Sarah Honeychurch

Sarah is a first year philosophy tutor and introduced a new way of running these weekly sessions. She has 3 tutorial groups of about 15 each, meeting weekly. Students across her tutorial groups are pre-assigned to one of 3 topic sub-groups, each with its own Moodle Forum and Moodle Wiki. (Moodle is the Virtual Learning Environment used at the University of Glasgow.)

Tutorial materials are divided into 3 parts, and delivered prior to the tutorial, each to one of the 3 Moodle topic sub-groupings. Students were encouraged to post answers there to the tutorial questions before attending. During the tutorial:

- Tutor introduces subject
- Group splits into "expert groups" and are given 10-15 mins to discuss their question.
- Each group nominates a spokesperson (if it transpires that one person is doing all of the work, the tutor may step in and nominate for future weeks).
- Tutor reintroduces subject. "Expert groups" take it in turns to present and teach the class.
- After each presentation, tutor comments/asks questions. Rest of class encouraged to ask questions.
- For the rest of the tutorial, the tutor and the class discuss the comments and questions arising from the presentations.

By the end of each tutorial, each individual student has built a model answer to the whole tutorial topic (typically 3 pages of their own notes), covering more ground than would have otherwise been possible.

Study Questions

1. Fill in the answers to these facts and mention them to your home group to help comparisons:
   a) Total number of learners involved:
   b) Self-teach group size:
   c) Reciprocal-teach group size:
   d) VLE used?:
   e) Discipline and level (e.g. HE – year 1 – biology)

2. Would this learning design be relevant and useful in <u>your</u> teaching context?
   If so, how? If not, why not?

Steve Draper's Positive Psychology option

Two years ago, I decided to introduce a level 4 psychology option on positive psychology, partly because I knew many students would like to learn about it, even though it was no-one's research interest. I decided to have it largely taught by students, partly because I was no expert here, partly to save contact time (these options are short on classroom hours), partly because I believed from the educational literature that it would be good for them!

A new final year option course in positive psychology with 70 students was largely organised around student generated content. Students were divided into groups of 6, each group was allocated one of 12 topics, and required to produce an introduction to their topic that would be of maximal utility to the rest of the class (e.g. short summary, the best starter reference, connections between published evidence and unevidenced claims in the self-help literature, ...). These introductions were in the form of Moodle wiki pages, and each group also had their own Moodle forum so that they could work together apart from in face to face meetings.

In the second year I ran it, I added an exercise whereby they had to produce a critique of some other group's wiki pages: to focus them on the genre, and to push them into using each others' pages early on.

The feedback showed strong valuing of the groupwork (both process and product), but more divided opinion about the relative lack of authoritative lecturer content delivery.

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Jim Baxter

A 2006-7 redesign of level 1 psychology at Strathclyde University was based on dropping half the lectures, and organising groupwork for a giant class (N = 550) mediated by the VLE (Blackboard).
The groups (of about 6) each had their own space, and produced pieces of written work jointly (2 pieces every 3 weeks), visible only within the group (and to Jim who ran the course).

The overall design of the course is six blocks of three weeks each, dealing with different areas within psychology. In each three week block a scaffolding approach would be used for the tasks, with the early exercises in each lecture block asking students to define and illustrate key terms relevant to the current subject matter, and later assignments requiring students to compile essays collaboratively.

Specifically, in Week 1 of each lecture block, a light 'introductory' written task, typically requiring 7 short answers, would be set, immediately after the lecture on which it was based, with the workload distributed amongst group members. In Week 2 students would be set a reading task giving them a chance to prepare for the more demanding task to be set in Week 3: This 'in-depth' task, typically requiring 7 longer answers which would then be combined by the students themselves into a single coherent essay, with the workload again distributed amongst group members. Students would have one week in which to complete each task, with the deadline set at noon on the day of the next lecture (lectures are from 2-3pm).

Across the board the quality of student responses to the assessment exercises has been outstanding in many cases, with some content frequently surpassing the level expected of second year students and even, in some cases of fourth year students.

Lessons from this:

- Even in a campus university, it is often more practical for students to interact online than F2F.
- Every online action is recorded by the software. This needn't be actively monitored, yet complete records are available if there is a complaint: comprehensive but cheap policing.
- Students seeing others' work is a potent source of feedback (with no staff effort): showing them what is realistically possible, letting them evaluate their own work against others'.

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Ann Brown

Ann Brown used a jigsaw design extensively in her interventions in US schools e.g. for Biology for 13 year olds. She discusses Aronson, but also other theoretical perspectives (situated learning, learning communities, …).

"Students are assigned curriculum themes (e.g., changing populations), each divided into approximately five subtopics (e.g. extinct, endangered, artificial, assisted, and urbanized populations). Students form separate research groups, each assigned responsibility for one of the five or so subtopics. These research groups prepare teaching materials using commercially available, stable computer technology. Then, the students regroup into reciprocal teaching seminars in which each student is expert in one subtopic, holding one-fifth of the information. All children in a learning group are expert on one part of the material, teach it to others, and prepare questions for the test that all will take on the complete unit. All children are finally responsible for the mastery of the entire theme, not just their own fifth of the material." [From Brown & Campione (1994).]

One assertion of hers was that, in these classes, the teachers were NOT the subject matter experts: instead, they taught not biology, but how to learn (by example, instruction, and scaffolding). The teachers acted (only) as experts on how to learn.

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