

Research Space

Journal article

Students as co-creators: Improving engagement with the flipped classroom

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TSES Article: Students as Co-creators: Improving engagement with the flipped classroom. A Case Study.

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Introduction:

The need for teaching in Higher Education (HE) to utilise active learning strategies and encourage more student-centred approaches to learning has been increasingly recognised by the HE sector, and plays an important role in graduating students with employability skills (Ito & Kawazoe, 2015). Indeed, the sport and exercise sciences has begun to attract increasing research interest as to how to effectively employ active learning strategies to improve student success and engagement (e.g. Lakew, 2016; Dane-Staples, 2019; Knudson & Wallace, 2021; Keogh, Gowthorp & McLean, 2017).

One active learning strategy includes ‘flipping’ the classroom. The flipped classroom model is a specific type of blended learning, whereby session content that would typically be lecture based, is flipped as a pre-session learning activity allowing class time to focus on higher order thinking activities. By presenting lecture materials or other direct instruction tasks prior to class time, this frees up this space for tasks that can focus on discussion, application, and critical thinking by being more interactive and student led. The model has been successfully employed with sport students (Hayman, 2017) including coaching students (Reddan, McNally & Chipperfield, 2016).

Despite evidence suggesting numerous positive outcomes for the flipped classroom model (Shi, Ma, Macleod & Yang, 2019), one of the biggest challenges for staff remains how to ensure students engage in the pre-class learning activities (Long, Cummins, & Waugh, 2017). The case study here outlines how including students as co-creators may help to promote engagement with pre-class tasks and navigate meeting learning outcomes when students have different levels of preparedness.

The Case:

The flipped classroom model is selected as a learning and teaching strategy for a level 6 module on an undergraduate BSc in Sport Coaching. The module is designed to encourage students to think about contemporary themes in coaching research and consider how these ideas apply to their practice. The use of the flipped classroom model here is considered useful to allow class time to be more effectively used to provide scaffolded support to students in developing their critical evaluation skills with reference to research, understand how to synthesise research articles and apply this to their practice.

Why use students as co-creators?

Co-creation occurs when “staff and students work collaboratively with one another to create components of curricula and/or pedagogical approaches” (Bovill et al., 2016, pg 196). Using students as co-creators has been recognised as a strategy to promote engagement, develop professional and employability skills, improve staff and student

relationships and for some students can be transformative to the way they think and practice (Lubicz-Nawrocka & Bovill, 2023). In this case, students are co-creators in a number of ways that are designed to promote autonomy, challenge and community in order encourage engagement in the module tasks.

What do we do?

Using the idea of co-creation *in* the curriculum (Bovill and Woolmer, 2019), students on the module are included in the design of learning and teaching within a course, as the course progresses. Students are asked to co-create in a number of ways.

1. Developing the schedule:

First, to develop the topic schedule for the module, students are asked to research and consider topical or contemporary themes that might be included the weekly schedule at the outset of the module. Students are provided with a potential list of topics but also encouraged to develop their own topics. Topics are discussed and agreed as a class, and a list drawn up, facilitated by the module tutor who can advise on which topics have enough traction in the literature to meet the aims of the sessions.

2. Co-creating the output materials:

Students co-create the lecture materials by selecting appropriate research papers to bring, review and discuss with their peers. They can select any relevant papers to the topic that they feel relates to their coaching practice or the coaching practice of their peers. Students are encouraged to decide how best to present their findings and summarise the key learning points from their synthesis of the group's research papers, thinking about how they can use technology to share and disseminate their ideas. The role of the tutor in generating and/or providing materials is discussed with students which often results in students being offered a 'primer' to the topic that is tutor led, and/or suggestions for follow up information to cover any gaps. Over several cohorts using this model, example choices from students here include using technologies such as Padlet to post images of their discussion outputs; using virtual discussion boards to bullet point the key learning; or generating PowerPoint slides that can uploaded to the VLE.

3. Determining the operating rules:

At the outset of the module, students drive the 'setting' of the operating rules relating to the pre-class preparation and the format of in-class time. Students are encouraged to consider how they select and communicate their chosen paper, to ensure students arrive with a range of articles. They decide upon the agreed level of preparation of that paper, choosing how best they can evidence their pre-class engagement. They also decide the consequences for those students who have not met their agreed standard of preparation. The role of the tutor here is to facilitate and guide this conversation to ensure that the ideas generated are inclusive for all students. Examples students have generated include developing working groups based on the level of preparation completed, providing a set of papers for in class use, or providing students who have

not completed the preparation with various roles in the group that 'make up' for their lack of preparation e.g. flipping their workload out to post session work.

Reflections: Feedback, Challenges & Key Learnings

Using this model with several cohorts of students has identified some consistent themes that represent key learnings, which have provided scope for continuous improvement of the model for teaching.

Student confidence around co-creation:

Students have reported positive feedback about the format of the model and the opportunity to be involved in co-creating in the curriculum. Students typically enjoy the freedom of determining their own reading lists, and selecting how to discuss and present ideas. One student feedback comment suggested;

“A thoroughly enjoyable module that supported the growth of my inquisitive skills to dive deeper into research papers...The ability and ownership to self-select research papers that best suited our interests and external coaching practice was refreshing”.

However, students can often lack confidence in their role as co-creators, sometimes because their experience of learning has mostly placed them as recipients of knowledge and not as having a role in constructing it. With this in mind, feedback from students on this module has often reflected concern they are 'not learning the right thing'. Carefully scaffolding experiences across different levels of study and authentic conversations at the module outset has helped alleviate some of this student anxiety.

Tangible session materials:

Helping students to recognise the outputs of their co-creation through the production of tangible materials has helped students to more fully appreciate their role in knowledge construction, helping build confidence in their ability to co-create. It also provides a means of sharing outputs across when working in small groups and helps students to be able to more meaningfully identify where learning has taken place.

The role of the tutor in facilitation:

The role of the tutor when using this model requires discussion with students. Where students are meeting this type of co-creation for the first time, they can find it difficult to ascertain the tutor role and seek lots of validation for their ideas. Starting the module by scaffolding the development of critical thinking skills has helped students to start to evaluate their own contributions. The facilitation of the ideas generated for developing materials and operating rules are key to the success of using this type of model. To enable all students to meet learning outcomes of the sessions, discussion about the consequence for turning up unprepared often need considerable tutor moderation. Often the starting place for student suggestions is to exclude (sometimes physically) unprepared students, or prevent them from participating in a meaningful way.

Promoting ideas that allow for a variation of preparedness (e.g. different working groups) or allow students to be assigned different roles in the session offer more inclusive alternatives.

As a summary, the flipped classroom model offers an active learning strategy that frees up time for students to engage in more tasks that develop a number of higher order skills like application, critical thinking or reflection skills. Encouraging students to co-create parts of their curriculum, offering carefully considered facilitation whilst scaffolding learning for support, might offer one way in which we can promote student engagement with flipped classroom teaching.

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