature of assessment through formative learning journals (blogs) and the summative Integrated Learning Portfolio. A comparison of the 'student voice' heard in blogs and group sessions at the beginning and end of the year will evaluate the students' learning experience. Staff views on developments will be presented.

Key Words

Integrated Learning

Curriculum Design

Reflective e-journals

Academic skills development

References

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