

Interview with PDPST008

21/3/12 - Media Professionals Tutor

How did you become involved in the project?

I think I became involved with the project through knowing yourself, through discussions in the PGCHE and then we found out we had common interest in coaching. And then you circulated information about the project and I thought that could be really useful and it could be applicable to the media professional workshop. So that's sort of where it came from, I think initially.

What were the key drivers for you getting involved? What was the main thing that attracted you?

I think the main thing that attracted me was seeing how I can use coaching principles in a learning environment where its kind of changing the emphases from teaching to developing learners own expertise. Kind of drawing on themselves, I thought that was an interesting idea. Because I think for myself I find it uncomfortable standing in front of a class and being directive to them. Telling them stuff. I would rather them to think about stuff, to be independent learners. So that was my interest in joining those to things together. This kind of independence in learning and coaching.

So what is important to you about independence of learning?

I think what's important is that its more long lasting. If I just stand in, at the front of the class and just tell them things. Either they won't remember or they might not put it into practice. But when they are encouraged to be independent learners they go through a cognitive process within themselves. So they are actually working through something actively and those principles can be used in other aspects of their lives and beyond the class room, beyond doing a degree. If they are facilitated in those techniques it can be a life long thing.

So for you as a tutor that's a more important aspect to develop?

Yes.

What enabled you to integrate the coaching principles or processes within your area?

I think it was my own background in coaching, because I have done coaching myself. I have been coached, coached other people, done a course in coaching. So I had that kind of background. But I think it was useful to come across this project your involved with to see how that could actually be transferred to an academic environment. Because I hadn't made that link before, really. Some reason I hadn't, I had seen them as to separate interests and I hadn't been able to put them together.

How has that change your two separate interests?

I think seeing that they do not have to be two separate things, that actually you don't have to divide yourself in that way. You can draw upon resources from a wide range of different areas. And it's how you integrate them and make them your own that's kind of important.

How much of that change has been down to your project or down to your PGCHE?

I would say the project more than the PGCHE. What the PGCHE did do was highlight how I learnt and the way that I like to be taught and I didn't realise that before. So that was interesting.

So that was your learning from that and this enabled you to see these two aspects to bring together?

Yes

What sort of barriers have there been for you to try and get this involved in your modules?

I think some of the ones is the culture. Kind of the culture of academia. Definitely within my particular area, cultural studies, humanities base where it's often theoretical based kind of lectures and seminars and it's based on telling students stuff. Telling them about these theories. Rather than getting them involved in something. Where, what's interesting about the media professionals workshop module, it's a different kind of module on the course. And it's more media making, so it's kind of a creative aspect rather than theoretical and that works well with the coaching. Because students are actively going out and doing stuff. Using their kind of creativity, sourcing materials, having to come up with their own ideas, and that kind of thing. So I think it works well in that, so I think part of the thing was institutional barriers of what's expected of being a lecturer. So you are expected to lecture, aren't you. The whole thing, you're supposed to stand there and impart your knowledge. And I think that's held in high esteem still. And you're seen as the expert defiantly and that's the whole thing coming out with a PhD you're supposed to be the expert in a particular area. And then you impart that onto somebody else. So that's kind of an interesting idea. And I think, so it's institution, subject, conventions kind of the role of the lecturer. Partly I also think it's miss understanding, can be a barrier. When people hear the word coaching they have certain ideas about what it is and that can be misleading sometimes. Like my line manager thought that coaching was a bit like being a sports coach. That you would push somebody really hard, that you would run them through the mill kind of thing. The other idea, that actually I heard within my kind of teaching circle, within our team, that some people thought that life coaching is kind of more to do with life style. That it's not serious, that it's like a make over, like a personality make over. Rather than being about personal development, is was something sort of fluffy, kind of wish fulfillment stuff. Rather than actually serious practice. So all those kind of views went into the mix.

How did you overcome those barriers?

I think I find ways round them. So I had discussion with my line manager and said "coaching isn't about pushing somebody to the limit, it's very different from sports coaching" and I said like in a gentle way "I can understand that the word coaching invokes that in you but it's actually a different thing". And the same with the thing about it being a life style choice. You

know saying to colleagues "well you know it is actually a serious academic field of study now". Because there is a journal coaching and teaching its been recognised in business etcetera, personal and professional development and ins like that.

So it was a matter for you of having conversations with them and putting your case forward to over come those barriers?

Yes

Have those barriers been overcome do you think?

Partially. I think it takes time and I think it's about showing evidence of results. If you can show that you have used these techniques as an intervention and you have seen a difference in students kind of motivation, not just the performance and assessment but the actual motivation and engagement. And I think that's when people will notice.

What sort of changes have you made other than the sessions I did with your students?

Other changes. When I actually give lectures I try to, I'm using the word try there! I use questioning, I use a lot of the what questions rather than the why. Defiantly with my subject area there is a lot of why's. Why is society like this, why isn't the like this, why are women portrayed like this. It's why why why. So it's about changing that to what can we learn from these representations what would be another way of representing women. What are the main factors that contribute toward this? So it's about shifting the questions sometimes.

What sort of responses does that elicit? What sort of changes make?

I think there is a difference between level 4 students in 1st year and by the level 5 I think I have noticed a difference. Because level 4 students when they first arrive I think there is a tendency to come from an environment where they are told things from school. They are told this is the answer I'm the teacher I'm the expert this is the answer you feed it back to me and that's how you get good results. So that's sort of the way they have come through the education system.

So that's the process they understand?

That's what they understand. So when you start to incorporate some what questions they actually look frightened. Their response, when I look out and see their faces, a lot of them look absolutely scared that I am actually asking them for their opinion. And they are like "Well nobody has asked me before" or they will give me an answer that they think that you want rather than their own answer.

So speaking it from the knowledge that they have already picked up?

Yeah.

How do you overcome that?

I think that comes through their experience of changing university life. Getting embedded within it, and through the assessment and feedback that they get. That we are interested in

their responses, which they have to back up with evidence and consider in different debates, but there is not one answer. That there are many different perspectives on something and how they can way that up. I think that takes practice and they learn that across the different modules. So I think by level 5 they are getting into that and then when you ask the what questions they are more fluent in giving answers.

Starting to think here, rather than looking for...

Not all of the students are like that, it's not all of them, but you can see some tendencies I would say.

What, for want of a better word, percentage of influence has coaching had on that change? Because that change happens to a certain extent in academia anyway. Do you think it has change the process or how it has impacted?

I think at the moment it's small. I think there is a lot more potential there. I think it is like a little seed that's growing. I think it could be a major part, it could play a major part. And I think when students get used to it, when they become more familiar with the practices I think it will make a really positive change. I think, to motivation levels engagement.

So you firmly believe that this will have long term impact?

I do because I think the current system isn't working. I think what I see in my own school, is I see students disengage. Not all students again, not all students. We have got a core of students who are engaged and are really involved in the learning and are will to do search and really get into their subject. There are some that are not engaged at all. We seem to have lost them. There is something about their experiences that is not working for them. And I think we have still not got to the root of it, what it is? I think it might be a way, it might be an opportunity to explore new ways of teaching, new ways of learning, new ways of offer the material that we do, but in a different form. It's about evolving the curriculum.

So you have changed your questioning style within your lecturing process, is there any other changes you have made?

I think in the assessment process, it's the feedback that I give to students. I would say because when I give feedback to to students on their work I tend to say "what could you have done differently". Use the reflective aspect of the coaching, "what could you have differently, what if you had thought of that". Rather than saying "why did you do that". Or what made you think that. It's a subtle change sometimes, but again it's to make them think, come to the assessment next time differently. Rather than being kind of dismissive. You know sometimes I think students get criticism, well they see the feedback as criticism. And especially when they a first starting the course it can be really destroying for them. But the same thing can't be over inflatory either. I can't kind of boost them up without them having firmer foundations. It's about having a feedback sandwich. It's about giving them something positive, you know something they can think about for the future, and stuff like that. So maybe that aspect as well I have introduced some coaching there.

So adjusting the tone and the style of giving that feedback to enable them to think rather than feel I've done this wrong?

Yeah.

So it's a moving forward aspect, would you say?

Feed forward.

How would you describe a typical students on your module?

Is there such a thing as a typical student, that's the thing?

Ok, so you talk about a core group that you feel are motivated and don't needs great feel of support, they are going some where and they feel engaged. And then there is this group that isn't so motivated, that s disengaged. So what sort of , how would you describe them?

Their personality or their learning style?

A bit of both.

I think the ones who are disengaged, I think some of them are juggling a lot of different things. So I think it's their personal circumstances are a factor. So they might be working or what ever. Some aspect of their personal life is impacting on their studies. Which I think sometimes doesn't get addressed. So it can be something to do with that. Another one is maybe lack of confidence actually. Some of them lack confidence so they disengage already, because in away they are frightened of failure, but it becomes a self-for-filing prophecy. Then you will get some who are actually over confident. And they are disengaged because they think they do not need to come into class because what's the point they know it all already. So a range of different things going on.

If a coaching intervention was in place what elements would you see being overcome from that group?

I think coaching can be useful fro a number of things. Especially to do with actual, really fundamental things like procrastination. I think coaching could help students in that way. And things just about management, time management. Setting goals, actually being a kind of structured thing. Having that, having that I think would be useful for students, who are feeling lacking in confidence or they are juggling different things, how to prioritise things. Things like that.

So is it a life learning process they are going through when they come to university, as much as it is about coming to university?

I think it is I think it's both.

So those two things are running along side, and some students are able to deal with it for whatever reason and other students just find that....

I think so. What I have found, what has struck me this semester is with the media professional workshop, is students learn the technical things and they might be really good at that. They are taught the skills from the media professionals that come in. Where it falls down is their actual inability to manage their time, procrastination, putting things off and then it's all a last minute rush and then they don't really do as well as they could do. It can be a crisis of confidence, they just give up they think "I just can't do this". Or feeling overwhelmed. So a lot of this stuff is going on. And it isn't addressed anywhere in the curriculum really.

Do you do tutorials with your students?

Yeah we do.

Have you used the coaching in that?

Yeah I do when students come. I think they do respond to it and I find when you have had a session like that it builds rapport with the students and it encourages trust I think on both sides and I think the relationship improves after that.

Your teaching relationship improves after that?

Yeah

Can you give an example of a particular student issue and how you tackled it?

Oh there was one. A student came to me. As part of the professional workshops they have to write an assessment about their future career plans. This student came to me and she said "I would love to work in film but I would never be able to do it?" so I was picking up on the language "I will never be able to do it", "I'm not good enough" and "nobody will take me on". So I thought, this like trigger words here, I thought through the coaching "what if you found out different opportunities that are available", "have you looked at what is available?" "where could you start" or "what could be the first step that you take" and so we went through that kind of process together. And then she investigated the different roles within the film industry. And then I said "what about the skills you have, what you've gained?" and she says "oh didn't really think about that". Because she was already working so I said "what about what you have already learnt in your job?" "oh I didn't think about that I didn't realise how to bring these two things together". So that was like a light bulb moment. Kind of that process and that was really good seeing that. To turn that around from "I won't do it, I'll never be able to do it" to something like "oh we'll maybe I could".

So that is moving forward again. How has that student progressed?

That was good, that was a turning point, I think after that her confidence grew and I noticed that confidence growing in other modules as well, not just that one. And she has done very well.

So just having a different type of conversation with her?

Yeah.

And is that different to how you would usually do it a year ago?

Yeah I think, if I hadn't had that conversation with her, I would have had no idea that, that was going on in her head. That she thinks "I'm not good enough and I'll never get anywhere". And it just made me think how many other students are sat there thinking "I'm doing this media degree but what's going to happen when I leave" or "I won't get anywhere" "who's going to take me on" that kind of thing. I'm sure other students are going through that as well.

So we have looked at some changes, have you seen any changes across the whole group?

No. I think it depends on the willingness of the person. It comes back to that fundamental coaching principle that the person wants to change. Is willing to be open to change. And that's a key thing, because if they are not, then it's very difficult.

So where would you place your group on that scale?

Patchy some are willing and some aren't.

What sort of feedback did you get from the sessions I did with your students?

I think a couple came to me and said they found it useful because they are trying to forge ahead with their plans for beyond graduation so they found it useful. But they were the ones who do think ahead. They're the ones that I would have said are already motivated. I think it's the coaching idea of, coaching makes you expand on your best. That boosting your performance. And one student in particular is very much that way inclined and already performing at quite a high level and they want to push it to the next level. And they liked the coaching session. And I would have thought that from the beginning and said that that person is going to be receptive to it and clearly they were.

And the unreceptive students?

It's just like it goes over their head.

Not even any negative comments back?

I don't think so. It may come in time. It may not be something that immediately comes to the fore in their minds. Maybe even when they have graduated they may think oh right, "I remember that session". Might be when they go out into the world of work and they come across coaching again in their work place and they think, "oh yeah I've come across that before".

What do you see as the main achievement or outcome for what you have done?

Exploring possibilities. There's not just one way of doing things, there's other ways. And to, it's about constantly evaluating your own practice as well. What is working, what could I do differently. How will that impact upon the students. What works for them. So it's kind of an on going process. It's not about standing still. It's about change, and embracing change.

How much of coaching philosophy do you use with yourself?

A lot.

So that is something you do for yourself?

Yeah.

What impact do you think this will have in the long term?

It's hard to say, do you mean on the students or the institution?

On the students, yourself and the institution.

With the institution I think it's going to take time. Like is said we have got this small seed and can grow it. And that's great this idea, that there is already a network of coaches, that are teaching or coaching other students. So that's good. I think the teaching environment is changing anyway. I think there is a realisation that maybe what worked before is not necessarily going to work now. Academia is changing. Commercial world is changing, the two are coming together, all kind of opportunities that are out there. New things coming along. I think a small start but much more potential is there at the institutional level.

I think with the students, again I think it's a small seed. Some of them responded straight away, but others there might be a little idea lurking in there that hasn't come out yet. It depends on what actually happens when they encounter new ideas themselves. Go out into the world of work, might come across it.

With myself it's practice. I think some times I do use coaching principles, other times I forget I go back to the teaching, telling them stuff mode. I'm not doing, don't do it hundred percent of the time. And then I stand back and think "oh I wish I had done it a different way". So I think it's a constant kind of practice, it does improve with practice, it becomes more second nature. Because at first you have to think about it consciously. I will consciously ask open-ended questions and coaching kind of questions. And I having to really think about that, then the more that you do it, more kind of flow comes doesn't it?

What a your plans for next semester's modules?

Next semesters modules, I think even more. I think through working with yourself and learning about this project. That it's given me encouragement to continue and to develop these ideas. And I'll evaluate how useful they have been at the end of this semester, with that one particular module, and think about how could I introduce those ideas to other modules. Even the ones that are really theoretical. Is there a way in there? And there will be its just about finding that.

How are you going to evaluate it?

I asked the students and look at what they have produced. How they have worked in groups. Has it made a difference to their group dynamic. Ask them to see me on a one to one basis, so I give them feedback that way. And when I actually see them I'm going to actually ask

them coaching questions in that process. "What I'd you learn from that", ask them how effective was the coaching, "what did you learn from the coaching session", "will you take that forward", "What else have you learned about coaching" and things like that.

It would be interesting to know your feedback from that, if you are able?

Yeah

That's the end of my questions, is there anything else you feel you would like to say that I haven't covered?

I think in a way I feel slightly isolated. Because I'm the person in my team who is thinking about these coaching principles, and maybe the others don't approve or they don't understand them and it would be helpful to maybe be part of a network. Where there is lectures who are interested in integrating coaching practices. To have a dialogue and see how they did it. I'm not say that like what I have done is a perfect way I think there is a lot more I could do really, and feel there is more I could do. And to find out how other people have used it successfully or more extensively. I think that would be useful.

What would enable this?

It could be as part of the eight of the month series. Or something like that. It could be integrated it doesn't have to be separate. Could be part of the learning teaching assessment kind of process. And may be linking that with the student ambassadors as well. So the to come together so, lectures can learn from what have the student ambassadors coached, what have they learned from practices and visa-versa. And it could be integrated into the PGCE, something about coaching practice.

The following is a reflection by the interviewee on coaching and assessment that came in general conversation after the interview.

In the tutorials I'm teaching them as a person and responding to that. Then on the other side of that, the flip side of that is, when I assess their work I'm in a position of power. And I give them a mark for their work, that gives me power over them. And that can disrupt the coaching process in way. You can be equal to them, and encourage them and stuff, but if I mark their work and do not give them the mark that they think they got, it's like I'm two different people then. In some situation I'm encouraging and facilitating and in the other one I'm wielding the power. And I thought wouldn't it be interesting if you actually had a dialogue with students, and you came to the assessment and I'm given their work and their sat at the side of me and we actually went through that together and agreed a mark. That's a bit radical isn't it?

That sounds fantastic.

You think so. It just sort of occurred to me after our session. Because some of the things that they say to me, they are totally fixated on their assessment, and what marks they are going to get. So some times that can act as a barrier, because they know ultimately that I'm going to be marking them. So they are careful about what they say to you and are guarded in

certain ways. I just thought wouldn't it be great if I just sat there and we discussed it together. And say "well what did you do here?" "Could you have done that a bit differently?" and then we agreed jointly, given the criteria, the marking criteria. It's still got a chart, and well "What do you think, and what mark do you really think?" and is don't think they would inflate it to much, I don't think it would be abused that much. If you were there and you were facilitating and encouraging them, they are not always going to give themselves a first. Because you are still working to a criteria. And I thought wouldn't that be good.