



Flipped classroom 103: Engagement

Description

What do you do with 100 students for two hours after they've watched your lecture as a video before coming to the class? In our case the aims were to reinforce the lecture content, facilitate discussion on the lecture themes, encourage participation and presentation, encourage academic reading and writing, develop critical reading and comprehension skills, and prepare for the assessed submissions (a video interview and a case study). Engagement is key, and we aimed for variation in the class tasks and activities. It helps if the students are suitably prepared, and if the two hour slot is structured.

We booked a large teaching space with tables organised for discussion groups of 8-12. Each table had a computer monitor connected to a PC and a main console for distributing online material. The space could also be divided into three smaller spaces by moving partitions.

Starting off

In the first session we divided the class into groups of 12 and gave each group a name (Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, etc according to the International Radiotelephony Spelling Alphabet). As the theme of the first lecture was *the post digital* we commissioned each group to move outside the classroom and to gather video evidence on how people live with and without digital technology, and upload these short videos to YouTube. They were then to discuss these in their groups: Is there really anything in the world untouched by digital technology? Does it matter? What are the implications of your view?

Then followed a session in which individuals volunteered to address the whole class with their findings. This exercise highlighted an important follow up task for both students and course organisers. This involved collating all the work and uploading or linking to the course pages of the VLE (virtual learning environment). With 5 students undertaking the course by distance we were keen to build up this class resource, and to maximise the opportunities for interaction between the resident group (100) and the distant cohort (5). At least they would be aware of each other's work.



Encouraging discussion

The following week involved another structured programme of creative activity, this time focussing on writing and story telling as a group activity. I won't say more about these initial sessions as the objective was to move the class towards enhanced skills in reading, writing, discussing and presenting critically. Working in an art and design context we feel we have little difficulty in keeping students gainfully occupied in varied, creative group activities. The challenge for us was to lead into sophisticated group discussion, informed by the literature and on topic.

To this end, we led the class towards a standard workshop format. The groups would discuss allocated topics or readings, document their findings on paper flip charts and then present to a larger group. This is a fairly standard workshop format. It's also usually the case that participants fall into the same roles every week, with some having more to say than others. Half way through the semester we had a session where students were given name tags to wear indicating a new role for each: a chair, notetaker, two presenters, an experienced coach who would offer advice and encouragement before and during presentations, and others primed to ask questions after the presentations and keep the discussion going.

After the first such session we found that in subsequent weeks students would habitually share roles within their groups and seemed more confident as a result. I should add that presentations were recorded on smartphones and the video files uploaded to the Blackboard server as a record, a resource, to encourage familiarity with the video medium, and for sharing with the ODL students.



Engagement activities

Each week's class would also include a novel engagement activity. For example, the week in which we talked about artificial intelligence we asked the class to discuss questions they could put to 'the oracle,' write these on pieces of paper and put them in a question box. Questions were taken out at random and put to the lecturer (the oracle). After he answered, some volunteers would put the question to various online chat bots, with amusing results. This and other approaches were on topic, especially in light of the lecture's focus on the Turing test.

As a further example, during the session on techno-utopias, students were primed to review a segment of the film *Metropolis*, to act it out and record it. The teachers then assembled the sequence to reconstruct the movie. This proved not only an amusing exercise in absurd collage, but a way of gaining familiarity with the issues raised by an iconic film, as well as instilling greater confidence with the video medium.

We also had a session in which the lecturer set up a mis-en-scene and interviewed and recorded a student volunteer to demonstrate the production of a simple and effective interview.

The course coordinator was aided by two other staff members who would facilitate the larger group discussion sessions. A learning technologist was also on hand, mainly to assist with the ODL students.

Benefits for the teaching team

It wasn't all plain sailing, and some students raised questions about the format of the classes. An evaluation will follow, but at this stage it's worth noting that the flipped classroom format enabled the teaching team to cope with a large student group. Recording and editing of the lecture content (previous post) could take anywhere between a couple of hours to a whole day, depending on the approach taken, and we expect the lectures to have a shelf life of a couple of years before they need refreshing, though where lectures were broken into 15 minute segments we expect that piecemeal updating would be possible during the next year of the course. An evaluation will follow in the final post on this topic next week.

Notes

- You can't always assume students have seen every video of course, and in a timely manner. It's easy to monitor page views and the numbers of video views tapered off towards the end of the 11 week course, as did the numbers attending the class. That's fairly usual.
- It was a modern style teaching space, but of an earlier generation. It was slightly cramped for the numbers in the class and the building was undergoing renovation. So the windows were blacked out. I mention this as one of the main causes of concern in the feedback from students focussed on the condition of the room.
- The flipped classroom idea was in the news this week: [London maths teacher shortlisted for million-dollar teaching prize](#)
- [note added 1 June 2017] For full discussion see our journal article
 - Coyne, Richard, John Lee, and Denitsa Petrova. 2017. Re-visiting the flipped classroom in a design context. *Journal of Learning Design*, (10) 2, 1-13. <https://www.jld.edu.au/article/view/281>

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1. Media

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2. flipped classroom

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