Growing the person

Communication, soft skills, and the broader curriculum

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Context / Research Background

• Media Arts and Centre for Business, IT, and Enterprise, at Wintec
• 2014 – employer expectations of communication skills of graduates
• 2015 - educational perspectives of communication skills of graduates
Communication as part of the ‘employability’ landscape

• Employers are looking for attributes along with, or as part of, communication skills.

• Notion of pre-competence and threshold competence (Jackson, 2009)
Snapshot of employer survey

• Our findings were consistent with broader international research on employability skills and communication – much focus on interpersonal skills, teamwork, written communication, and also personal attributes.

• Communication learning outcomes included in our courses were generally consistent with employers’ expectations.

• **BUT** employers still found communication skills of graduates wanting & identified issues with adapting to professional contexts.
Snapshot of tutor survey – so far

• Mostly consistent with employers’ thoughts
  – High ratings for all skills, but highest for interpersonal
  – Also rate personal attributes like motivation highly
  – Rate presentation skills higher than employers, spelling slightly lower

• Many mention the importance of adaptability to professional context
Issues for teaching

- language morphing
- delivery style
- authenticity
- scaffolding
- flexibility
So...

- How should communication competency be taught and does it include broader competencies and attributes beyond basic communication skills?

- Should communication skills be embedded or taught as stand-alone courses?

- How might it be woven into discipline-specific learning?
Results so far...

But, when reading comments...
- 22% respondents favour stand-alone
- 28% advocate BOTH
- BOTH categorised two ways:
  - stand-alone + embedded
  - integrated
- Embedded either in-class, or work-based
Models / Methods for teaching communication

Stand-alone
- Contextualised communication skills

Embed
- Expressed as part of, or applied to, subject-specific content

Integrate
- Substantial integration of communication skills as subject content

Work-based
- Communication skills as interpreted within a professional context
Your thoughts?
Applied to ‘teamwork’

Plus
Minus
Interesting
What else?

Other models?
Other examples?
What needs to happen?

Best practice for your discipline?

Questions to be answered for effective approaches?

Academic / Institutional / Professional
A proposed framework

University of Western Australia – Communication Skills Framework (2009)

- Incorporated into a major or covered separately
  - “explicit focus” on communication
  - develop skills progressively across levels
  - content, pedagogy, and assessment
- taught by or in consultation with specialists
- integrated into professional and subject-specific content
A post-it for your thoughts...
References


