

Postgraduate certificate in learning and teaching education essay



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In order to reflect on the progress that I have made so far in higher education it is necessary to give some background with respect to what I was like before I started. Prior to commencing the Teaching Toolkit and Post Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education I was not a particularly loud or assertive person and at times questioned whether I was suited to teaching/lecturing, despite my love of teaching. Furthermore, at the commencement of the Teaching Toolkit and Post Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, I was unsure and apprehensive about what to expect from the course and what would be required of me for the courses and what areas of teaching that I would be interested in the most. The aim of this assignment is to reflect and detail what I have gained from the course and how it has benefited me not just in terms of teaching but in terms of my academic career as well. In addition, this essay will also highlight how my learning and teaching meets the Higher Education Academy's (HEA) and Staff and Education Development Association (SEDA) standards for learning and teaching and how I plan to continue my professional development in the future.

Personal Development to date

I would say that the most important thing that I have gained from the teaching toolkit/Post Graduate certificate is confidence in my ability as a teacher. As previously stated I have previously questioned my ability as a teacher. However having completed the teaching toolkit this served to enhance my confidence in my own teaching as I was slightly apprehensive prior to the commencement as this was my first observation and I was concerned about what others thought of my teaching. I feel that the process

of peer observation helped me to reflect upon my teaching. The process has helped me to look at the different aspects of my teaching, such as methods of delivery, level, student management, and to reflect on how I approach and deal with these issues. This is something I had not previously done, certainly not in a focussed, structured way at least. One example of this was during one of the peer observations the observer noted that during the session I had to deal with a difficult student who after arriving 20 minutes late proceeded to do almost nothing throughout the session. I mentioned to the observer that I was forced to speak with him at the end of the session about his behaviour. The observer mentioned that perhaps I should have spoken to him sooner (i. e. during the session itself) as to address the situation immediately. Though I was justified in my actions, the reflective process taught me to think about the situation and was my actions the best way of controlling it and whether there were better methods I could have used. As a result of this session I feel that I will be more confident and assertive in future sessions.

In addition to this I am not a particularly loud person and my voice is rather soft. Therefore the session offered on the Teaching Toolkit course entitled projecting and protecting your voice, I feel was invaluable when I teach larger groups and I need to maximize my voice. Whilst this does not fit in strictly with any HEA or SEDA guidelines, it was established by Nilson (2010) that a clearer more audible voice commands greater classroom attention and facilitates learning which does fit into the HEA professional standards framework with respect to teaching and supporting student learning.

As an associate lecturer/demonstrator I often had little influence on curriculum design and course management. However, having completed the Teaching Toolkit and from what I have learned thus far on the PG Cert LTHE I have engaged more with this process and have thus requested/been asked to design practical session for students up to and including MSC level. As a result of this course I have contributed significantly to the design and amendment of several aspects of the XS1100, XS3100, XS3101 and XS4101 modules. I feel that without the Teaching Toolkit and PG Cert LTHE I would not have had the ability or the confidence to do this. From the knowledge I have picked up on this course I was able to identify and amend potential weaknesses in the assessment design in some of the Biomechanics modules, (in that they focussed too much on written work and too little on the practical skills associated with sports Biomechanics). As such students are now primarily assessed in terms of their practical/real world skills as opposed to assignments (for example for the XS3100 Applied Biomechanics module students are required to provide 3-D gait analysis to an elite footballer, and they are assessed in their competency and ability). I feel that if I had not completed the Teaching Toolkit or commenced with the PG Cert LTHE course I would not have picked up on these potential limitations. With respect to national standards involvement in programme design and assessment is one of the SEDA and HEA values for teaching and learning accreditation.

One of the key aspects of the PG Cert LTHE was to complete a learning agreement, detailing key things that we wanted to achieve during the course of the program. Amongst other things (also detailed throughout the course of this assignment) I stated that I wanted to gain a better understanding of

electronic learning materials such as e-learn and incorporate them more effectively and to a greater extent into my own teaching. As Ramsden (1999) suggests that information technology is invaluable in higher education and will increasingly permeate academic activities in higher education. An important aspect of teaching that I have learned much from is E-learning strategies. Prior to the commencement of the PG Cert LTHE I had not utilized any form of electronic learning materials (other than standard PowerPoint) to support my teaching and aid student learning. Having been a student and then progresses to teaching in the School of Sport and Exercise I feel that we are only really beginning to integrate E-learning into my teaching, having used it relatively little during my undergraduate studies. E-learning is an area of interest not just to me but also with the national framework as HEFCE in conjunction with the HEA introduced in 2005 a 10 year plan to embed e-learning into higher education. However, following completion of the learning agreement, I began to read the E-Learn starter pack provided by the LDU which was very useful. Following this I began to utilize E-Learn more within my own teaching, with respect to the Harmon et al (1999) 5 stage model I am primarily within stages 1-2 but aim to utilize this method more in the future (See future development section).

Furthermore, I stated that I wished to obtain a better understanding of the assessment and feedback process and to find ways of improving my assessment methods and marking. Assessment and feedback are closely linked and the type of assessment can often be the driver for the type of feedback given. These aspects of teaching and learning are key values proposed by both SEDA and the HEA. Through the PGCertHE workshops and

participation in departmental training days, I have gained a greater awareness of the different types of assessments that can be used and the types of feedback. Additionally, I have learned that one of the most important aspects of assessment and feedback is the timing of it. The timing of assessments is crucial to the learning process. An assessment given immediately following or relatively soon after the conclusion of a topic area will have significantly greater influence on learning than if it was given at the end of the module (Bone, 1999, p. 17).

One of the key reasons that I decided to undertake the Teaching Toolkit and PG Cert LTHE was to help me when giving feedback, particularly on written reports. The PG Cert LTHE has helped me to realise that without appropriate feedback the quality of teaching and assessment strategy are of little use as students are thus unaware of their own achievement and progression.

Feedback is something that the university as a whole generally scores poorly (REF). Therefore, I am at times apprehensive when giving written feedback and as such marking often takes me along time to complete. However, the Teaching Toolkit has taught me that alternative methods of feedback can be appropriate. As such I have begun to use audio feedback rather than written marking. Ferris (1997) suggests that audio feedback can offer a better alternative to written commentary in terms of the student's response to feedback. In concurrence I feel that this allows me to give far more detailed, thorough feedback in the same amount or less time as written feedback and appears to be far more favourable with the students. In addition to this I have also tried face-face feedback, whereby students are given limited feedback and their mark on their assignments, then given an appointment

where they are provided with more detailed feedback during the meeting. Although I have only experimented with this approach with a small number of students I feel that face-face feedback may be a very effective approach to feedback.

Another key thing that the Teaching Toolkit taught me is the importance of professional development. Therefore, following completion of the Teaching Toolkit week I decided to undertake a Strength and Conditioning qualification to supplement my knowledge of Sport and Exercise Science (which I felt was lacking in this area). This links in well with the HEA knowledge and understanding guideline with respect to 'subject material'. I feel that this has benefitted me not just in terms of knowledge but also in terms of the number of modules that I am able to teach on. Furthermore, with respect to national recognition the qualification also gives me accreditation as a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist by the National Strength and Conditioning Association. This qualification also corresponds well with the HEA resource guide with respect to Sports Biomechanics (my teaching area), as it focuses on similar goals in terms of 'technique improvement for performance' and 'technique modification to improve injury' (HEA Biomechanics 2011).

Prior to the commencement of the Teaching Toolkit and the PG Cert LTHE I feel that I did not consider the importance of reflection with respect to teaching methodology. I feel that I did not consider the needs of the students sufficiently with respect to their learning environment/experience. Having completed the teaching toolkit and commenced with the PG Cert LTHE I feel that I am able to focus my sessions much more with respect to the students

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own learning experience rather than my own. I feel that the Teaching Toolkit and PG Cert LTHE have taught me (particularly in practical sessions) that there are different types of learners and that I have to cater to a range of student abilities. Students learn differently and as such differentiation in teaching styles is important in order to ensure that students are included equally the learning process (Felder and Silverman 1988). Le Fever (1995) suggests that when lecturers understand students learning styles and can adjust their teaching to these styles students will learn. For example, in order to help learners that benefit from auditory stimuli I like to use graphs and video clips in my sessions. For those who respond best to dynamic stimuli I try to minimize class time and focus more on the hands on practical aspects of the module (which in sports science there is a lot of). For analytical learners I always try to include relevant facts and numbers in my lectures. This links well with the HEA framework with respect to understanding how students learn.

Future Professional Development

As mentioned previously I have become interested in E-learning. In terms of professional development I hope to do more work/learning in this area.

Whilst I feel that I have made quite a lot of progress in introducing e-learning/technology into my teaching I still have a long way to go. I feel that I need additional training with respect to of e-learning technologies and training on how to optimise different multimedia presentation for different formats. As previously stated this corresponds with the HEFCE and HEA 10 year plan for the implementation of technology into teaching.

In addition, I feel that I also need to develop my personal tutor skills. This is an important and at times underappreciated aspect of teaching that I need to develop additional skills in as all lecturers are allocated personal tutees. This corresponds with the SEDA guideline with respect to student support on academic and pastoral issues and the HEA framework with respect to student support and guidance.

One key aspect of my professional development that I hope to achieve within the next 12-18 months is the completion of my Ph. D. This links back to the learning agreement in which I listed submission of my thesis as one of my desired outcomes. In addition it also fits in well with the HEA professional practice framework with respect to the ' integration of research and professional activities with teaching and supporting learning'. I feel that completion of my Ph. D will be invaluable in fulfilling this aspect of the HEA framework and believe that this is the one of the primary reasons that a Ph. D has now become an essential pre-requisite for institutions wishing to appoint new lecturers.

In addition to the previous statement with respect to the HEA guideline recommending ' the integration of research and professional activities with teaching and supporting learning' I feel that I also need to develop my research profile. As stated previously I feel that for someone my age I have a relatively strong publication record, nonetheless I have data for papers that have yet to be submitted and research ideas that still have yet to come to fruition. Furthermore this also fits within the SEDA recommendation regarding the ' undertaking of appropriate development activities'.

In terms of professional development I am also currently working towards accreditation from the British Association of Sports Sciences as an exercise practitioner and through the course endorsement scheme. The course endorsement scheme is designed to ensure appropriateness of the curriculum, resources and teaching strategies that undergraduate courses offer for training sport and exercise scientists. I feel that this qualification as well as helping me in terms of accreditation by a professional body, will also benefit the school in terms of attracting consultancy based income from sport steams and athletes and more significantly in obtaining accreditation from the Brutish Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences for our Sports Technology degree and M. Sc courses, which has been a major goal for some time now.

In addition, in terms of professional development I hope to further my research supervision skills. Having had access to excellent supervisors throughout both my undergraduate and postgraduate studies I feel that I have learned a lot and have much to offer prospective research students. Following completion of the PG Cert LTHE I hope to commence with the PG Cert in Research Student Supervision. I feel that this programme offered by the LDU will be enormously beneficial to me in terms of providing the best research degree environment/experience for the student. Furthermore, this links well with respect to the HEFCE (2003) recommendations for the development of threshold standards and framework of good practice for postgraduate research supervision.

Summary

In summary, I feel that I have gained a significant amount of new knowledge from the Teaching Toolkit and PG Cert LTHE. I feel that the key outcome for me is the understanding of students needs in terms of different teaching and assessment strategies to cater to different kinds of learners. I feel that my increased knowledge has improved my confidence and enabled me to enabled me to become more involved in teaching and with academic issues such as curriculum design, module review and assessment boards

Furthermore, having reflected on what kind of teacher I am the Teaching Toolkit and PG Cert LTHE have as such helped me to find out what kind of learner I am as well. The Teaching Toolkit and PG Cert LTHE have provided me with a number of key new skills that have helped me develop significantly from a young lecturer who at times wondered whether he had chosen the correct career path into a much more confident person.

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