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COMMUNICATION IS KEY:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION KEY SKILLS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN CHINA
Background

- Globalisation and the perceived need in China for the development of ‘key’ skills.
- Communication key skills defined as ‘Vital social and methodological competences for daily life & professional development’. (OSTA 2007)
- OTPAE: Objective /Tasks/Preparation/Action/Evaluation links skills’ acquisition & learning experiences. (Tong & Zhong 2008)
Challenge to traditional Chinese education which is ‘classroom, teacher and textbook centred.’ (Wang 2002)

Student-centred learning: Tao 1950s ‘anti-Marxist’ education thought (Li 2005)

Concept of key skills in general and communication key skills in particular.

Significance of development within Chinese context.
Communication

as competence

Notion of competence

- suggests: ‘Possession and development of sufficient skills . .’ (FEU 1984)
- elicits: ‘Terminological confusion’ (Winterton 2005)
- ‘cannot accommodate the ethical and epistemological bases of professional practice.’ (Hyland 1997)
- ‘incorporates profoundly naïve assumptions about language.’ (Lum 1999)
Communication in context

- ‘Co-operative’ and ‘socially situated endeavour.’ (Fussell and Kreuz 1998)
- ‘Activity in which symbolic context is not merely transmitted but exchanged between human agents, who interact within a shared situational and/or discourse context.’ (Price 1996)
- ‘Dynamic social process’ (Gerbner 1993)
Research

- Case studies of 3 VET colleges (B, R & S).
- Observation, focus groups and interviews.
- Illuminative evaluation (Parlett & Hamilton 1972)
- To explore teachers’ and students’ understanding of communication skills.
- To investigate the effectiveness of student-centred learning in promoting Chinese students’ communication.
- To consider the implications of the development within a Chinese context.
It takes too much effort to adapt to the process of change; both the students and I have to get used to our new roles. (T. Anm, B)

- I have to know my students well and what interests them (T. Anm, B)
- I think the course is very practical it improves my participation in learning (Tang, B)
- Skilled communication can mediate interpersonal relationships (Lan, B)
- When you take part in that situation, you can feel something. You can get a better understanding of the concepts . . (Feng, B)
- The aim of teaching, ultimately is non-teaching (T. Xum, B)
I feel much better than before. As T. Xiao said, we should be brave in facing up to reality, to those challenges as solid as the Tai mountain (Jaimei, R)

- Communication skills are not only a means of communicating with others. They also help you to perceive others. Learning the knowledge is not enough. Equipped with these things we could occupy an invincible position in society. (Hong, R)
- Participation in communication should include 2 important factors: one is practice, the other is active thinking. Logical and objective. (Ling, R)
- Rather than to memorise conventional rules and regulations, I get a real experience of communication which makes me feel much more confident now. (Lili, S)
Effective learning is about whether the students can gain real understanding . . that is their reward (T. Wu, S)

- This course is an indirect tacit knowledge . . It enables us to understand others (Tan, R)
- The assessment has changed. It is not only about the method but also the content (T. Wu, S)
- Teacher, I think this task should have been given to us last week. We could have prepared more.
- This course is taught in a very different way. The teacher going to us not like before when the teachers looked far away from us (Cheng, S)
Implications and impact

- Complex, social and integrative nature of communication development.
- Cognitive, psychological and affective dimensions, attitudes towards authority.
- Socialisation processes grounded and socially situated.
- Flexibility and adaptability.
- Critical evaluation and interrogation of ideas and experience.
Conclusion

- Enhanced self esteem and confidence affecting motivation and attitudes.
- Participation & collaboration improved.
- Increased awareness of impact on others.
- Scope for influence educationally, socially & politically.
- Potential for a more responsive and adaptable workforce, comprising creative and versatile individuals who might be receptive to different and ultimately more sustainable discourses of globalisation.