Understanding the students’ perspective on how pedagogical approaches influence their experience

SCOTS
Students Consulting on Teaching

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Understanding the students’ perspective...

Current understandings of the students’ perspective on the pedagogical experience commonly stem from:

- End-of-unit/module evaluations;
- Large student surveys (e.g. NSS);
- Ad hoc informal discussion;
- Formalised processes - student representatives – subject boards

The SCOTs project piloted a process to access an additional source of informed feedback....
SCOTS – the project

• An innovative idea – valuing and listening to the student perspective to enhance the student experience (acknowledgement to work in the USA in this area);

• A pilot project in the School of Health and Social Care at the University of Lincoln;

• The student perspective on their experience as a resource or service for lecturers - objective student feedback on various aspects of teaching and learning;

• A ‘teacher-driven’, confidential, flexible and voluntary service, with the lecturer and the SCOT negotiating how the task will be undertaken.

  Developing ‘collaborative relations between student and academic for the production of knowledge’
  (Neary and Winn 2009: 137)
The process...

- Academic makes a request for a service;
- A SCOT is allocated;
- SCOT and academic meet, negotiate task, set scope and agree practical details;
- Task is undertaken;
- SCOT and academic meet for post-task feedback and discussion as previously agreed;
- Academic provides feedback on the service
SCOTs - the team

- undergraduate students with an interest in teaching and learning and the enhancement of the student experience;
- recruited and paid on temporary contracts for the period of the pilot project;
- students are ‘experts’ on what it is like to sit in classes;
- not enrolled in the classes of the lecturers they work with so able to offer an objective student perspective;
- training before working on the project and attend regular SCOT meetings;
- Co-ordinated by a part-time student co-ordinator
The SCOTS project – some fundamentals

- A project development group including academic and student representation, including engagement of the student union – student participation throughout at all levels of the project and its development;
- Identified small pocket of time-limited funding;
- Alignment with institution’s strategic objectives and values;
- Approval from University Teaching and Learning Committee;
- A willingness at all levels to ‘take a risk’ and be innovative!
- Critique? – ‘validating’ expertise; power issues related to recruitment, selection, training etc
Challenges

• Lengthy processes for approval – time delays;
• Recruitment processes not always ‘fit for purpose’;
• Raising awareness of opportunities amongst students (related to timing issues);
• Balancing opportunity with study priorities for students;
• May only engage academics who are already working to enhance their practice;
• Academic concern beyond the School of Health and Social Care.
Opportunities

- Focussed, timely and negotiated engagement with student feedback more likely to be meaningful (Hounsell 2009) and supportive of the reflective practitioner, their ‘situational understanding’ (Eraut 2004:100) and the development of practice-based evidence;
- Trying something different – not only the project itself, but within the detailed work of the SCOTS;
- Valuing the students’ perspective, raising their ‘voices’; students as co-producers of knowledge and learning; Teaching in public;
- To work with a very dedicated small team on a specific (currently time limited) project;
- Opportunity for future to expand further in the institution next year – perhaps embedding this within the peer observation policy as an option (but issues about funding!)
SCOTs thoughts about the project

• ‘…hopefully lecturers will see the SCOTs are a tool to benefit/enhance peoples’ learning rather than to criticise/evaluate those imparting the knowledge’

• ‘At first I was nervous but the lecturer really wanted to hear my thoughts’

• ‘I really enjoyed the training’
Academics thoughts about the project

• ‘I found the input from the students (SCOTs) to be very positive and complimentary’

• ‘They (the SCOTs) were clearly able to identify appropriate issues’

• ‘Feedback from students is the ideal for improving lecturer skills, but your own students may have many reasons for not being fully frank. The SCOTs scheme is a fantastic solution to that problem’
More thoughts about the project

• ‘…prefer SCOTs observations to peer observations which can lack impartiality’
• ‘I feel confident in [their] abilities to observe and assess my teaching and valued the feedback given’
• ‘I feel that it is an excellent idea to gain feedback and comment from an impartial student source’
• ‘It has given me confidence in my abilities and one of two of the comments from my SCOT have made me think differently about what I do and how I do it’
References


SCOTs Students Consulting on Teaching

University of Lincoln
School of Health and Social Care

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