

Welcome to Episode 5 of Enhancing Academic Practice. The host today is Chloe Cortone and in this series we are discussing best practice in learning and teaching and how this can be applied in your own practice. In this episode I am joined by David Bedford from the Learning Skills Team. Hello. So let's get started.

Last time we were talking more generally about how staff and students can work with you and your team. And we said that you're going to be talking about case studies this time.

So I'm interested to hear about these other ways that you've worked with different teams and why you think it's important to share these. And I think it's really important because each member of our team works with specific schools or on specific campuses and they are very different. The demographics on the three different sites are completely different and obviously the needs of each discipline in terms of academic skills and information skills are very varied. So we like to make sure that we can support students in tailored ways that work for their course for those students for that campus. And we love to talk to course teams about new ways that we could work with them.

It's really exciting to try new stuff and as I'm sure it is for everyone else as well. And we're discovering that more and more courses work differently to what we might see as a kind of a standard model. So we're adapting to all of those differences. So before we move into some specific case studies, can you just give me an idea of the sorts of challenges you end up addressing? Yeah, so some of it is around student anxieties.

So some of the students that I work with are really very anxious.

They're returning to education after quite a long time out of it and they don't really believe in themselves. So a lot of them have the skills, they just don't believe that they do.

So there is an element of almost coaching in getting them to see that they can do this, that it's not an alien world for them. I think sometimes some students don't see the need for particular skills until something's gone wrong. And we don't want to be a remedial service that fixes stuff that's gone wrong. We want to be a kind of an aspirational service of let's thrive and let's excel. But we do encounter that sort of, I don't see why I should engage with this. So I think you said that you had a really good case study from adult nursing where you talked about how you had to work differently. So could you give me a bit more information about that one? Yeah, so it's a module for adult nursing in the first year where there are 10 to 11 tutor groups that are taught simultaneously across both Canterbury and Medway. And they needed the interventions from our team to happen for all of them at once, which is impossible unless we clone ourselves, which apparently we're not allowed to do. This is one of those groups where many are returning to education with that kind of low level of confidence in academic abilities. So we had a bit of a logistical challenge in how do we reach 10, 11 groups at the same time and that anxiety thing. So how did you solve that problem? So we, after discussing it with the course team, we began sort of, we'd refer to it as beaming in. I'm sure that's not the correct terminology. But we beam in using Collaborate to all of the different pack groups. So they are in whatever room they're in with their tutor. And we deliver a short experts in the room section on a particular academic skill, whether that's reflective writing or evaluating information or good old referencing or whatever it is. And then that is followed by activities that we had designed within our team, which the tutors do with their students in order to practice the skills, give them opportunity to discuss them and express any anxieties that they have. And so we did several sessions during the first semester on those different topics. And of course Collaborate is in the virtual learning environment Blackboard, so most teaching staff are familiar with it, aren't they? And how well

did that work? Initially we did have some technical challenges with sound. So we started having to issue advice that the pack tutors in the bit before we beamed in should check the sound first and summon help if necessary, because different rooms are set up slightly differently in terms of how the sound systems work. In terms of delivery, it was weird for us at first. Just we were speaking even more than usual into a void. And so I would quite often use Mentimeter as part of it. So at least I was getting some something back to break it down. Yeah, because I couldn't see the 11 groups. One of us would be on call so that if anything arose during the activities afterwards that was unexpected, or questions that the tutors didn't know that they could contact the relevant team member. And that worked quite well. We didn't get many things come up, but obviously that then becomes a learning thing of, okay, we need to talk about that or build that into the activities for next time, because it's a question that arises. So we need to make sure it's addressed. So obviously that was a synchronous activity. And obviously I know that the Learning Skills Hub and everything exists anyway, but did you give them sort of asynchronous options to prepare or to look at before or after? So some of the sessions we had asynchronous activities to follow up. So things like the session that introduced academic sources of information. There were activities that they did in the class, but then there was a more in-depth activity exploring library search, which was done after the class, because although we'd asked for people to bring in laptops, we're well aware that not every student has a laptop. They may forget. They may not get the message. So we made sure that there was that activity that everyone did post session as well. And we tried to avoid pre-session activities for this particular module. But with other things that we do, they can be really helpful. Okay. So that sounds like a really interesting way of reaching students on different campuses in many different locations. So that was really fascinating. And have you got another example you'd like to share? Yeah. So colleagues from some of the other subjects that I don't work as closely with have trialed some sort of regular bite-sized interventions. So they've popped up in person at the beginning or end of lectures or seminars for a particular course for sort of 15, 20 minutes throughout the semester, which has allowed them to move from sort of introducing themselves to delivering some information about particular skills through to practicing it, discussing it, and then just Q&As towards the end. But I am trying to time it with the delivery of the module so that all of the different skills made sense there and that it was thoroughly interwoven rather than, here's a learning skills thing and here's the module content as separate things. It was just rolled throughout the course. So I think something to take from this for colleagues is that there isn't one set way of coming in and fixing a problem, that you've got lots of different approaches. Yeah. And so they should feel comfortable coming to you with a range of needs because you're probably going to be able to find a solution. Yes, yeah. And we're willing to try something new that we just, yeah. If it doesn't work, then try something else. As with anything else that we try at the university, it's always worth experimenting and trying what we can do. Yeah, and we can work online, in person, hybrids, small sessions, long sessions, purely asynchronous. But always with the what is going to work for this group and this course in mind. And it's going to be appropriate from everything from foundation to postgraduate. So there isn't an idea that is only for a specific level of students. Yeah, absolutely. And I sometimes have days where I see four different groups and it goes across all three faculties and from foundation to postgraduate and then I have to go and lie down because that's been a very complicated day for my brain. But we do work across the entire range of courses and students that we have here. Okay, so having listened to this, if someone thinks, yes, I have needs that I need the learning skills team to address, what's the best way for them to talk through their options or ideas? What would you suggest they do? Just get in touch with us. Obviously, if you know who the team for your school are, just contact us directly. If not, email our generic email address of learner at Canterbury.ac.uk. Bring in whatever colleagues you think are necessary for the conversation. So whether it's the module delivery team or people involved in other modules that have similar needs. I think generally a conversation works better than

a series of emails. Yeah. Okay, so the best thing is to just get in touch with you and discuss the situation. Brilliant.

Thank you very much. So thank you for listening to episode five of Enhancing Academic Practice podcast, which has been on case studies from the learning skills team. And David will be back for a third episode where he's going to be talking about critical thinking specifically, which I think is of interest to many of us because it's a skill we want our students to really develop. As ever, this will be on Spotify and there will be links for further information available on the web page. Thank you.