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CLIP CETL Fellowships Report Form

Names: Catherine Smith & Darren Raven

Title of Project: Thinking Tools for Creative Learning; Connecting the Units

Issues:
The following issues were identified and prompted this project:

• FdA students demonstrated difficulties in acclimatising from FE to HE and lack of necessary organisation, time management and planning skills.
• Differentiation is extremely challenging due to diversity and large numbers.
• Our students often display surface approaches and failure to apply and connect learning gained from previous learning or across current course units.
• Issues with engagement, achievement and retention within 1st year.

Aims:
These were the project participant's aims, goals and objectives:

• Help our students to develop transferable thinking tools to facilitate independent learning, reflective practice and synchronisation across all the course units.
• Improve the 1st year students' capability to deal with HE level study.
• Promote an atmosphere where creative risk is valued.
• Enhance the students' learning experience, achievement, progression and career prospects.
• Improve retention rates and confidence within the course, especially widening participation students.

Rationale:
We were interested in undertaking a Fellowship project because we care about our students and are constantly trying to improve what is an extremely challenging situation to learn and work within. We wanted to apply design thinking in the teaching and learning of design.

Methodology:
This is a summarised breakdown of how we undertook this project:

• Found and adapted 20 of Edward de Bono's 60 CoRT Thinking Tools to our specific T&L context.
• Planned and delivered 8 x 2.5hour long sessions. These sessions were repeated twice a day to over 120 1st year FdA students.

• Content of the sessions was practical and workshop orientated with exercises directly linked to the students' current studio projects.
• Each session started by showing examples from relevant yet unusual graphic designers who used idea generation processes to develop innovative work.
• Follow up focus groups interviews and thematic analysis of the outcomes.

Student Feedback:
Feedback from student focus groups was largely positive and included several key themes:

• The Tools are, when further examined, largely common sense.
• People use them already in a subconscious manner but making the processes explicit makes them easier to use and understand.
• The Tools help link learning to industry and help the students see themselves as actual designers.
• The structure of the Tools is helpful rather than restrictive.
• Using the Tools to reflect allows acknowledgment of the difficulties of the course and gives an opportunity to question how the Tools might help as a way to navigate the course.
• The Tools provoke and facilitate metacognition and reflection for, on and post action in relation to learning and the subject discipline.

Some of the negative responses to the Tools included:

• Tools and the processes seen as alien or clinical at first
• Doesn't fit with student assumptions about design practice
• Very different from previous design educational experiences
• Difficult for students to see transferable potential
• Unlikely to apply Tools without constant reinforcement.

Outcomes and Themes:
Through evaluating the focus group material and our own reflection we have identified the following themes and goals:

• We must constantly attempt to demystify creativity and debunk the notion that it is inherited or natural talent
• What we mean by terms and words such as; process, context, research really need explaining to our students and quality time spent examining them so the students can develop their own useful understanding. Each discipline or course needs to create a common course lexicon.
• We need more T&L methods that build upon prior knowledge and ask the student to carry things forward
• Applying the Tools to the specific context is crucial
• Common sense is not common.

Impact on learning:
This project helped the students in many ways including:

• Increased awareness about thinking (thinking about thinking for the 1st time - metacognition)

• Development of a common language of terms for thinking processes
• Reflection on role of thinking within their discipline
• Development of analytical and reflective tools
• Provided challenges to previous assumptions on design practice
• Useful for organisation and providing a structure
• Helpful in demystifying professional practice
• Facilitates feelings of professionalism and business mindedness
• Speeds up their process
• Adaptable to different personal situations.

Application in other contexts:
These are some suggestions for using the Tools in other T&L contexts or situations:

• Introduce at the beginning of the course
• Utilise a small, context-appropriate selection of the Tools
• Sessions should be short, quick & applied to real situations
• Keep explanations of Tools brief
• Show relevant design examples
• Link to existing studio briefs
• Reinforce often in other areas of the course

Teaching & Learning materials produced:
We have adapted a list of the Thinking Tools that can be further adapted by tutors, students or course teams in the development of subject specific teaching and learning activities.

We have also developed an adaptable workshop that allows participants to directly experience and understand several of the Tools.

Impact on the curriculum:
As a course team we have embedded use of the Thinking Tools through all course activities. Sometimes the Tools are used in a very minor way so as to facilitate a post workshop crit whilst other times the Tools play a more central part in analysing and breaking down a new project. The simple processes of the Tools give the students a constant to either use or push against.

The benefits are manifold but some main ones include the ease of structuring of workshops and the elimination of having to constantly reinvent the wheel when it comes to T&L activity planning. When you have over 120 students in each year group and repeat workshops sometimes up to 6 times this is not to be under-rated as a positive change.

The highlighting of thinking as a vital part of the design process and the giving of equal time to it is another positive shift in the planning and delivery of the course. The traditional focus upon craft and the students being able to make aesthetically pleasing work is not enough anymore. All the design press is pointing in this direction and asking how can design thinking help improve the world. Focus solely on 'pretty' craft damages the students' employability and would be a dereliction of duty on our part. This is a difficult change for some students depending on their previous educational experiences but well worth the challenge.

Dissemination:

This project has enabled the following opportunities for dissemination:

• Workshop at UAL Teaching & Learning Day, Jan 07
• Presentation to new CLIP CETL Fellowship holders, July 07
• Workshop/paper at DEFSA Flux conference, Cape Town, Oct 07
• CLIP CETL staff development 'Conversations' x 2, May & Nov 07
• Workshop at UAL Library & Learning Resources away day July 07
• Being used on LCF FE Fashion Portfolio course & our FdA
• Workshop at Widening Participation conference, LCC, Oct 07
• Accepted as one of the three current ADM-HEA workshops

We are open to run the workshop developed from this project at anytime to any group. The Tools can be adapted to any context, situation or problem.

Reflecting on the process

Plus:
Working closely with a colleague on this project was good. Usually we work alone with a group of students and this makes reflecting on practice difficult and constantly chips away at your moral and energy. Working with someone else allows you to feed off each other's strengths. It enables reflection to occur naturally through constant discussion before, during and after the workshops we ran together. Also, our approaches to teaching are different and we were able to complement and learn from each other.

When some of the students realised generating great design ideas doesn't require 'natural talent' and with a few simple processes that they can do it too. Any opportunity to dismantle the dangerous and damaging myth of 'natural talent' is a welcome one.

Having the opportunity for adapting, creating and trialling a set of T&L activities to improve a situation and actually finding some things that really do work is very rewarding and helps to replenish the energy that is constantly sucked out of you when working with large groups in challenging situations.

It was enjoyable to risk-take and put ourselves into a situation with self-directed goals.

Minus:
Rooming was constantly an issue with inadequate rooms and furniture. Last minute room changes and building work disturbed many of the sessions. This had a direct negative impact on the project. T&L environment is so often the last thing we think about and yet can ultimately dominate the classroom situation, making student engagement difficult in sessions that might have otherwise been successful.

Dissemination of our project within the SGD at LCC is unlikely to happen without a lot of pressure or energy from us.

The lack of technology for teaching and learning purposes makes working in a manner suited to 21st century teaching extremely difficult. As in our regular teaching, we had to use our own personal equipment (Apple Mac laptop and digital camera) throughout this whole project. There seems to be a lack of a clear central policy regarding access or supply of IT technology throughout the whole of the UAL. This needs addressing if we're to live up to our marketing and compete on a global stage.

A large percentage of the students we worked with (now 2nd years) don't seem at all interested in the thinking aspect of design and without constant prompting and reminding will rarely use the thinking tools or other ideas generation processes in their work. They are more focused on surface aesthetics and technological aspects of design such as learning and demonstrating competence with software.

In hindsight we could have developed a tighter research methodology. Despite it being an action research project and it is felt that we could have been more careful about how we worked out what our focus should be. We would have benefited from a staff development seminar with other pedagogical and/or action researchers early on in the planning stages.

Interesting:
The fact that the students are, largely, not interested in design thinking when the whole of the discipline's press and literature is full of articles about how other industries and disciplines are now using or are interested in adopting design thinking in their practice. We think this points to a massive problem with the way design is taught in schools and FE.

It is interesting a project originally intended for use with students has been used for a UAL staff away day and has so much potential for curriculum and staff development. The ability to apply thinking to create novel, new and useful solutions is not easy and people who are able to do so are rare or lucky. When used and facilitated well, these tools enable and empower people and show them that they are as creative as anyone else. It is an immensely rewarding experience to help people come up with their own fantastic new ideas.

The staff interest at these sessions surpassed our expectations. This seems to reveal an inherent desire to be put into more creative problem solving environments more frequently, with a specific regard to our own teaching practice. Projects such as the CLIP CETL and the CLTAD schemes should continue to take advantage of this.

How we have learnt from this project and adapted and embedded the activities throughout our course. The delivery of the Tools is now blended into the studio activities such as project delivery, feedback crits, tutorials and evaluation. They give the tutors and students a common, known framework to use. This helps all the students' work become slightly more thoughtful.

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