

Including activation of students in the planning of two sessions

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Introduction

To ensure a student-centered learning approach and to develop the student's skills and competences it is important to activate the students during teaching. Student's knowledge of the subject is developed through actively interacting with the material and through dialogue with fellow students. Further, activation of students is important in order to maintain their attention through for example lectures, and to promote critical thinking and facilitate that students can learn from one another. (Rienecker L. 2015)

Activation of students during teaching can be done in a multitude of ways and there is room for imagination and spontaneity. However, giving students time to think and talk about the subject at hand is the end goal which can then be reached through the activation of students. There are several examples of how to give students the time to think and talk about the subject and some of them are: wait time, allow students time to write, think-pair-share, and "do not try too much". It is also imperative that all students feel engaged, not only a select few. This can be achieved by hand raising, randomly calling students or assigning reporters for small groups. (Tanner KD)

In the end, cultivating a student-centered environment and facilitating student development through activation of students in teaching comes down to planning a session accordingly. When planning a session, important things to keep in mind are: student activation, not overloading the session with content and allowing for learning, incorporate learning objectives etc. (Rienecker L. 2015)

This final project will present the results of an intervention in which two new sessions were planned and executed. The sessions included several elements of student activation and were constructed around student-centered learning. After the sessions, feedback was received from the students which formed the results part of this final project. It is of utmost importance to plan sessions so that they encompass activation of students in order to make the students an active partner in the teaching and learning process. The reason for this is to develop the student's critical thinking and understanding of the topic but also to give the students breaks in between all the information that a lecture can contain. Therefore, I chose to execute an intervention with activation of students and dialogue included in the design of the new sessions in teaching.

Below, I will present the methods used, then go through the results. Thereafter, I will shortly discuss the results considering the literature and the problem at hand, and at the end I will provide some short conclusions.

Methods

Setting

The intervention was conducted during November 2023 and the feedback was received December 2023. The intervention consisted of creating two new sessions (a lecture and an exercise-lesson) for a course called "Social Medicine, Rehabilitation and Prevention" given to Bachelor students in Public Health at the University of Copenhagen during fall 2023 and to execute the sessions. The course is given to first-year students and consists of topics that are important in the field of social medicine. The course comprised of 60 students during the semester. Health economics as a topic has not been a part of the course in previous years but during this specific semester I got the opportunity to create and add these two sessions in health economics. The purpose of this was to give an introduction to health economics for public health students, to spark their interest in the topic and to prepare them for future health-economic courses.

The intervention

The intervention consisted of a lecture and an exercise-lesson, where the sessions would be designed in order to create student-centered learning. To be able to do this the lecture was designed to include several parts of activation of students and the exercise-lesson was designed with the aim to give the lecture some context and to give the students the opportunity to work and familiarize themselves with a new topic, in this case health economics. The lecture was designed to provide an overview of the topic of health economics while keeping the level of the lecture on an appropriate level for these students. Further, to provide a safe and open environment I chose to present myself and my background and to start the lecture with an activation exercise with an open-ended question. The open-ended question was “what is health economics?”. This question was chosen in order for me to be able to hear how much the students already knew about the subject so that I could revise my lecture accordingly for the rest of the session. The question was also chosen so that students could get the possibility to start thinking about the subject and be prepared for the rest of the lecture. I also gave the students enough time to think, write and discuss with fellow students to facilitate student development. During the lecture I had included several questions with the aim to facilitate activation of the students and to support the students in understanding the new subject through silent thinking, discussions and writing. The exercise-lesson was designed as to include only activation of students, without lecturing, where the aim was for students to develop their understanding of the new subject and to apply the knowledge they learned during the lecture. During the exercise-lesson I provided the students with 3 different questions and topics, and they were split into smaller groups of 3-4 students. After each task we discussed the questions in plenum and the students could ask questions to me or to their fellow students. The questions that were provided to the students for their exercise lesson were chosen so that they would help the students process, understand and work with the topics that were presented during the lecture as well as the questions being relatable to the current healthcare system and climate in Denmark.

Feedback

In order to evaluate the intervention and to investigate whether the sessions were contributing to student-centered learning and if the activation of the students was sufficient, a short survey was handed out to the students after their final lecture in December 2023. The survey was in Danish and included 4 questions, 1 open-ended question and 3 yes/no questions. Feedback on the lecture and the exercise-lesson was provided anonymously by 21 students. For one of the respondents the answers were missing and the respondent wrote that he/she had not been partaking in the module. The students gave their consent to be a part of this final project. Below, in table 1, the translated version of the survey is presented (translated from Danish to English).

Table 1. Questions to students regarding the intervention

Question 1	Describe shortly what you thought of the lecture and exercise-lesson (content, length, level, relevance etc.)?
Question 2	Do you think there was enough dialogue/activation of you and your fellow students during the lecture and the exercise-lesson?
Question 3	Did you feel that the content of the lecture and the exercise-lesson was connected?
Question 4	Would you recommend the module “Introduction to health economics” to be a part of the course in the future?

Results

The results of the feedback from the students were in general very positive and the majority of the students who answered the questionnaire felt that it was important to provide this module (the lecture and the exercise-lesson) in the future. Below, the aggregate results from each question are provided separately.

Question 1 – thoughts on content, length, level and relevance

None of the respondents answered that the lecture or the exercise-lesson was bad, not relevant or the level was too high. 10 respondents thought the lecture and exercise-lesson was good, 2 students wrote that the lecture and exercise-lesson were “super nice” and 6 students thought that the sessions were exciting while one of them thought that the lecture was too long. Only 3 of the students answered the question of relevance but they thought that the sessions were relevant. Further, 3 students responded to the question about level and two of them thought the level was high (but not too high) and the third respondent answered that the level was OK.

Question 2 – thoughts on activation of students

The answers to question 2 were somewhat mixed. The majority of respondents (12 students) thought that the dialogue and activation during both sessions was good. Two of the respondents found the activation good during the exercise-lesson but not as good during the lecture. One student wrote that it would have been optimal to have had a written assignment during this module in order to enhance the understanding of the topic. 4 students answered that the activation was good for both sessions but especially good for the exercise lesson while one student concluded that the exercise-lesson in health economics was the best exercise-lesson during the entire course. Moreover, one student wrote that I was very good at asking questions during the exercise-lesson.

Question 3 – thoughts on cohesion between lecture and exercise-lesson

Most students (17 students) felt that there was a good connection/cohesion between the lecture and the exercise-lesson. One student could not remember if there was a feeling of cohesion between the lecture and the exercise-lesson and one student felt that there was a cohesion and at the same time not (without giving more explanation). One student wrote that I was not the exercise-teacher at the session where he/she was attending.

Question 4 – recommendations for the future

All respondents felt that the lecture and the exercise-lesson “Introduction to health economics” should be given in the future for the course.

Discussion

This final project presented an intervention where activation of students and dialogue were included in the design of two new sessions for an existing course for students in the Public Health bachelor program at University of Copenhagen. The two sessions were a lecture where both open-ended and yes/no questions/discussion points were included during the session and an exercise-lesson which consisted of three group-based tasks that were then discussed in class. A month after the completed sessions a survey was handed out to the students in order to receive feedback on the format as well as the level of dialogue and activation.

Overall, the students felt that the amount of activation was satisfactory both during the lecture and the exercise-lesson. However, a few students felt that the activation could have been better during the lecture. Further, the majority of the students felt that the content of the lecture and exercise lesson was good, the level was OK to high, and the sessions were relevant to their education. Most students felt that the content of the lecture and the exercise-lesson was coherent and cohesive and all the students that responded to the survey recommended that both sessions were to be included in the course in the future.

I felt that the most important aim for me with this intervention was to give the students the ability to grasp the concept of health economics, to present the subject in an interesting manner and to contribute to student-centered learning. By including parts of activation in the lecture and designing the exercise-lesson as to include group-tasks I felt that the aim would be fulfilled. As research shows that it is important to activate the students in order to develop their knowledge in the specific topic through critical thinking and discussion with fellow students (Rienecker L. 2015), I felt that activation was my primary tool to reach the aim of my final project. I did not, in fact, ask students whether they felt that the activation contributed to enhancing their knowledge on the topic and in

hindsight that would have been a relevant question to include in the survey. However, the majority of students felt that the amount of activation was suitable and that there was cohesion between the two sessions and therefore you could argue that at least some parts of the activation contributed to increased knowledge on the topic.

I wanted to engage as many students as possible and provide an inclusive student-centered environment. Tanner (Tanner KD) states that this can be done in several different ways but one way is by raising hands and that is what I chose as the method during my lecture. It is obvious that in a classroom of over 50 students you cannot ask each student for their answer to a question you are posing when you have limited amount of time and pre-defined slides and content but by having several discussion points, giving students time to think and discuss, increasing waiting time between questions and answers you can increase the inclusiveness in your classroom and that was one of my aims and what I tried to do in practice. The students were provided with a reading list before the lecture and the exercise lesson, and the students were expected to read the material beforehand. This expectation of preparation was set so that students could actively engage in the lecture and the exercise lesson and get the most out of the content and information provided. We know that not all students prepare beforehand, or even after. However, it is important to convey the importance of this to the students, also in the future of this course.

When providing the same sessions in the future for the course, it could be considered whether, as one student recommended, a written assignment could be included in the module. This could enhance the student's knowledge of the topic even further and develop their critical thinking and discussion skills. Further, even more activation could be optimal during the lecture as well as considering connecting the two sessions even more to provide increased cohesion.

Conclusions

This final project aimed at conducting an intervention where activation of students would be an imperative part of two new sessions for an existing course in order to develop the student's knowledge of the topic,

give student's some breathing room between loads of new information and to contribute to an inclusive and student-centered learning experience. The results showed that the activation of students was successful as well as the planning of two new sessions that were cohesive and also relevant to the course and the education. Moreover, results showed that students recommended the two new sessions to be included in the future of the course.

Feedback received from a colleague and revisions

A fellow assistant professor at the section of Social Medicine was kind enough to read through this final project and suggest some revisions. The revisions that were suggested were to: write down the open-ended question used in the lecture (during the start of the lecture) and give a reasoning for why this question was chosen, state the tasks that were delivered to students during the exercise lesson and state the reason for why these particular tasks were chosen, and finally, to discuss how much preparation was expected of the students before the lecture and exercise lesson, if this preparation was a prerequisite to be able to participate in the activities and if I had any recommendations for the future of the course in regards to this. I thought that these suggestions for revisions were insightful and important and would enhance the quality of this project even more and therefore I chose to include them in this final project. The first two suggestions were included under the heading "The intervention" and the last suggestion was included in the discussion.

References

- Rienecker L. University teaching and learning. 1. edition. ed. Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur; 2015.
- Tanner KD. Structure Matters: Twenty-One Teaching Strategies to Promote Student Engagement and Cultivate Classroom Equity. CBE—Life Sciences Education. 2013;12(3):322-31.