UNIVERSITY OF Southampton
School of Health Sciences

Capability, practical intelligence and the first year Foundation degree curriculum: lighting the blue touch paper

Julie Wintrup & Liz James

University of Southampton

Overview

- **Foundation degrees:** 2 year, diploma-equivalent, work-based Higher Education qualification (2001)
- **Workforce drivers in UK:** introduction of unregulated, higher technical / associate practitioner roles (2003)
- **Students:** working and learning, often employer-sponsored, usually vocationally educated and trained
- **The First Year curriculum:** the student voice
- **Theoretical perspectives:** practical intelligence and self-theories

Introduction and context

- National Health Service (NHS) and Social Care provision is increasingly complex, requiring capable and lifelong learners:

'Capability – extent to which individuals can adapt to change, generate new knowledge, and continue to improve their performance' Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001

- Learner characteristics – female (30:1), working (usually in direct care roles), studying – initially - to progress at work
- Completion and progression issues (HEFCE 2007)

The 1st year curriculum: our goal

- We see (some) experienced students lose confidence and / or struggle academically
- We lose others due to the stress of combining study with already-busy lives – at predictable times
- They tell us they get most from 'doing', from practical sessions…but later recognise the value of thinking
- *Our goal is to further develop the curriculum to meet students' **academic** and **work needs** to prepare them for HE and career progression*

A student voice

Five months into the first year

- *Okay, so on the study side your expectations were that it was going to be less academic?*
- Or skills based learning, like the safe practice, just more of that, more depth on that side.
- *Right, okay.*
- Hands on and practical rather than ……. pen to paper.
- *Okay, so would you say you felt unprepared?*
- Totally unprepared. Inundated with stuff that, not knowing how to start an essay, I mean I've bought another book, that's around here somewhere, just to try and start me off, but then I'm not on my own on that score, because I mean even the NVQ 3 ladies you know, with the wealth of experience and their skills, their training, you know, the academic work is hard for them too, so, you know I don't feel…

- *How would you say that you valued the work based experience that you've had so far in terms of, in terms of your professional development, your future career?*
- Oh, high esteem, because I've loved the placements and I love the job so I consider that more important than anything else, whether that's just me personally, I haven't come on the course, I didn't come on the course to learn about theories, that wasn't my point, my point was to learn, you know, get more experience ..so perhaps (it was) a different angle for me.

But I think they should have said, I think they should have said now this is going to be really important, this theory, please take notes, you know, because we all just, you know, we are all practical people sat in that room, shifting in our seats thinking why am I writing all this down, you know.

So that was a shame, but I now understand the importance of it.

Our question:

Other than making sure students receive good information and advice prior to beginning...

...how can we, as educators, quickly engage students - socially and intellectually - in their programme of study?

There is nothing more practical than a good theory

Kurt Lewin (1952:169)

Practical intelligence and tacit knowledge

- *Practical intelligence*: the ability to perform successfully in naturalistic settings in a way that is consistent with one's goals
- Cianciolo et al, 2006
- *Tacit knowledge*: what one needs to know to succeed in an environment that one is not explicitly taught and that usually is not verbalised
- Sternberg et al, 2001
- *Development potential* of practical intelligence

- We know our students are successful in practice so we can ask them to share their achievements, challenges, daily responsibilities, their hopes and plans
- By describing their contributions to the lives and well being of the people they care for, they begin to explore and verbalise their tacit knowledge
- Many fear they are ‘too old’ to begin learning – we can easily challenge this and provide evidence to refute the idea
- We can create a culture in which they can feel proud of their work identity and move at their own pace into a new, integrated student / worker identity

Self theories: belief systems

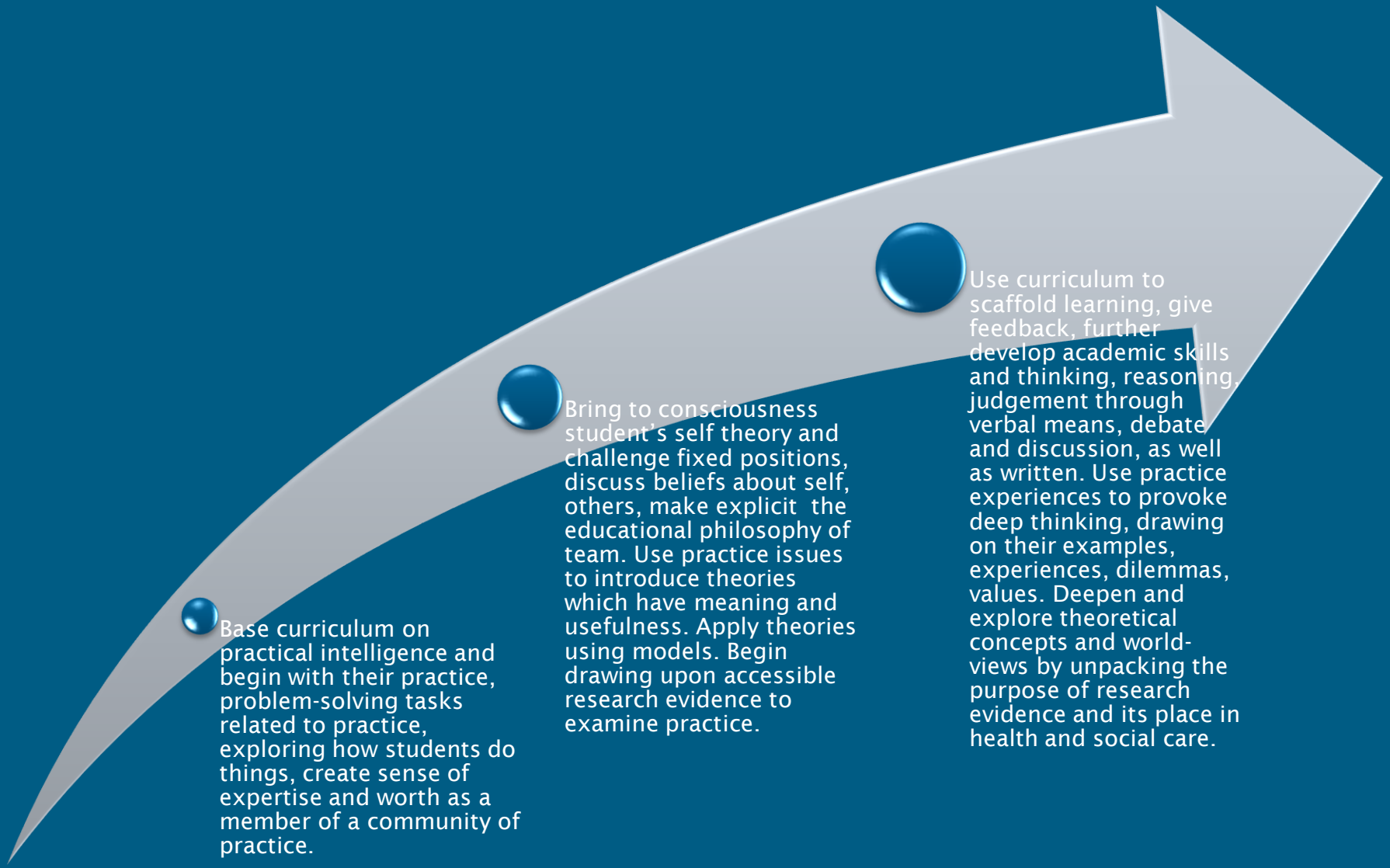
- **Entity belief**: a fixed view of intelligence. Likely to lead to the setting of *performance* goals
- **Incremental approach**: intelligence is malleable - more effort leads to more learning. Likely to adopt *learning* goals
- Dweck, 1999; Yorke and Knight, 2004

- Exploring the **zone of proximal development** and **scaffolding**
- Vygotsky (1896 – 1934)

We can work to shift fixed views by:

- Challenging our own beliefs and that of colleagues
- Working explicitly to identify insidious entity beliefs – of students, educators, employers
- Building into curriculum learning goals rather than performance goals – and articulating the difference
- Incorporating active sessions, workshops and group learning which push self-imposed limits
- Giving accurate, constructive and instructive feedback in a variety of ways
- Drawing upon work experiences to scaffold theory

In summary


Base curriculum on practical intelligence and begin with their practice, problem-solving tasks related to practice, exploring how students do things, create sense of expertise and worth as a member of a community of practice.
Bring to consciousness student's self theory and challenge fixed positions, discuss beliefs about self, others, make explicit the educational philosophy of team. Use practice issues to introduce theories which have meaning and usefulness. Apply theories using models. Begin drawing upon accessible research evidence to examine practice.
Use curriculum to scaffold learning, give feedback, further develop academic skills and thinking, reasoning, judgement through verbal means, debate and discussion, as well as written. Use practice experiences to provoke deep thinking, drawing on their examples, experiences, dilemmas, values. Deepen and explore theoretical concepts and world-views by unpacking the purpose of research evidence and its place in health and social care.

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