

LINKING TEACHING METHODS TO THE SATISFACTION AND SUCCESS OF STUDENTS IN ONLINE STUDY MODE

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Abstract: *The purpose of our article is to link teaching methods to the satisfaction and success of students in online education. The creative courses, especially in the fully online education process, is challenging innovation in teaching. The specificity of an online study with one-month performance of courses is to force the lecturer to become more effective, and students in a compact learning effort. We have found that teaching using creative methods increases the effectiveness of students' study and performance; although not equally to all, but even the less successful students did not feel "losers". Among the creative methods we have taken into consideration are the fun theory, the introduction of icons/references with the possibility of student identification, teaching with examples of good practices, cooperation with the economy in solving practical challenges and virtual mobility of students from various educational institutions and countries. The article presents and analyzes data from student evaluations and questionnaires in six courses, especially from the point of view of how the creative methods described in the article when innovating, such as virtual student mobility and work in international mixed online teams and cooperation with the economy, influence both the the general satisfaction of students with the subject as well as the acquisition of planned subject specific and general competence of subjects. In conclusion, we find that on-line studies require a very precise and targeted lecture. If students want to acquire the required competences, the relationship between theory and practice is about 30 : 70. Our recommendation is that students fully conquer a smaller amount of content than superficially transform the larger one. We believe that our findings will help lecturers in the field of creative subjects, in addition to creative communication and advertising, as well as subjects in the field of public relations, in introducing creative methods of teaching in everyday lectures and, consequently, with more successful outcomes of the subject.*

Keywords: *teaching methods, online education, student evaluations*

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest challenges which lecturers in higher education (specifically in the field of communication and other “soft skills”) face is determining the most effective teaching strategies for students. Understanding student involvement in learning can help lecturers design the most effective curriculum and determine how students best learn. To meet this demand, many lecturers are using active learning pedagogies as a social and informal process where ideas are casually exchanged student involvement and intellectual and interpersonal activities (Menges, Weimer, 1996). Among the active teaching methods of teaching this article discusses a collaborate or team-based learning, fun theory, the introduction of icons/references with the possibility of student identification, teaching with examples of good practices, cooperation with the economy in solving practical challenges and virtual mobility of students from various educational institutions and countries. We understand active learning as a process involving students not only “doing” things, but analyzing what they are doing.

»Communication is a risky business ...« (Andersen, 2007) and when we teach in that field, we become well familiar with this slogan. If we want to follow different paths in communication's curriculum and at the same time be successful, then the only path forward is to use a wide range of different methods, theories and cases. The next step is to emphasize the ones which are proven to be highly successful in teaching and got high grades in students' own evaluation.

A lot of scientific material is daily published, republished and reviewed, so it is important for our methods to pragmatically reflect and adapt beyond the old ex cathedra style of teaching. One must also take into account that new methods of learning are being developed every day in the field of basic communication science. We do not want to wait for the theory is completely developed by academics before using it, since by using it, when it is still new and evolving, students can contribute, get a chance to test it and are granted the opportunity to evaluate it.

We also think that students have a right to be able to learn without being bored out of their minds, as a lot of listeners in ex cathedra classes are. Just thinking about ex cathedra, »the phrase has come to be used with regard to statements made by people in positions of authority, and it is often used ironically to describe someone speaking with overbearing or unwarranted self-certainty« (Merriam Webster), one can still describe a lot of university teaching.

2. USING THE ACTIVE TEACHING METHODS IN PRACTICE

Based on our students' evaluations, we do not think it is exaggerated to say that our educational methods differ from the style described above. For our teaching of advertising campaigns and courses in the public relations fields, we got some really informative commentaries:

- * Professor has held extraordinary interesting webinars.
- * Professor put a lot of hard work into webinars.
- * I love that a lot of creativity was demanded and we can let our imagination run wild.
- * Professor gave me a really substantive feedback which is really great.
- * I love all this freedom of creativity.
- * I like exercises which stimulate creative thinking.
- * I love exercises where we can use theory in practice.

Beside this we recommend a mixture of lively, energetic, even fun teaching, which can yield better results since people become more motivated to study interesting content in a relaxed atmosphere.

»What we need to maintain our interest in life, is a justified expectation of pleasant surprises. (And yes, you can expect a surprise if you're not logically omniscient.) This excludes the herbal profusions, the poorly worked-out plans, and the supernatural. The best reason for this justified expectation is experience, that is, being pleasantly surprised on a frequent yet irregular basis.« (Yudkowsky, 2009).

Yudkowsky is not an academic, but he has received a lot of attention as one of the AI bloggers. We can find the proof in neuroscience: »According to Dr. Matt Bellace at Lynn University in Florida, laughter releases the neurotransmitter dopamine, which serves as a reward for the brain, creates a sense of euphoria, and plays a pivotal role in our motivation to continue the behavior. Dr. Bellace notes that the benefits of laughter include improved immune functioning, stress relief, increased tolerance for pain, improved cardiovascular health, reduced anxiety, and improved mood.« (Brandom, 2017).

And this is what all of us in training business want to accomplish: We like it when dopamine is released in our students` brains every time we teach them something interesting and enjoying. Because »even learning something new triggers these feelings of euphoria, but only if it's something really engaging and awesome« (Kites in the Classroom, 2018).

How can we accomplish this »engaging and awesome« learning? The answer is: maybe with hard work, excellent preparation and innovative tools!

2.1. USING HUMOR AS A TEACHING METHOD

The fun theory is based on the discoveries of neuroscientists that a fun-filled theory, supported by current examples from practice, stimulates the ability to memorize content and acquire new knowledge. Humor in educational settings serves a variety of positive functions beyond simply making people laugh. Humor builds group cohesion and people respond more positively to each other when humor is present; it brings them together. Humor helps individuals cope with stress; it relaxes them. But, as Weimer notes, "not all the functions of humor are positive. If humor is used divisively or to disparage others, it weakens group cohesion. Humor has negative impacts when it is used as a means of control. For example, given the power dynamic in the classroom, it is highly inappropriate for instructors to target students by making fun of their ignorance or beliefs." (Weimer, 2013).

We know that teachers/lecturers are not selected or trained to be comedians or entertainers, but we know that a positive climate for learning, and enjoyment, is correlated with retention of information and putting knowledge to work in everyday situations (including tests). Every theme can be approached with good will and with empathy to students. They are more relaxed and they learn more and process information more efficiently.

2.2. CASE STUDY

We use the case study method of teaching for two reasons. Firstly it helps with the teaching of theory which is by default quite boring. Second and most importantly, we use it as a homework problem that the students can really concentrate and bite into. It is important that we operate with a real business problem, so we at the same time can bring learning to real life and vice versa.

»Case studies are effective ways to get students to practically apply their skills, and their understanding of learned facts, to a real-world situation. They are particularly useful where situations are complex and solutions are uncertain.« (Case Studies, UNSW Sydney).

Qualitative research shows that is one of the most efficient tool we can use. Comments in the evaluation questionnaire praise practical realization of advertising actions an some public relations courses.

* I love practical orientation of the subject and the fact we didn` t have to cram like we always have to.

* Homework was connected to real case!

* Subject was very interesting. A lot of practical work through which we were able to connect to theory. Super and not boring at all!

* The everyday problems.

* Possibility to use practical knowledge in reality.

2.3. TEAM-BASED LEARNING

Teamwork is the collaborative effort of a team (a group of interdependent individuals who work together towards a common goal, with clearly defined roles within the team in order for everyone to have a clear purpose) to achieve a common goal or to complete a task in the most effective and efficient way. Team-based learning is “an evidence based collaborative learning teaching strategy designed around units of instruction, known as “modules,” that are taught in a three-step cycle: preparation, in-class readiness assurance testing, and application-focused exercise.” (Team-Based Learning Collaborative, 2018).

Since we are teaching basic business skills we must consider, which knowledge is the most required for students entering jobs, where building relationships and success go hand in hand.

»Findings from a questionnaire administered to undergraduate students in a communication research course indicate that involvement in cooperative learning is a strong predictor of a student`s academic performance. A significant positive relationship was found between the degree to which grades are important to a student and his or her active participation in cooperative learning. Further, the importance of grades and sense of achievement are strong predictors of performance on readiness assessment tests.« (Tsay, Brady, 2010).

One of the important features of our business school in online education is team work in a virtual learning environment. Taking into account the strict instructions for team work, students learn more, in addition to subject matter, also social skills, which are exaggerated by the excessive use of social networks and similar benefits of the use of information and communication technology in the background. Here, the role of lecturers and online tutors is in promoting, motivating and directing. Students learn by they can also help each other, which benefit both the advanced and less advanced students.

2.4. COMPETITION

Our evaluations prove the same. Sense of achievement is a very strong stimulation. We try to upgrade it with competitions between teams - the winner gets a symbolic prize from our sponsors, which are involved in our lectures by case study methods.

For instance, when we declared that every member of the winning team will get an artistic T-shirt from our sponsor, a startup company, students reacted enthusiastically with the results being even better than usual.

Competition is a context in which a situation in which someone is trying to win something or be more successful than someone else or to do better than all of the others (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018). Competition exists when there is scarcity of a desired outcome. To say that we are preparing students for the real world by putting them in artificially constructed competitive situations is to impose on them a specifically biased world-view (Johnson, Johnson, 2006). In a broad sense, lecturers collectively create a more or less competitive future by the way we encourage our students to think and treat one another.

2.5. COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991) suggested that cooperative learning is more than simply “working in groups,” and should include the following:

- positive interdependence where team members are reliant on one another to achieve a common goal, and the entire group suffers the consequences if one member fails to do his or her work;
- individual accountability where each member of the group is held accountable for doing his or her share of the work;
- face-to-face promotive interaction where, although some of the group work may be done on an individual basis, most of the tasks are performed through an interactive process in which each group member provides feedback, challenges one another, and teaches and encourages his or her groupmates;
- appropriate use of collaborative skills where students are provided with the opportunity to develop and implement trust - building, leadership, decision - making, communication, and conflict management skills; and
- group processing in which team members establish group goals, the assessment of their performance as a team occurs periodically, and they often identify changes that need to be made in order for the group to function more effectively.

2.6. REVERSE TEACHING

The traditional mode of education has been classroom lectures, where the lecturer explains a topic, followed by homework that includes student exercises. In reverse teaching, the students first study the topic by themselves, and then present it in the (in our case, in the virtual) classroom. When reverse teaching is used, the classroom becomes more interactive and the teacher has ample opportunity to provide individualized guidance when it is most needed. The role of the classroom teacher is then to tutor the student when they become stuck, rather than to impart the initial lesson. This allows time inside the class to be used for additional learning-based activities, including use of differentiated instruction and project-based learning. The lecturer guiding the students, allowing them to assist the other students when they are assimilating information and creating new ideas.

3. CONCLUSION

In this article, we presented some of the methods by which we try to introduce a difference in (virtual) lecture room. In addition to trying to be moderately casual at lectures and fun to some extent, we find that with each implementation of a particular course it grows itself. On the other hand, the abovementioned methods of submitting substances to the lecturer require considerable involvement in the subject. At the beginning, much energy has to be invested in preparing the subject and finding practical examples for students' work. In the end, taking feedback from students and adhering to them requires the holder of the course to update it in the future course of the course.

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