

Source : Comenius 2.1 PPe Pee « Projet personnel de l'élève et politique éducative d'établissement, Mars 2000

Cannington

ACTIVITY: Student Support

CONTEXT

Country: UK

Institution (type): Land-based colleges

Students concerned in this activity (number, % of group):

All students

Age: 16+

Course, training, options: All courses

Level (European): 1-3

AIMS

This could be any (or all) of a range of aims: to improve basic skills (eg literacy, numeracy, ICT), Study Skills, Vocational skills (ie Practical), Life Skills or specialist (ie Dyslexia) support.

Reasons for carrying out this activity:

The overall aim is to support the development of the whole student; academic and personal, and to support achievement.

OBJECTIVES

Expected results; concrete products; expected benefits for the student(s):

The improvement of skills (as above)

To decrease difficulties experienced by the learner (student)

Improved grades – allowing the learner to reach his/her true potential.

PROCESS

1) Setting up, preparation

What; for whom; why; who takes the initiative?

Individual or group support; general or specialised.

For students with recognised learning needs, the Learning Support department/Tutor takes the initiative by setting up and offering a programme of support either before the start of the course (the preferred model), or in response to a recognised need for support.

How (tools, techniques, procedures):

Tools used include specialist (qualified) tutors, various software packages, paper-based materials, other materials as required.

Resources:

A room specially set aside for the support sessions (includes a small 'one-to-one' room for more private support sessions), with materials and computers etc, readily available.

Who participates?

Student and tutor(s)

2) Sequence

Each person's role; when; at what time of the year; is it during or outside timetabled (class) time:

The support either takes place in timetabled sessions or as a 'drop-in' service.

How long does the activity last?

Activity goes on throughout the year, in timetabled sessions, in student's own (non-timetabled) time, and in evenings. Length varies according to need.

RESULTS OBTAINED

(Products achieved)

Were the stated objectives achieved? Yes/No

Generally Yes.

The expected results are improved basic and other skills, leading to improved achievement and retention of students on the course of study. Student satisfaction and an increase in personal confidence. Sometimes student achieves an additional qualification, ie 'Wordpower', 'Numberpower', GCSE English or Mathematics, or additional vocational qualifications.

Has the activity had an impact on interpersonal relations (between teachers/students, between students, between teachers, etc)?

Generally this is excellent; a relationship of trust between the student and the support tutor is (usually) built up. The vocational staff and the support tutor have to work together to ensure the support programme is effective, with many consequent 'knock-on' effects such as a greater understanding of learning styles and the nature of specific learning difficulties (and how to overcome them) for the vocational tutors, and an increased knowledge and awareness of the main issues of the vocational teaching for the specialist support tutors.

Between students, we hope there is an increased awareness of each other's strengths and weaknesses, and very often it is clear to see that the students build up a mutual support network. On occasion, this is not so. For example, when a student is embarrassed about receiving support and reluctant to let others know. This can lead to misunderstandings within the student group and impatience with that student (difficulties may be misconstrued as 'laziness').

Has the activity had an impact on the student's plans; personal, academic, professional?

Very beneficial; student's skills and confidence are improved. Student is often clearer about his/her own aims and objectives, and his/her limitations and potential, as a result of a support programme.

EVALUATION METHOD

1. How is the activity evaluated; by whom?

Student support is evaluated in various ways: by the improvement in the student's achievement/results (in conjunction with the whole teaching team), by questioning of the students through the Termly Review Process (including Focus Group Discussions in at least one college), by observations of support teaching which are carried out regularly as part of the college's internal quality assurance and self-assessment procedures and, less frequently, through the Funding Agency's Inspections.

2. How is student progress evaluated?

Part of the on-going support process is a regular review of progress with the student, in which the student is invited to give his/her opinions. This contributes to the overall evaluation of the effectiveness of the support programme.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

What difficulties (if any)?

- a) Funding; there is never enough money to pay for all the support required so inevitably there is a compromise in terms of how much time, perhaps supporting a small group of students together for reasons of economy when individual support would be better.
- b) This is overcome, to a certain extent, through entering the student for additional qualifications. These may be quite low level literacy, numeracy or IT qualifications, or similar complementary courses. The reason for this is the college is able to draw on extra funding if the student is entered on an additional qualification course (and receives more funds when the student achieves the qualification). However, this can put extra stress on a student who is, perhaps, already struggling to achieve the main course. Care must obviously be taken to ensure that the additional qualification supports the students' learning needs, and does not add to their difficulties.
- c) Vocational (ie non-support) tutors are not always sufficiently aware of students' individual learning styles and possible difficulties, and so are not able to support the students' learning in the ordinary lecture time as well as they should.

How were these overcome?

This is overcome through staff development within the college, both formal and informal.

MINIMUM CONDITIONS REQUIRED IN ORDER TO DEVELOP THIS TYPE OF ACTIVITY IN AN INSTITUTION

Conditions relating to time, place, resources, legal regulations etc:

Specialist (qualified) support staff.

Space set aside for support sessions, with appropriate tools and materials. Recognition by the senior management team of the value and importance of the service offered by learning support, funding from central sources.

ANALYSIS AND BENEFITS FOR THE STUDENT

This activity teaches the student valuable social interaction skills, which often helps him/her to integrate better with the group.

It helps the student to understand the subject (vocational) s/he is learning by having the opportunity to discuss issues and revisit topics on a small group or one-to-one basis, at his/her own pace (this is very important).

It improves the student's self-esteem and confidence. In particular, by becoming aware of the nature of and reasons for any learning difficulties (eg dyslexia) the student begins to realise that s/he is not 'stupid' but has a particular way of learning or a particular blockage to learning which needs to be overcome.

This activity usually contributes to an improvement in the results obtained by the student.

BENEFITS FOR THE STUDENT

The student does indeed gain by this activity. The student is generally aware of this because s/he is able to see the improvements in results and understanding.

Tutors are aware of the benefits because they observe the student's improved understanding and results; they often notice an increased confidence in the student.

The student's behaviour is often adapted / improved as a result of beginning to understand the nature of his/her difficulties and of having someone to help who understands.

The staff's impressions of the student change as they become more aware of the nature of the student's support needs and, very importantly, how they can help through an adjustment of teaching style. This has the 'knock-on' effect of developing staff's teaching skills.

LINKS WITH OTHER SUPPORT PRACTICES

This activity is linked to the pre-entry interview, as it is at that point that the student's learning support needs should first be identified.

There is also a link to the Induction process as, during this time, students are further assessed and a deeper understanding of their support needs is obtained through the various activities.

Link to student services, as Learning Support is provided for the 'whole student' (the holistic approach), which may include the need for social and emotional counselling etc.

Link to the Tutorial and Monitoring system as the Personal Tutor liaises regularly with the Learning Support services, where relevant.

Link with Health and Social Support.

Link to staff development programme within the college, ie the particular needs of students often dictate the programme of staff development provided, such as the needs of a profoundly deaf or a blind student.

THE EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SUPPORT PRACTICE

- Pedagogic
- Monitoring and support
- Support – academic, pastoral, social, medical and personal.

Academic – the improvement of skills at all levels.

CONCLUSION, SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS