

Title: Learning better together: developing an across the years student-centred learning community

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- understand the value of student-driven community of learning from theoretical and practical points of view;
- explore and discuss the challenges related to the development of student-centred learning communities; reflect on the roles of the stakeholders;
- Discuss and decide how the approach could be of use in their own practice

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

This workshop will describe and critique a project, 'Ask, Answer, Discover', run in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures and supported by the Centre for Integrative Learning, CETL, Nottingham University.

The project intended to design an environment for creating an active online learning community (Palloff and Pratt, 2007), comprising of students from all four years who would normally not have the chance for mutual academic interaction, thus increasing the notion of students' belonging. The main aim of such environment was to move the emphasis from "tutor's pre-packaged knowledge dishing" to social learning that promotes self-realisation and self-expression towards the collective knowledge creation through interactivity and cooperative effort of understanding (Cummings, 2003).

How does this model work? Undergraduate students from all four years get access to an online environment where they can ask and answer questions related to their studies (in this case, Russian Grammar) and receive support from their tutors when it is needed. To provide full answers, they are encouraged to do some research which enhances their ability to combine knowledge from all the fragmented language modules into one bigger picture, and improves their investigative and social skills (Assister, 1995).

The workshop will highlight the journeys undertaken by the students and the project facilitators, specifically focusing on the lessons learnt, the challenges of setting up and running a project of the kind and the recommendations for those who would like to embark on a similar initiative. The discussion of project outcomes will be supported by the evaluation data (student focus groups and student questionnaires) collected by the project team.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

1. Introduction (How does the project discussed below relate to the Centre for Integrative Learning? The project's aims and general outcomes) - **3 min**
2. Discussion (What are the theories underpinning the concept of a student learning community? What are the main characteristics of such communities?) - **5 min**
3. Project 'Ask, Answer, Discover' (How did it work in practice? Who were the stakeholders and what were their roles? What went well and what were the challenges?) - **5 min**
4. Recommendations for future development and potential for transferability of the project – **3 min**
5. Small group discussion facilitated by session leaders (How can this approach be used in your own practice? What support is available in your institution for the successful implementation of a similar initiative?) - **20 min**
6. Feedback from groups. Facilitators and participants will draw out main findings from discussion. – **7-10 min**

References

- Assister, A. (ed.) (1995). *Transferable Skills in Higher Education*. London: Kogan Page.
- Cummings, S. (2003). *Knowledge and Learning in Online Communities in Development: A Social Capital Perspective*. Manchester: Institute for Development Policy and Management.
- Palloff, R. and Pratt, K. (2007). *Building Online Learning Communities: Effective Strategies for the Virtual Classroom*. San-Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass.