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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)

Context

- 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.