

**Title:** **Dumbing Down or Beefing up the Curriculum: integrating an 'academic skills framework' into the subject**

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## **Abstract:**

### **Session Learning Outcomes**

- Share 'good practice'.
- Consider & reflect upon own practice.
- Opportunity to share experiences, ideas and materials.

(Particularly useful for lecturers in the social sciences but not exclusively).

### **Session Outline**

The paper describes a C-SAP funded project which evaluated the introduction of a new tutorial programme for first year Sociology students which sought to integrate a "skills framework" within the subject to enable students to develop a range of academic skills alongside their subject specific involvement.

The development of this project is contextualised on 2 levels;

- i) the pedagogical rationale for a 'skills framework' approach and the related concept of 'patchwork quilting'.
- ii) the institutional decision to abandon the more conventional and separate delivery of a study skills module and to replace it with a more relevant delivery of 'academic skills' through the students' subjects.

The evaluation of the staff and student experience is then examined using both quantitative and qualitative methods;

- i) qualitative review
  - staff evaluation via a weekly Reflective diary.
  - student evaluation via Focus groups made up of tutorial reps.
- ii) qualitative review
  - students also completed 2 surveys to assess their attitudes to the programme.
- iii) accidental review – student's own reflective accounts proved useful.

Conclusions from the research raise issues about the methodological problems involved in conducting such evaluations as well as the difficulties encountered in delivering the programme.

## Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Paper will take approximately 30 minutes followed by discussion (30 minutes) and workshop activity(30 minutes);

Discussion:

The paper provides the basis for discussion of a range of issues including the 'politics' of Learning & Teaching, the resourcing of curriculum innovation, the need for 'academic skills', widening access, mixed ability/experience learning, use of tutorial, transferability of materials across disciplines etc. (this might work better at the end of the session)

### Participation:

Participants will take the role of first year sociologists in a tutorial activity used on the programme and asked to reflect upon the extent to which it achieves its aim of integrating skills (in this case reading) with the subject (thinking sociologically).

The fact that this activity crops up in the second tutorial of the programme means that delegates require no experience of or interest in Sociology – in this sense they will find themselves resembling many first year students on Combined Honours programmes!

### References

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