Example Two – Deep and surface approaches to reading scientific literature

This tutorial introduced students to the difference between 'surface' and 'deep' approaches to reading scientific literature whilst developing their own critical reading skills. Although the learning objectives and requirement for active involvement were set by academic staff, this tutorial provided me with the opportunity to set my own, constructively aligned learning tasks, as outlined by Biggs (2003).

I designed this tutorial to be as interactive and discussion based as possible. To do this, I set the students a task of reading a specific scientific paper and for each of them to pay attention to a particular section. In order to promote engagement from all group members I asked each of them to comment on their section whilst I facilitated an overall discussion with all members. Any technical queries were written down to be answered at a later point. Throughout this discussion I provided feedback to encourage student motivation (Fry, 2003). Once we had completed this I then asked for the author of the paper to enter the room and discuss the piece of work with us. This followed a similar format to the previous discussion but with extra facilitation from me, as understandably the students were initially shy to critique the author's work in their presence. After a few minutes the students were more confident and appeared to gain a deeper understanding of the paper. An additional reason for choosing this paper was that it was based on the author's undergraduate dissertation which surprised the students. I asked the author to take a few minutes to explain why they choose to publish their work and what was required to get it to this standard. I wanted to show the students that things which may seem impossible at this stage are entirely possible when they put their minds to it.

I believe that small group working like this is an excellent opportunity for each student to express themselves, allowing the additional benefit of social learning (Fung, 2006). This is particularly useful for topics such as 'surface' and 'deep' learning where discussions about the positive and negative aspects of both can be discussed in relation to grades and how this affects their well-being (Ramsden, 1992). Towards the end of the tutorial I was asked about my own reading approaches which allowed me to tell the students about how my own learning style has evolved and how this has increased my confidence and enjoyment of my subject.

This tutorial was observed in support of this associate fellowship application and the feedback I received from the member of staff and my colleague (the author) was excellent. I was particularly happy with positive comments about how engaged the students were and how I created an active learning environment. Feedback from such an experienced member of teaching staff also helped me realise that I can push the students more when answering questions - something I was unsure of beforehand. I really enjoyed delivering this tutorial and I am looking forward to doing it again next term.

500 words

Literature cited:

Biggs, J (2003) Teaching for Quality Learning at University. Open University Press/SRHE: Maidenhead.

Fung, D (2006) Telling tales: a fresh look at student experience and learning in higher education. Paper given to the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Warwick, September 2006.

Ramsden, P (1992) Learning to teach in Higher Education. Routledge: London