

**COLLABORATION
ON ENHANCING THE
HOLISTIC CURRICULUM**

Mountview

- Conservatoire offering vocational training for the theatre and its related industries. Students engage in an intensive 35-40 hours per week of teaching contact time
- Undergraduate and Postgraduate courses with three main precepts for learning at all levels: Curiosity, Commitment and Courage
- Partnership with UEA since 1997 – strong relationship and our practice is enhanced by the joint activity we engage in and by the support we receive from the Partnerships office
- New facilities in Peckham <https://youtu.be/vuzhM9p51dk>

Holistic Curriculum

- An approach to curriculum that embeds the interrelationship of subjects, makes it possible to increase intuitive connections for students and create confidence in learning
- Providing a learning experience that has been considered with a 360 degree view to maximise outcomes
- A holistic view includes factors such as environment, staff relationships, atmosphere, timetabling and styles of teaching, learning and assessment

Timetable

- Unlike teachers, students experience the **whole curriculum** within the timetable rather than just parts of it
- Planning the order of sessions is key to the experience received, each part of the day should inform or complement the other parts
- A Music Theory class scheduled at 5pm on a Friday or 10am on a Monday is likely to produce different results
- Are students pulled towards a particular area of their learning by its timetable positioning?
- When is the optimal time of day to improve ballet?
- How does the environment of differing studio facilities affect the learning?

Discussion

- How is your timetable put together, what are the key considerations?
- Are there examples of subjects on your courses that would benefit from a particular time in the day/week?
- Does environment affect learning in any particular subjects at your Institution?

Action for enhancement

6 observations prompting action

1. Students increasingly reported that workload was too heavy and they were feeling overwhelmed with information
2. Staff identified no increase in workload and that work expectations on students were unchanged
3. New and complex pressures exist on students including smartphone use and social media pressure

4. Staff noted that students were increasingly reporting or presenting with anxiety related conditions
5. Increased use of the personal tutor scheme and wellbeing support
6. Difficulty in sustaining concentration was affecting depth of learning

Planning and response

CONSULTATIONS

- Students were consulted further and reported that they felt increasingly pulled between subjects and that they were *“trying to juggle so much information simultaneously”*
- Staff were consulted and stated that curriculum could not be reduced without affecting outcomes, diluting the training excellence and reducing overall quality
- Staff advised that providing repetition of practice in all skills over a period of time is a fundamental feature of the training across all discipline areas

RESEARCH

- Staff looked at the trend within the sector for increased levels of anxiety and discovered that it was a universal factor
- Student module evaluations were analysed to identify if there were peak times of year that most presented workload issues or ‘juggling’

Key question: How could we retain the volume of curriculum delivery within the timetable and yet manage to reduce student anxiety over workload?

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Changing course design to create 'follow on' modules would combat the 'juggling' but repetition of practice would suffer
- Increased wellbeing provision would help cope with the volume of anxiety issues but would be limited to treating anxiety rather than reversing it as a trend
- A solution could be found by re-imagining the curriculum shape and that this would require collaboration across 7 discipline areas

What could we change?

Why did we run project rehearsals in parallel with skills teaching?

- By running project rehearsals alongside skills teaching our rationale for years had been to help students directly apply learning to rehearsals
- It became clear that if we re-shaped the timetable and the term shape that we could affect the experience of the curriculum

TERM SHAPE - 12 weeks:

4 weeks skills teaching & project rehearsals

1 week assessment

1 week rest

4 weeks skills teaching & project rehearsals

2 weeks assessment

What we changed in September 2015

We devised a new term shape

TERM SHAPE - 12 weeks

6 weeks skills teaching

1 week rest

4 weeks project rehearsals

1 week assessment

- Separating the Performance Project module from all skills teaching modules we created two distinctly focussed blocks
- Skills practised alongside each other to ensure repetition of practice but without the pressure to apply them in rehearsal until the second half of the term

Staff collaborated to promote the interrelationships between disciplines

- Collaborations between staff across different discipline teams aimed to promote intuitive connections for students
- Shared language was the key focus of many of these collaborations between discipline teams:
 - Voice & Singing
 - Dance & Singing
 - Acting & Music
 - Screen Acting & Movement
 - Movement & Singing
- Students further encouraged to articulate connections between subjects during plenary sessions

Review of wellbeing provision

- Signing up to a sector wide Mental Health Charter **#timeforchange**
- Increased human resources
- Identified initiatives for future action by both staff & the Students Union

Review

- The opinions of students were overwhelmingly positive:
 - *“made more sense of the training”*
 - *“workload much less overwhelming”*
- Staff had to rethink the delivery of their part of the curriculum to accommodate the changes from 8 weeks to 6
- Refreshed schemes of work and teaching delivery

Benefits

- ✓ Student anxiety has reduced
- ✓ Thinking time and space has been created for the students
- ✓ Connections between skills classes are much clearer
- ✓ Students continue to make excellent connections from skills classes and apply them to projects
- ✓ Students more able to translate work between skills classes through use of shared language
- ✓ Student perception is that workload has decreased and the course is more manageable
- ✓ We are able to employ freelance creatives for a block of 4 full weeks rather than as sessional staff across 9 weeks

Challenges

- Change in term shape took us out of kilter with other drama schools and initially affected our freelance staffing
- Student absence is still higher during the skills block than when rehearsing projects
- Staff timetables need careful management due to intensive blocks of delivery

Follow on initiatives

- Induction week anxiety talks for level 4 students with a specialist and performance anxiety workshops for level 5
- Tutor group meetings with focus on anxiety, social media pressures and peer to peer strategy sharing across levels
- Wellbeing slots have been created to offer students various wellbeing activities at the start of each day: Yoga, Qi Gong, Meditation and Bodywork wellbeing sessions
- No classes commence before 10am giving staff an opportunity to attend meetings, engage in planning activities and for students and staff to be ready for the day

Collaboration on a Holistic Curriculum

Conclusions

Confidence has been a key factor in the results of this project and will act as a motivator for future enhancement

- Student confidence in staff commitment to developing the training has prompted greater collaboration with staff
- Staff have improved relationships between discipline teams and show greater confidence in their collaborative skills
- Change is invigorating when everyone is involved collaboratively in the decision-making process

QUESTIONS?