

Bahrain Polytechnic: A Case Study in the application of RSVP Design learning tools

Bahrain Polytechnic is a government-owned tertiary education institute located in the Kingdom of Bahrain, teaching local students on a range of degree courses including Business, Information and Communications Technology, Engineering Technology, Visual Design and International Logistics Management.

With an intake of approximately 300-400 students each academic year, the Polytechnic is small enough to offer a student-centred approach to learning and a high level of support to students who are struggling.

A foundation year, 'Preparation for Academic Learning' offers additional teaching and coaching in core subjects of English and Maths and provides an opportunity to enhance study skills. There is also time to develop inter-personal, communication and team-working skills.

A range of 'electives' – additional programmes which students select themselves – operates alongside the main academic programme.

Integrating RSVP Design's experiential learning tools

The Polytechnic is committed to developing what the staff refer to as "21st Century Skills" – the skills that support independent learning, creativity and innovation, communication, the acceptance of individual responsibility and effective teamwork. They understand that in a small island, local students need to be prepared for employment outside their home environment and will benefit from developing a broad range of skills that make them attractive as employees in international businesses.

In 2013 The School of Humanities bought a full range of RSVP Design's experiential learning tools, specifically in order to develop an elective entitled 'Thinking out of the Box'. This programme ran for the first time in the academic year 2013-2014 and received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the students.

The programme includes 60 hours of classroom based study, plus 90 hours of self directed work including in-depth, reflective assessments, and aims to give students a very different experience of learning.





RSVP Design's selected learning tools

A number of key activities from the RSVP Design range punctuate the programme.

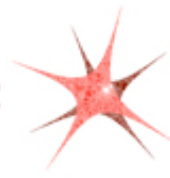
- The 'Challenging Assumptions Puzzle' challenges students to ask questions, challenge what they think they know and leave behind beliefs that will limit their academic progress
- Colourblind® rehearses and refines verbal communication skills and group problem-solving
- Counter Intelligence highlights the importance of applying critical thinking skills, emphasizing the need to evaluate and seek evidence in an age of freely available 'mass information'
- Webmaster offers a challenging, large group application activity towards the end of the programme, which assesses the students' ability to manage time, resources and each other in delivering a complex project with a measurable correct answer, under test conditions.

Examples of Student Feedback

- *I realized in this course that I am resourceful and I can adapt to change even though my perspective at that start was that was not possible. I had no idea what I could be capable of doing especially in group.*
- *Dealing with difference, was very significant for me. I was exposed to students from other degrees and I have encountered that before. I realized that I can cope with uncertainty, I did not know this about myself.*
- *I realize that I had a perspective that I now believe was "wrong". I saw that everyone in our team offered something. That having a shared goal and a commitment together makes a big difference, I felt proud, not a feeling I used to having here. I saw how well groups can work!! I had never had that experience before.*
- *In life I limited myself too much.. my perspective of myself has changed. I was never confident walking into uncertainty.. I avoided uncertainty. But this course showed me that I can cope with uncertainty and that if I just "go there "then great things happen.*
- *I realize I have a quiet confidence that I developed throughout the course. I realize I do not give up even though I had a perception that I do.*
- *I realize I like hands on I didn't know this about myself and I am thinking I want to use this more in my life.*
- *I loved the course because it was so different from anything I had done before. It gave me an opportunity to learn more about myself.*
- *I realized that I do not like being responsible for others but in the course I had to address this. I had to be involved. I cannot believe it: I actually love the new things.*



Bahrain Polytechnic's teaching staff work on a series of RSVP Design Experiential Learning activities during their two day professional development workshop with Ann Alder, RSVP Design's trainer training specialist.



RSVP Design's Training of Trainers

The elective programme has been so successful, and student feedback so encouraging, that Bahrain Polytechnic has confirmed its commitment to developing a more learner-centred, experiential learning approach across all of its programmes, beginning in the Faculty of Humanities.

To support and accelerate this, Ann Alder from RSVP Design was approached to deliver a two-day workshop training to the Faculty Management Team, including programme managers and designers and lead teaching staff. The workshop, for 16 people, covered many aspects of the design and delivery of experiential learning activities and was tailored specifically to the skills and needs of the Polytechnic.

This was followed by a one-day workshop which was extended out to 40 teaching staff, from a range of specialisms including Maths, English, IT, Engineering, Visual Design and Transport Logistics. This workshop introduced the concept of REALS – Rich Environments for Active Learning – and explored how to use experiential and accelerated learning techniques in teaching more technical subject matter.

Feedback and testimonials

"I have had the most wonderful two days of training that I have had in 40 years of working in education. I have to say, I have enjoyed this more, and learnt more, than in anything else I have done at the Polytechnic. And Ann Alder, is without doubt, the best facilitator of learning I have ever met."

Sajida Tabbara, Dean of the School of Humanities, Bahrain Polytechnic

"Creating and delivering the 'Thinking out of the Box' elective has been a wonderful experience. The staff are motivated, excited and our enthusiasm is transferring to the students. Student feedback is outstanding – they are thinking about themselves, reflecting and producing assessment work that demonstrates a level of personal awareness and maturity that we never expected."

Jo Visser, Annie Roberts and Deborah Brownlie, Course Tutors

Further Information

To learn more about how we can help you to integrate powerful, student-centred learning activities into your academic and vocational training, or to enquire about staff development through following one of our trainer training programmes, please contact:

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