

A1 Case study

Introduction

When planning projects, I ask the students 'What do you want to learn in this project?'

Previously, I have planned projects rigorously in advance. On 'Writing as Performance', students said they enjoyed how structured it is. However, on 'Performance as Protest', students weren't so forthcoming with verbal feedback. I had started to feel insecure about whether students were getting what they needed from the project, as attendance was more patchy and classes quiet. I decided to try this new approach during the next group tutorial (a formative assessment point for the students).

With this approach I aim to increase engaged learning where students feel empowered and to open avenues for feedback on learning and teaching.

Background:

This approach was inspired by conversations with my colleague Andrea Zimmerman and my PG Cert tutorial group, where one lecturer described building a collaborative reading list with students. I see this approach as part of bell hooks' 'engaged pedagogy', which 'necessarily values student expression'.¹

hooks writes:

'I have been most inspired by those teachers who have had the courage to transgress those boundaries that would confine each pupil to a rote, assembly-line approach to learning. Such teachers approach students with the will and desire to respond to our unique beings, even if the situation does not allow the full emergence of a relationship based on mutual recognition.'²

Through curriculum co-creation and tailoring, I aim to increase student engagement and validate their unique interests.

Evaluation & Moving Forward

This approach successfully encouraged open & direct communication from the students about their experience on the project, which hadn't happened previously. I told students my reasoning for this prompt – that the class works for them.

The feedback challenged assumptions I'd made about the success of previous activities e.g. most students said they found theory set in advance for discussion in class stimulating. Previously, I'd assumed lack of completion of these tasks meant they didn't find them useful. But students explained that no, general workload on the course was the reason. Additionally, students asked for a mix of theoretical discussion and practical group work, and to explore anger and humour as political tools.

¹ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, p. 20.

² bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, p. 13.

Students initially found it difficult to articulate specific themes and teaching styles; there was silence and not much variation in student answers. Giving them suggestions helped them generate more ideas e.g. 'would you like more theoretical texts?'.

Emily also suggested co-creation could be made more productive and inclusive by asking students to write what they want on post-it notes and group these to create a rough 'sketch' curriculum. This would also take the focus from me as the one to provide the knowledge, or meet student demands (which was a little daunting for me in the session), and instead promote discussion between students about what kind of learning environment they want to create and further highlight *their* role in creating it.

Curriculum tailoring since this session has involved additional work in the short-term. So far attendance has not improved. However, again this might be due to external factors. To evaluate the success of this method fully, I will need to maintain and encourage further the open dialogue with the students that I successfully began with this approach.