Huntingdonshire Regional College: The Teacher/Learner Switch

Summary

It is said the best ideas are often the simplest ones. At Huntingdonshire Regional College, Ken McKerral, an Advanced Practitioner in E-Learning has developed a very simple idea to engage students and improve teaching and learning. Ken has named his method "The Teacher/Learner Switch". It is a process that uses a unique colour code system, to help differentiate learning outcomes and deliver ownership of time to the students to enrich learning experience.

About Huntingdonshire Regional College

Situated in Huntingdon in Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire Regional College has another campus at St Neots. The college offers courses for students of all age groups, starting from 16 years. It offers Higher Education courses in association with the Anglia Ruskin University. Many part-time courses are offered for personal and professional development, and some for recreational learning. Apprenticeships are also offered for young people and training for professionals from business organisations is also provided.

There are various courses offered at Huntingdonshire Regional College, which cover a wide range of subjects. Some of the subjects are Hair and Beauty, Engineering, Business and Administration, Performing Arts, Childcare, Photography, and Information Technology. Apprenticeships are offered in catering, carpentry, and plumbing.
The challenge

Having clear structured lessons can enable course outcomes to be met on time, which is an important aspect of the learner’s journey. However, for teaching staff, this can be very difficult to achieve, particularly in a class of mixed abilities. Learner engagement is key to ensuring that students understand and retain the content of a particular lesson so that they can apply their knowledge when assessed.

Ken began looking at ways this could be achieved through using technology and explored the use of colour coding to differentiate between the different elements of the lesson, believing that this could provide more structure to lessons and provide a more engaged response from learners.

The activity

Ken explored the use of colour coding to differentiate between the different elements of the lesson, as he believed that this could provide more structure to lessons and provide a more engaged response from learners.

He devised a system he calls the ‘Ken Milk System’ which takes the typical colours of milk bottles e.g. blue, green and red, and assigns them to each lesson outcome or activity depending on its difficulty – blue being the easiest through to red, the more challenging. A slide of the corresponding colour will then indicate to the class the level of difficulty of the next task but learners still have the option to work on tasks to suit their ability.

Ken McKerral introduces the teacher/learner switch to his learners
Ken also uses a white/pastel coloured slide to indicate when it is his time to teach and then flips to a yellow slide which passes control to the learners for their opportunity to form a discussion or take part in lesson activities. This is what is called the Teacher/Learner Switch at Huntingdonshire Regional College.

The outcomes

This is an incredibly innovative idea which does not require complex technology. Instead of using Microsoft PowerPoint to just deliver content, it has been adapted to create a new culture of learning within the classroom.

Using the switch between slides passes the ownership of time to the learners, which in turn gives them more control of their learning and is therefore more engaging.

The colour coding system also helps differentiate the learning outcomes of the lesson. This helps Ken to structure lessons more effectively and ensure that everybody is learning at the same level. For example, if the group quickly progresses through the ‘blue’ activity, Ken can make a necessary adjustment to the time taken to complete the task, so that learners can move onto the more challenging activities. A more coherent and flexible lesson structure allows the user to plan time more effectively and keep up with the curriculum.

The impact

This case study shows that the pedagogy is the driving factor for engaging learners rather than the technology used. Ken has adapted the use of PowerPoint, which is usually a one-way communication/delivery tool into a two-way learning model, which has been well received by the learners.

Allowing ownership of lesson time, gives the learners greater responsibility for their learning and therefore boosts morale. So far the feedback has been very positive as Ken explains:

The Teacher/Learner Switch although very simple in concept has proved time and again that the learners involved in this system enjoy the structure. The learners state they feel that every lesson has a purpose and there is something to achieve each time and that it allows the opportunity for every student regardless of ability to be stretched and challenged. The system clearly shows planning, meeting the learners individual needs and is fun for the tutor and learner to be active in.
Useful links

http://www.huntingdon.ac.uk/

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