

Evaluating the effectiveness of student-centred assessment in an undergraduate programme

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The research

The aim of this session is to discuss the preliminary findings of a research involving enabling students to design their own assessments, and its implications on the teaching and learning environment.

In two previous studies, student criticism of current teaching strategies and learning environments emerged (see Nikolai, Silva & Walters, 2014; Walters, Hallas, Phelps & Ikeda, in press), which seems to be consistent with the findings of a study by Zakus, Malloy, and Edwards (2007). Zakus et al. (2007) found that tertiary level sport students were critical of programmes that produced administrators rather than managers, providing few opportunities for them to develop critical thinking skills. According to these authors, students seemed to be conditioned to follow a set of prescribed methods to arrive at solutions. The primary benefit of this current study is that it provides opportunities for researchers/educators to develop a greater awareness of student perspectives, which may enhance the learning environment for both teacher and student.

The purpose of this study is to directly address some of the concerns expressed by students and work collaboratively to develop a more learner-centred teaching and learning environment. Furthermore, Larson and Miller (2011) emphasised the fundamental importance of providing students with the opportunity to engage with learning within authentic contexts. Accentuating an awareness of a learner-centred teaching approach encourages students to be active contributors to the design of their own assessments and, ultimately, enhances academic success.

Students from a second-year sociology of sport paper were invited to design their own exam. A two-hour session was facilitated where learning outcomes and exam strategies were addressed. Students were then given the opportunity to create their own exam questions in a student-led classroom environment. Concurrently, students from a third-year coaching paper

were invited to design their own assessment. Students' experience was captured through three focus groups of students drawn from these papers. Students were invited to participate within start-of-semester and end-of-semester focus group interviews. Two groups were recruited from the sociology paper, and one group from the coaching paper.

Preliminary findings suggest positive engagement by students regarding the ownership of their learning experience. It is anticipated that the results of this study will contribute to academic staff's reflection on their own teaching and learning practices.

This study draws upon student voice in order to encourage students to contribute meaningfully toward the design and delivery of their programme of study. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for a co-leadership model of students' learning experience. Furthermore, it allows for reflection from both staff and students regarding the learning environment.

Why the topic is important

Traditional approaches to learning and teaching often make use of the lecture format and a faculty-designed assessment. These factors contribute to a sense of disconnection between students and their learning experience. By engaging students to design their own assessment, students participate in a co-leadership model of the classroom environment, which contributes to a sense of empowerment and ownership. This study aims then to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach by capturing students' experience, allowing for further reflection.

How the session will be run

We will present the structure and aims of the current research, and provide the audience with the study's initial findings. Then, the remaining 40 minutes will be used for discussion, reflection and interpretation of these findings. The intention is to provide the audience with an awareness of the implications of a student-designed assessment while providing an opportunity for reflection on own teaching and learning strategies. Additionally, the discussion will provide us, as the researchers, with a broader and deeper understanding of our findings, which will enrich the research.

The session will engage the audience, focusing on four main questions. In each question, participants will have the opportunity to discuss in small groups, as well as share those discussions with the larger audience. Possible questions/discussion topics would include, but not limited to:

- What similar research is being done in participants' institutions? What were those findings?
- Reflecting on preliminary results, when in the students' undergraduate journey should this be implemented?
- How do current assessment methods (essays, exams, etc.) really assess students' critical thinking and deep understanding of the topic? Do these really promote the learning process?
- Do lecturers over assess? Are students writing essays and reflection for the single purpose of passing the paper?

References

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