



Issues in sustainability: embedding communication development in first year architecture

Key Words

discipline-based, embedded language and literacy development, sustainability, faculty collaboration

Abstract

This paper will discuss a recent collaboration between the Architecture Faculty and Learning Centre at the University of Sydney in which the development of communication as a graduate quality was embedded into a core first year unit of study (Architectural History). The initial focus was the development of academic honesty as required in written communication in the discipline – the faculty’s response to the pressure imposed by the university’s recent prioritising of academic integrity and new plagiarism procedures. The original focus was broadened, after early negotiation, to embedding development of written communication in the discipline more generally. The embedded approach to developing academic communication capabilities has been shown to be more effective than the co-curricular approach in which communication development is delivered in adjunct workshops by literacy staff outside faculty units of study. There is also consensus that to succeed, such embedded projects require institutional support and substantial funding (Arkoudis, Baik & Richardson, 2012; Wingate, 2012). One recent study (Harvey, James, Szenes, Kim. & Stevenson, 2015) describes a relatively well-funded embedded project, which also aimed at, and succeeded in achieving a measure of sustainability. This project based its design on a set of sustainability principles, had substantial lead time for research and development, a team of collaborators including tutors, and dedicated time for ongoing consultation, materials development and long term evaluation. In the real world, however, university educators are often faced with urgent demands to help develop students’ communication with little institutional support and limited time or funding to do so. In this climate, it is even more critical that any embedded project aims at sustainability. The project to be discussed here is one such project with very limited resources: only two week’s lead time, two collaborators (myself, the Learning Centre lecturer, and the faculty lecturer-subject coordinator), no dedicated time for regular meetings and no access to tutors. These limitations threw up great challenges in collaboration, design and development, especially in relation to sustainability. This paper will therefore focus, firstly, on how I managed the initial constraints in respect to the design, learning resource development and implementation of the project. It will also focus closely on the process of negotiation with faculty, not only in setting up and running the project, but also on the ongoing management of the more complex tensions around making it sustainable, that is, in trying to push it forward into a future without my presence.

References

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