

Teaching In Adult & Community Education

(TIACE)

Course Pilot Report

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Final Report On The Progress And Outcomes Of The Pilot Course

Attached:

1. Copies of tutor attendance registers
2. Copies of tutor Diaries
3. Copies of Evaluation Forms
4. Copy of NEOCN accreditation results
5. Copy of NEOCN moderator's interim report

The Group

The course attracted fifteen adult students, of which five were very much newcomers to teaching and the others all 'old-timers' (to use Lave's terminology). Age ranged from mid-twenties to late sixties, and the balance between men and women was more even than usual – 40% male to 60% female. The experience of those who were old hands at teaching ranged from FE college work to schools teaching. Initial qualification levels took in PGCE, PhD and various first degrees, with a few who had few or no paper qualifications. This was a diverse group in terms of background and experience!

It may be surprising then to say that, generally, they worked exceptionally well together with no noticeable friction. There seemed to be a good sense of camaraderie, made plain by the willingness of the more experienced to be tolerant of the novices and to support them as they went. They were good humoured and keen, the tutor diaries constantly attesting to their willingness to take part in exercises and to enjoy all that was thrown at them. This, I believe, was situated learning working at its best – there was a strong sense of commitment to the course and a very strong confidence in the tutors.

Not only that but the student's showed excellent initiative and resourcefulness when one of the tutors was indisposed due to illness (myself) for one of the practice sessions. Rather than abandon the practice that was due to happen, two of the more experienced students were chosen to play the part of observers and worked as tutor-observers for the work on display. They also correctly used the Holistic Assessment Record forms to document the student work. All that was needed was for me to verify the comments and quality of the documentation, and the materials were allowable for assessment. I think this shows excellent professional judgement, confidence and coping skills. I think it was at this point that I knew that this group could manage to get through the course material with the minimum of fuss and would perform in a highly professional manner.

Why did this self-motivated response happen? Likely as not this arises from the very practical nature of the course and its dependency on group interaction (the medium here reinforced the message). This literally forced the group to fall back on its social resources, building good-natured support systems and thereby raise the standard of overall achievement. Their fun-loving attitudes help make this course one of the easiest and most enjoyable to teach we have experienced in some considerable time.

Attendance and Venue

Attendance was reasonably good, as the register shows (Margaret Bell's register was not available at the time of writing, but attendance remained consistent over her sessions as it did through mine), and much time was availed via tutorials, which proved very important in coping with student absences due to illness and domestic responsibility. Drop out was the lowest encountered thus far, with only one student leaving due to getting a job (not in teaching). This person was disappointed to leave and hopes to take up the course again at a future date. Attendance was particularly respectable during the testing 'practice session' part of the course, where group solidarity was most important. This attests to the group's strong willingness to support each other and work together.

The venue was very good indeed. The gentlemen of Wallsend Town Hall room bookings were particularly supportive to all of us, and they allowed us full use of their resources (including the town hall photocopier!). The room used was quite satisfactory, and provided a pleasant venue for this kind of active teaching.

Recruitment

The group was recruited via:

- Word of Mouth
- Direct mailing to APTT members
- Newspaper press release
- Posters displayed at various venues throughout the area
- Announcement in the AE_Curriculum_UK Internet e-list

The vast bulk of recruitment came from the first two items though, showing that the APTT has a good ore of teachers wanting to do this sort of course. Many had progressed from the Course Design Course, and seem to want to do the entire set of PLATO modules in succession. This was never the original intention, but it is an encouragement to get the remaining two modules written and implemented. Not only that, it means that the most experienced teachers who have completed the modules will be good candidates for teachers on these courses at a later date.

The Teaching

The teaching went consistently well throughout the entire course with hardly any faults worth mentioning. I feel my session on situated learning needs refining, but this is expected with material that is relatively new and untried. Another idea was for Margaret and I to do our own 20' practice sessions alongside the group in a future run. This would add models of practice and show that what they were being asked to do is not 'impossible'. All these ideas are simply icing on an otherwise very good cake though. I hate to say it, but it went excellently throughout, and the proof of this diagnosis is in the results!

To testify to this success, I'm attaching the interim report of the first of the two NOCN Moderator's who have been assigned to the course (Margaret Field... who could not continue as moderator due to moving to another part of the country). This report largely echoes the quality of the course... I'm very proud to say!

Student Responses and Evaluation

Thirteen of the fifteen students completed the course and have gained three NOCN credits at Level 3... the largest number on any APTT/PLATO module! One student failed to do the second of their practice sessions (like a Grand National runner, they shied at the last fence!) and ran out of time to complete. Everyone else handed in his or her work correctly and it was found to be of satisfactory quality throughout. This result easily conforms to the Quality Statements laid out in the original TIACE Course Outline document.

The final course evaluation was completed by eight of the fifteen students. All the responses, with hardly a noticeable exception were in the 'Agree Strongly' range for every one of the questions around good practice. The only instances where I can discern a slight drop (to 'agree quite strongly') were the questions concerning timing, feedback and diversity of learning. The first of these needs looking at in the light of this pilot... sometimes we may have pushed the group a little too fast. The second of these could mean that more detailed tutorials are needed, though this is uncertain. The last means that some course topics were more 'vague' than others in comprehensibility, and I would suggest that this is typical of a pilot course where the tutors are still getting used to the material being taught. Overall though, I am delighted with the results of the evaluation, and think it helps consolidate the work done in no uncertain terms.

NEOCN Moderation and CLT Verification

Due to our original nominated moderator moving away from the area due to marriage, the course has had two moderators: Margaret Field and Joan Armstrong. I felt that, in this instance, this was acceptable as it allowed a double examination of the course content and performance that would doubly assure the quality of what was being achieved. Margaret was interim moderator. She visited the group halfway through the course, talked to the students and observed me teaching. Joan examined the final files of course work and verified their consistency, their fulfilment of the NOCN accreditation agreement and standards, and that all material was present. Overall moderation was satisfactory, though the appointment of the second moderator was delayed for a long period and caused a long pause before certification. This is not welcome, and needs to be looked into. Otherwise, NEOCN administration was satisfactory.

There was no CLT verification of this course. I don't believe it could have added anything particularly constructive to what had already been observed and said by Margaret and Joan, though a third pair of eyes looking at overall procedures would have been a good sign of quality assurance from the funder stand-point.

Progression

Student progression has already begun. One student rang me yesterday (April 20th) to tell me she had been offered teaching work at Newcastle University. Another is working for WEA, and others continuing work they already had upon joining the course. Most have expressed an interest in the doing the next PLATO module in Assessment, which I think should be a popular course.

Summary

Maybe this has not been the biggest or most influential course in the world, but certainly it has been one of the most enjoyable I have been privileged to teach on since I started writing the PLATO programme. I think the course has been fundamentally effective in achieving its aim to produce a practical response to the complex questions raised by implementing situated learning. I think there is much to be learned from this that will inform future course development, and given time, curriculum development elsewhere. Areas that have proved to be particularly valuable, and contributed to the course's success include:

- **Holistic Assessment** – and the way in which this encouraged students to demonstrate what they could do in creative ways.
- **Interactive Teaching Methods** – practical responses to specific problems of encouraging situated learning to evolve in adult groups
- **The Chickering System of Evaluation** – which proved productive in terms of information, but did not carry the strong emotional 'sting' that other systems of paper evaluation do.

... but this simply highlights key areas that come to mind in what has been a major step forward for APTT and its development of teacher training.

Bob Groves (21st April 2001)
(Tutor)