

# How can Flipped Classroom Activities Support Teacher Motivation?

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DOI: 10.34190/EEL.19.161

**Abstract:** This paper proposes an alternative way of engaging the students. Instead of written assignments, the students are to hand in Podcasts or recordings of a selected topic in groups of up to 3 persons. The podcasts and recordings will be available to the class after a process of feedback from a peer group and the lecturer. In this way, it is possible to utilize the curriculum to co-create in groups, to share knowledge and to support critical thinking and critical reflection. There will be rules as to what the peer group is to comment on and the way they will offer their comments. As the course in question is an e-learning course in "Digital Work Forms in Organizations" at the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, the digitalization of the assignment is regarded as appropriate. The peer evaluation will support the teacher in the way that it will prepare the work for the teacher and thus contribute to reduce the workload, as well as the finished assignment is a shared product that will support and enhance the course content. The students will also benefit from this as they are provided with an opportunity of meta learning from the assignment and peer-reviewing. Another important aspect to support the teacher motivation is to have time to reflect and this will provide the teacher with a tool for continuous improvement of the curriculum. This will also represent an opportunity for the teacher to get different aspects and thus learn from the students. It will require establishing a culture for knowledge sharing amongst students and amongst students and teacher(s). Hence, the teacher's role will be to empower students to reflect and think critically, and to support continuous learning for the students and the teacher(s).

**Keywords:** content co-creation, motivation, e-learning, teacher motivation, critical reflection

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## 1. Introduction

Students attending higher education is a diverse (heterogeneous) group. Some students are full time students, some are part time students with a job either full time or part time. At the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences we offer study programs for both full time and part time students. However, if they are attending the same course they need to have the same requirements, the same mandatory assignments and the same exam. The "adjustment" is thus the lectures. The full time students have 3 hour lessons each week. The part time students have full day (6 hours) five times each semester.

We use a Learning Management System called Canvas where they need to be handing in their assignments and where they find articles and other relevant sources tied to the curriculum. This is also where they can communicate with each other and the lecturer.

In the past years we have implemented "Flipped Classroom" (Carbaugh, Doubet, & Tomlinson, 2016; Fezile & Gulsum, 2016; Nematollahi, St John, & Adamas-Rappaport, 2015; T Vold, 2014; T. Vold, Braun, & Lundesgaard, 2016) as a way of getting the students more engaged in the courses. The students have access to streaming video of most of the curriculum. In the classroom only "high lights" are presented. The rest of the "lecture time" we use on task solving, discussions and reflections. In this way it is possible to get feedback and viewpoints from the students, which provide an opportunity of learning for the lecturer as well.

Our campus have a course called "Digital Workforms in Organizations". In the spring semester of 2019 we tested out using a digital tool for communication for the mandatory assignment. The students were to communicate over a specific task using written digital communication. The reasoning behind this assignment was to make the students express themselves in writing as well as mimic a work like setting. They were to come to an agreement regarding an issue and they were "physically" "located" at three different locations in Norway. We hoped that this would spark the imagination and would challenge the lecturers regarding correcting the assignments, and thus support the teacher motivation.

This paper present the results from observations and group interviews made during and after the assignment in both the on campus courses and the online course. Even if we in the following discuss "teaching" we mean both "on campus" – and "online" - teaching. Our main focus have been to get feedback on how they perceived a practical approach to the mandatory assignment, how they perceived to write a reflection note, and a focus on

how to develop assignments in the future. We thus also propose an alternative assignment type and the reasoning for this approach. The objective is to support student activity, spur motivation, and enhance reflection skills, all in order to enhance the learning outcome for the students. It also represents an opportunity of expanding the "flipped classroom" concept and provide the lecturer with a stronger tool for the teacher regarding support for the students to become reflective practitioners.

## **2. Theoretical backdrop**

Teachers that feel that they master their job and manage to teach students their subject are also feeling motivated. Doing a search in Oria (our university chosen tool for academic searches) for "motivation" and "education" provide over 500 000 hits and by going through the approximately 100 first of these, they are all about motivating *students*, not teachers. When searching for "motivation" and "teacher" there are about 160 000 hits, still some of them about how teachers can motivate students. This is also confirmed by Butler (2012) who has focussed her research on developing the "achievement goal theory". This is mainly about looking at how to master the task and have goals for the mastery as well as goals for the performance. This is tied to goal orientations and avoidance states (Pintrich, 2000). It is not only about how to perform and master, but also about to avoid not to master.

Jang et al. (2015) also describe motivation. They describe six motivation factors; Attitude, Interest, Value, Self-Efficacy, Self Concept and Goal. Although the article is about students' motivation to read, the same may apply to teaching and teachers. This is about attitude towards the task of teaching, an interest in teaching, feeling that teaching is important, feeling that one master the "art" of teaching, the way the teacher sees himself/herself as a teacher tied to the individual identity.

Flipped Classroom is a concept that allows the students to be more active and take a more active part in the education (Colorado, 2012; Fezile & Gulsum, 2016; Lewis, Chen, & Relan, 2018; A. T. Vold et al., 2017; T Vold, 2014). The students are to prepare in beforehand for lectures by watching streaming video and/or other material available, like for example short articles or news-themes. That allows for more in depth discussions and the opportunity of exploring the subject in a different way. Making students contributing into the lectures with their own material, support adult learning theories. All of our students are 18 years old or older and quite a few of them have work experience. For many of our students, education is about understanding mechanisms at work, and to learn how and what to contribute with at work. This may be about organizational change, training programs, preparedness planning, etc. Adult learning is about including and involving students in their learning process (Knowles, 1970, 1984, 1990). Letting the students use their backgrounds to share their knowledge and utilize this knowledge to build new knowledge does not only allow the students to learn, but the lecturer also have an opportunity to learn from their students. The lecturer becomes a facilitator but will still need to be the one "in charge" and also provide advising. One goes from an asymmetrical to a more symmetrical relationship between the student and lecturer. This change in role perception may influence how the teacher sees him/herself. Lecturers that has little experience in teaching would probably benefit from being together with a more experienced lecturer as this shift in role perception may be difficult to handle. It definitely require an in depth knowledge of the curriculum and be able to respond to different questions regarding the course content. Also, the student should perceive the teacher as an "authority" and not discard the teachers knowledge as "we can look this up in Google". Raelin (2012) describes this change in the roles of company managers. It is more about facilitating through dialogue rather than deciding for them what they are to do.

This way of doing education also support the students in becoming reflective practitioners (Schön, 1987, 1991). The lecturer need to facilitate for reflecting and establish a culture for reflection. It's impossible to decide upon a culture for reflection. Hence, it requires a lot of work to develop a culture for reflection. Planning, concrete actions and systematic work is necessary. An important aspect in this work is establishing a psychological safety in order to prepare for the individual to be able to speak freely also on matters that are uncomfortable (Edmondson, 2019). It is also important to utilize the student input and backgrounds in the classroom. It is also possible to adapt the mandatory assignments to include reflection, much like reflective journals (Bassot, 2013; Moon, 2004, 2006).

Critical reflection (Askeland, 2006) also aids the process for the students to reflect as they are encouraged to explore backgrounds that they bring into their education. Critical in this sense is not about being negative or commenting, it is about finding cause-effect connections. E.g. can a student studying "digital work forms in

organizations" present what they use of digital tools and how this is perceived in the organization. If they are not content with the tools, what can be the reason for this? Can it be the introduction of tools? Is there something concerning the decision making process? Critical reflection will help teacher to help the students to be more critically reflective.

This also resembles what Kaplan (2003) provide as a checklist of advocacy in the classroom, where she suggests in what ways have I defined the objectives and the pathway to attain these?

- How have I assessed the background knowledge of the individuals I want to "teach" to support this idea? What information in their background can I use to facilitate the acquisition of the new material I want them to learn?
- How can I help the individuals I want to support these ideas to reflect or monitor their own thinking and behaviour so they can be successful advocates on behalf of the gifted?
- How have I included in my presentation the need to transfer the information communicated to other situations and programs? (Kaplan, 2003)

To this, we would like to add that that to facilitate for a culture that accepts making mistakes, and promote learning from mistakes, would be beneficial for the learning outcome.

This sums up the facilitative role and addresses the adult learning principles as well as it prepares for reflection and social constructivist learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

### **3. Method of inquiry**

We collected our data through observations and through semi-structured interviews with groups (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Merriam, 2015). A total of 105 full time students, 105 part time students and 162 online students took part in the courses this spring. We have discussed the assignments during lectures in the different classes. This qualitative approach has been necessary to seek out the nuances and the feedback in order to proceed with developing new assignments. They were also to write a reflection note in their mandatory assignment, and we have categorized the statements from these into a few generic statements.

### **4. Results and discussion**

#### **4.1 Feedback from students**

The general feedback in the beginning – when we handed out the assignment - the students were not at all happy with this "practical approach" to the assignments. They were frustrated and did not see the point of doing this "artificial exercise". They even asked their representative to address the matter with us lecturers.

As we had our backs clear regarding learning objectives with the task and could show how the assignment met the learning objectives of the course, they later dropped the complaint. This show also that it is important to be clear about expectancies. If they know what to expect, they are less likely to complain.

There were "endless" masses of emails and messages in Canvas asking how to go about this and which tool they should use, etc., even though specified in the assignment.

Despite the negative feedback and general negativity towards the task, the assignments way exceeded our expectations. They had really worked hard and followed our instructions. The part of the assignments where there were some different approaches, were the reflection notes. Many students had handed in very good and reflective responses. Statements like: "I was first hesitant towards having to reflect, but as it was a part of the assignment, I felt I had to do it. Looking back on this experience, it has contributed towards my learning outcome. We should be "forced" to reflect in all our courses" and "I was surprised over how much writing a reflection note gave me regarding understanding what I have learned", show that they may not have been accustomed to reflecting and be fully aware of the effect of reflection with regards to supporting the learning outcome.

Most of the students restrained themselves from putting their aversions in the assignment, and were quite reflective and showed a high academic level. This was quite surprising as they were not only very good, but also added comments about how important this particular part was for their learning and some even added that this should be a requirement in other courses. Comments from the assignments that support this observation are:

"At first we struggled with the assignment, but when we agreed on how to go about it, we understood the purpose of the assignment" and "It seemed difficult at first, but we decided on just doing it and then we realized that there are people actually working like this".

Several students also wanted to hand in the assignment on their own and not cooperate with other students. This was came up several times although the lecturers had explained the value of working and learning in teams (Joseph A. Raelin, 2006).

#### **4.2 Lecturers reflection notes**

Looking back at our own reflection notes as teachers, we notice a "bumpy ride". It starts out quite well and the students describe our first lectures positively. The students are active in all classes, both online and on campus. There are clear evidences of mastery and positive attitude. The notes from developing the mandatory assignment show a desire to be a bit "bold" and go "beyond" the ordinary assignments that are generally to either respond to a case or to answer questions from the textbook or other curriculum. We "wanted to make the students do something practical, something that they may experience in organizations that has branches in different parts of the country or even abroad" (excerpt from Vold's reflection notes). We also wanted to "make the students reflect upon their learning process" and the best way to do this was to make it as a part of the mandatory assignment. This may refer to the motivation factors self-efficacy and self-concept that Jang et al. (2015) point out. Self-efficacy refers here to the belief in the ability to develop an interesting task, and self-concept refers to our perception as teachers and that we were confident about being able teachers.

However, the students did not interpret the course description as having to do something practical. They were used to "ordinary" written assignments where they use the textbooks to answer the assignments. We needed to address this mismatch. This can to an extent be related to Habermas and his requirements for a discourse (Flyvbjerg, 2001). To be able to respect each other's roles in a relationship between student and teacher is important, as well as it is important to level the relationship and acknowledge the student as a customer and thus an equal partner. To show that neither the students nor the lecturer has a hidden agenda and that both parties are open and transparent towards each other prepares the ground for a best possible communication (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

The teachers' reflection notes also show a down period where the motivation is low. The lecturer had three different student groups to cater for. From all the different student groups came constant comments on the mandatory assignment. At one point, the motivation was so low that reading and commenting on the assignments were postponed with the result of new emails from students asking about the results. This did not – according to the reflection notes – contribute positively to the situation or motivation. However, the reflection notes also points out that it is "very relieving to be two lecturers tied to the course". Even if Vold is the responsible for the course, Ranglund was also a contributor/lecturer and it is expressed clearly that the value of not being alone has contributed positively towards picking up courage and motivation. This may relate to being a part of a Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). We could have avoided this by presenting an "ordinary" assignment as described in Pintrich (2000).

In this work we have reflected in the light of Gadamer (2010). According to Gadamer, it is very important to both listen and ask questions. In his book "Truth and Method", Hans-Georg Gadamer claims that we need to deepen our understanding of the nature of the question. We make no experiences without actively asking. When we acknowledge that a case is different to what we first assumed, we must apparently have asked ourselves if it is like this or like that (Gadamer, 2010, p. 326). It is in other words via questions we can revise our understanding. It is the *question* that is the basis and lead to the recognition of that a case seems different than we first thought, and this gives the question precedence. It is through the answers to our questions that the preconditions for our preconceptions and our biases are tested. Through dialogue with questions and answers, one must articulate and take up ones theme again for reflecting about one's own preconceptions and prejudices, something that may revise our understanding (Gadamer, 2010). This thinking shows us that both lecturers and students horizons have changed. After the course we think differently than before. In many ways, we have determined the questions, and that is the road to knowing, according to Gadamer (2010).

The exam was a semester assignment and the students were allowed to forward suggestions towards what it should contain, and their comments should be based on what they found contributing towards learning from

working on an exam. Some input were forwarded and in the development of the exam, we considered the suggestions. In the reflection notes, we find a comment about "we expected more input from students, but some is better than none". This suggest that we were somewhat disappointed, which lowered the motivation somewhat. This can be explained by the sense of lack of ability to establish a dialogue that has a desired outcome (J. A. Raelin, 2012). This "exercise" of bottom up rather than top down with regards to the exams, did not succeed as hoped for. However, this may be due to a still perceived inequality in the roles (Flyvbjerg, 2001) and also that they have an expectancy of the teacher role to be the one who decides upon the exam, and also that this should be a "big secret" until the day of the exam. This is a paradox as students generally do literally anything to disclose how an exam will be.

The students had their exam and since this was a new course, an external sensor marked all of the exams. The results were exceptional and the sensor commented on the high standard. This is noted in the reflection notes, as this contributed very positively to the motivation. This meant that also in other lecturers' standards we had done a decent job trying to learn our students something. This ties well in with what Pintrich (2000) points out with regards to motivation being linked to respect from other peers. It also gives a sense of filling Kaplan's (2003) checklist for advocacy in the classroom (both online and on campus).

The total experience, although giving us a hard time motivational wise, has not been very devastating and we still have a certain sense of motivation for developing a new task that will support the students.

## 5. The new task

We bring our experiences from the previous task into the developing of the new task. The new assignment will be to produce a podcast on a chosen subject. They are to work in groups of three and choose one of 10-12 subjects from the curriculum. They can use their mobile phones to record. The podcast must have the form of a podcast and be between 3 to 5 minutes long. They need to present the subject, discuss the subject –preferably give examples – and sum up. They will also need to provide a report that they hand in. The report may be the manuscript for the podcast. The report should also include a reflection note. As we writes this paper, we still have not decided on whether or not the students are to comment on each other's podcasts.

The reasoning for asking the students to prepare a podcast is that to prepare curriculum to present to others require a different approach than "just" reply to an assignment. To choose the subject support the idea of including the student in the learning process (Carbaugh et al., 2016; A. T. Vold et al., 2017; T. Vold et al., 2016), and the reflection journal support the students in becoming reflective practitioners (Schön, 1987). Allowing for student peer review of the podcast also mean sharing knowledge through the podcasts and will, in addition to working in groups, support social constructivist learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

## 6. Conclusion

We still have belief in our ability to teach and we identify ourselves as lecturers. We still also feel that the flipped classroom, although challenging, is the better way of educating students. Learning from experience, learning from and with each other, and learning from students are all motivating factors that contribute towards defining us as lecturers. We feel challenged by the "flipped classroom" concept but in a positive way. It makes us be clearer about who we are as lecturers, our pedagogical skills, and our knowledge.

### 6.1 Further research

We need to investigate further how the "flipped classroom" effect teachers and students. In this paper, we have used our own experiences, and we need to interview other lecturers using the "flipped classroom" as method in their courses. Also, we need to do in depth interviews with students as well as follow up with group interviews. We will continue writing reflective notes from the lecturing, and will encourage our colleagues to do the same in order to collect more data for a more extensive research project.

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