
Inspirational teaching and learning: Developing and encouraging autonomous student learning

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Abstract: *'What makes an inspirational teaching and learning experience?' Facilitators will use examples of student views on this from a range of disciplines. It will also demonstrate how digital media has been introduced and embedded into the curriculum at Sheffield Hallam University, and will reflect on issues and benefits.*

Introduction

The Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy (CPLA) is one of three Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Sheffield Hallam University. The overall purpose is to promote learning and teaching practices that empower students. There are innovative ways of enabling them to construct their own knowledge in partnerships with tutors and other students, as well as to acquire responsibility for their own learning. The university's new Corporate Plan includes an Inspirational learning initiative, which aims to provide a flexible methodology, enabling students to engage more fully with their learning.

Prensky (2005) and others have noted that student requirements for engaging with learning are changing, given their expectations for a digitally rich curriculum. Can higher education satisfy the student expectations for a more enriched learning experience by embracing digital technology? Can digital media support a more authentic learner experience and so meet the needs of employers?

Students in various disciplines across the university have undertaken enquiry based learning projects, and used digital media to present their learning for assessment. Our students were supported through workshop and drop-in sessions. For example, final year engineering students studying polymers recently completed a series of case studies using this methodology. We found that their work covered more depth and met a higher standard. One student commented that working with video "disguises the learning aspect."

Students are achieving higher marks and providing us with evidence to suggest that they are inspired by this enriched learning experience. Whilst this initiative offers new learning models it is also developing learner autonomy within students and encouraging employability skills; it also introduces new challenges for assessment.

This session will consider how these methods can be applied in all subject/ topic areas of interested delegates; the nature of student learner autonomy; the characteristics of inspirational teaching and learning approaches.

Session learning outcomes

By the end of the session, participants will:

1. have shared their experiences of inspirational teaching and learning practices;
2. have an understanding of what student learner autonomy is and how it can be developed;
3. be able to describe and explain some examples of the effective use of digital media to enhance, inspire and promote active student learning;
4. have an understanding of different ways in which both home and overseas students are inspired to be taught and learn;
5. have participated in, and contributed to, an activity designed to enhance their capacity to apply digital media to enhance their practice;
6. have exemplar case studies and resources to be able to plan and implement these ideas into their own practice.

Workshop structure

Introduction and Group activity 1 (10 minutes)

Participants will be asked to split into several small groups and then half the groups will each discuss one of the questions below:

- How do you define learner autonomy and therefore what student characteristics should we be trying to develop?
- What is, or makes, an inspirational teaching and learning experience, for both home and overseas students?

Debrief (10 minutes)

This will allow participants to share experiences and ideas and to reflect on what they have learned.

Short presentation (10 minutes)

Short video clips will be shown of students and staff from various disciplines, from both home and overseas, talking about their inspirational teaching and learning experiences and the development of learner autonomy. Web based resources will also be shown.

Debrief (5 minutes)

Time for delegates to ask questions/ discuss ideas and issues raised.

Group activity 2; case studies - group discussion (15 minutes)

Case studies (handouts) used in various disciplines will be handed out for delegates to review and discuss in small groups. Video case studies will also be played as exemplars.

Group activity 3; video production (15 minutes)

Small 'Flip cameras' will be used in the session, entailing the production of short video clips (~ 2 mins) within small groups, to be shared by the end of the session. Participants will be able to reflect in these video clips on how they can inspire their students and develop them as autonomous learners. They will also be able to recognise the role of the tutor, the student and the use of technology in developing an inspirational teaching and learning experience.

Debrief (15-20 minutes)

Viewing of the short video clips made by the delegates.

Concluding process (5 minutes)

Participants will reflect on what they have learnt in the session and share their ideas on how to enhance their students' learning experiences to make this more inspirational and develop student learner autonomy.

References

Prensky, M. (2005), 'Listen to the natives', Educational Leadership, Volume 63, Number 4, Pages 8-13.

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