

The APL Course

Course Pilot Report

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(March 2000)

An Introduction to the Assessment of the Prior Learning & Achievement of Adults

'The APL Course'

Attached:

1. *Copies of tutor attendance Registers*
2. *Copies of tutor Diaries (one for each session taught)*
3. *Copies of Evaluation Forms, completed by students at last session*
4. *Copy of NEOCN Results listing for the course*

Final Report

The Group

This course ran at Wallsend Town Hall from November 1999 until March 2000. It recruited 13 adult students (10 women, 3 men) of whom 9 finally completed the course. Of these 9 individuals, all of them are expected to gain the final NEOCN credit award (2 credits at Level 3), but as of the time of writing, 5 still have to hand in some or all of the expected written work. This completion rate amounts to 70% of the enrolled group, which is 5% less than that established within the course quality outcomes. I don't feel that this short-fall is necessarily a problem, since of those who dropped out of the course, only one did so for no apparent reason. The other three had good practical reasons for not continuing.

Recruitment

The group itself was recruited via:

- Word of mouth
- Newspaper press releases
- Posters displayed in Wallsend Peoples Centre, Newcastle University CLL, etc.
- Direct mailing to APTT members
- Announcements on the AE_Curriculum_UK Internet e-list

As a result, the individuals who applied came from a wide range of adult and community education backgrounds. None of them worked within FE or HE. All worked either voluntarily or in part-time paid capacities for small to medium sized adult education organisations on Tyneside.

Attendance

Attendance at the course was reasonable to good throughout the duration of the course. Tutorials were offered at two points during the course in order to give support with assessment and work in progress; 12 tutorial sessions were held in all, of 30 mins. each. Most students readily asked for tutorial time and made good use of it. There were no noticeable patterns of non-attendance with regard to either tutor or any topic.

The Venue

The venue was Wallsend Town Hall, which is comfortable, well-appointed and reasonably equipped (white board and OHP were available). The only problem with the venue, as far as could be detected, was the lack of coffee/tea making facilities during the session breaks. All the students complained that they needed a coffee break half-way through the session, but due to venue rules, this was not possible. Refreshment facilities need to be sorted out prior to the next course run.

The Teaching

This was the first time either of us had taught this subject or these topics. We were heavily guided by the NIACE pack on APL, but as time went on we added extra material as the responses from students required. The students helped greatly in this area, as the diary entries indicate. This means that at the end of this run we have virtually a 'new' course, different from that which we originally planned in terms of content and material. The course is now far less vocationally orientated, and more concerned with empowerment and progression. All in all, it is more suited to adult learning than it was when we started. Because we were both using the same pack as source material, it inevitably happened that we crossed over into each other's 'territory' as the course progressed. This meant that some repetition of material and contradictions in terminology occurred. This has been noted, and will be rectified for the second run. The course used case study materials heavily. This was very useful, and proved to be enjoyed by the students. Much new hand-out material was also developed, which helped orientate the course toward adult and community themes.

Student Responses

As the diaries show, the students seemed to enjoy the course, and responded well to both tutors and to all the material. The group 'gelled' together well; there was no evident friction. Learning came in 'bursts': many students said that their understanding of APL/A came around half-way through the taught material. It was at this point that they saw the main application value and empowering nature of the APL/A process. This is to be expected, since it was also around this point that practical APL/A work took place (see Diary entry for session 7 onwards).

Evaluation

Only five students attended the very last session when formal evaluation took place. Since this is 50% of the full group, it is too small to be an accurate representation of the true group summary evaluation. However, from the answers that were given, it appears that the students were generally satisfied with the progress and impact of the course (all ticks/crosses on the form were in the 'average' to 'strongly-agree' section for each question), with advice given to us which highlights the terminology confusion that occurred (and which is mentioned above), and the need for a coffee break. Generally this confirms expectations.

NEOCN Moderation and CLT Verification

Due to the lateness of the NEOCN Recognition Panel, course moderation did not happen until week thirteen of the course. Verification happened at the same session. It is my opinion that moderation was poor; two examples of student work were inspected, but feedback occurred to the whole group -- and this meant that criticisms which should have gone to individuals only, were voiced to everyone. I believe that this is embarrassing to students, and should not have happened. Verification should also have been done as a separate visit. This would have allowed greater time for feedback, and prevented a feeling of tutor and students being 'stressed' with both events happening at once. Written verification procedures should also have been given to the tutors before the process happened, so that all would have been aware of what was expected and what would occur. Generally I found verification to be unhelpful; I don't think that this was because of the verifier -- but more because the process itself was a 'mystery'.

Summary

This was a highly successful course; in fact much more so than had been expected. Though it was far from easy to teach, it progressed smoothly, and had good outcomes. All students prepared actions plans at the end of the course, and all have generally agreed that they would like APL to become a far more routine process within the world of adult and community education. I would hope that they will cascade their skills down to others, given the opportunity. As to progression, almost all have expressed an interest in continuing professional development, specifically by joining the next PLATO module (The Course Design Course).

Bob Groves (15th March 2000)