Dr Judith Seaboyer

Context: Literary Studies, School of English, Media Studies, and Art History
Pedagogy: Using the flipped classroom model to encourage effective reading of literary texts
Technology: Blackboard LMS, online quizzes, online marking

Overview

This study emphasises the need for well-designed solutions that encourage students to read complex and sometimes confrontational literary texts effectively and be prepared for class discussions. Judith discovered that the quality of students’ reading is a global problem in universities. She used an ALTC large grant to identify what was going wrong and came up with an effective course design, including formative quizzes and reading guides, to engage students and encourage effective reading. The classroom is flipped so that students must be prepared before attending class and be ready to engage in discussions to delve deeply into, and critically analyse, the literature.

Case study summary

Benefits

• Using online marking systems for undergraduate and advanced undergraduate courses allows more timely feedback for students.

• Reading guides help students with a deeper understanding and critical analysis of the text.

• Ensuring that students come prepared makes the class a happier, more vibrant place to learn for students and teachers.

• Once the reading guides and marking systems are developed they can be reused.

Issues to consider

• There is an initial large time investment, but this pays off in terms of lighter future workloads and students’ deeper learning.

• Try to work with other staff to develop sustainable teaching resources, so that a sole teacher does not carry the burden of time and effort.

• First-year students need more scaffolding to engage in critical analysis.

• Marks must be assigned to students’ completion of readings to provide incentive for them to prepare for class. As soon as the reward of a mark is removed, students tend
to stop prioritising their reading task, which has negative effects for class discussions and students' learning.

Reasons for adopting the flipped classroom

Judith and a group of academic staff from four other Australian universities were talking about the fact that their students don't read effectively. An investigation into the literature revealed that this is a global problem. Judith and her colleagues received an ALTC large grant to further research the problem and seek solutions. One of the outcomes was the Creative Commons Reading Resilience Toolkit, which is available for anyone to adopt and adapt.

Planning

Planning proceeded in two stages. In the first stage, reading tasks were set to ensure students think more deeply and critically about the text. Teaching staff marked a concise 300-word piece of student writing using automated comments to help track whether students were adjusting their learning after receiving feedback. The second stage was a follow-up to the project and was directed to large first-year classes at UQ. Assessment cutbacks meant marking short pieces wasn't feasible with large classes, so Judith successfully trialled carefully designed technology-assisted assessment in the form of quizzes.

Flipping the class

Engagement strategies included:

- Ensuring that all students are prepared by assigning marks to readings. Being prepared gives all students the opportunity to contribute to class discussions.

- Lectures and tutorials provide opportunities for feedback to students as to how they are going with their reading and writing.

- Using class time for discussions, questions and to raise issues generates a lively atmosphere where students can delve deeply into elements of the text and learn from peers.

- Helping students to manage their time more effectively, so they can prioritise their reading and critiquing tasks and be ready for class.

- With advanced undergraduates, key questions are gathered from students to ensure that they are dealt with.

- Students are asked to discuss key questions in groups of 2-3 and then discuss conclusions with the larger group.
Online component

- Online marking of short pieces with feedback libraries, so that comments on common issues of grammar, argument, syntax, and so on, can be automated.
- Reading guides to help students look more critically at the text.
- Online quizzes with carefully constructed questions.

Conclusion

Judith believes that although it is necessary to assign marks to the completion of readings, it is more than just an incentive: it helps students prioritise their workload and manage their time more effectively to get through a heavy reading workload. The classroom dynamic really changes when students are prepared—there are lively discussions and debates, and it’s a much happier as well as a much more productive place to be. Judith strongly encourages collaboration with colleagues to design course resources and activities for the flipped classroom and to establish a community of practice to share resources and ideas.

Useful links

Creative Commons Reading Resilience Toolkit: Developing a skills’ based approach to reading in higher education.

Discussion formats and activities: Dr Cavanaugh’s site outlines a range of strategies to generate discussion in the classroom.

Elicit information from students: Diana Laurillard advises on how to encourage students to take part in the dialogic process to enhance learning.

This resource from the Curtin Teaching and Learning site provides information about scaffolding activities and team activities.

For further information, see the TEDI Flipped Classroom website.

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