

Title - Am I Bovered? Engaging Students in the Learning Process, through a Student Led Conference

Keywords - Employability, Groupwork, Assessment

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Group - Final year level three undergraduates completing the B.A. (Hons) Sport Development with P.E. programme.

Activity - Student led sports development conference.

Aim - Student led conferences are becoming an increasingly popular way of engaging students with their own learning. The idea of a student conference came out of one of those 'wouldn't it be great if..' moments during summer module planning sessions. The module team wanted to provide level 3 students with a realistic conference situation that would help them gain confidence in their own abilities, and to enhance their employability skills in preparation for graduation. Additionally the team wished to further pursue some peer assessment work that this cohort of students had undertaken as level 2 students.

Context / Background - This conference is the culmination of a level 3, 12 credit core module which attempts to enable students to critically analyse current sport development delivery models. The module looks at key policies and delivery modes and provides a much needed update of the current sport development agenda. There are two parts to the assessment, the presentation at the conference and a critique of the content of all the presentations in a particular theme. The module is taught in the first semester and delivered with three staff from the programme team.

After completing the module the student should be able to:

1. Analyse and evaluate the implementation of national sport development policies and models delivered at a local level.
2. Critically analyse existing sport development policies and models.
3. Devise and critically evaluate an initiative for the delivery of sport to a particular sector of society.
4. Identify and critically evaluate the different roles of agencies within sport development.

Example - Student led conferences are not new;

"...this practice is the biggest breakthrough in communicating about student achievement in the last century. The pride in accomplishment that students

feel when they have a positive story to tell and tell it well, can be immensely motivational. The sense of personal responsibility that they feel when anticipating what it will be like to face the music of having to tell their story can also drive them to productive work."

Stiggins, R. (1999). Assessment, student confidence, and school success, Phi Delta Kappan November, pp. 191-198.

The case study and the resulting evaluation outline the experience of the Sport Development with PE programme team. 70 students prepared, delivered and peer assessed at a student led conference. It details the reflection of students on the learning experience, the use of a student led conference as a way of engaging with students and the perception of students' employability skills which developed as a result.

The module is delivered in the form of 'front loaded' teaching comprising 2 x 3 hour sessions for 3 weeks. The content as described earlier identifies changes in policy, implementation or organisational structure of sport in the UK. Students are given sport development problems identified by key industry partners such as local authority sport development officers, national governing bodies, equity organisations and local community groups. Students select their own groups and are then given the next 5 weeks to prepare their solutions to the problems, which are then delivered as part of the conference programme at the end of the module in Week 10.

It was agreed early on in the planning process that an external facility should be booked as the venue, together with lunch provided for all delegates, in order to make the day as realistic as possible. Conference proceedings were agreed with the students and a programme was provided. As with any conference a delegate list, delegate pack and name badges were prepared. The problems were divided into three themed areas in order to fit into the programme structure. The rest of the Sport Development programme team were invited together with other guests including the providers of the 'problems'. A key note speaker was arranged to complement the student presentations.

It must be highlighted that it was the students' responsibility to provide abstracts, copies of presentations and supporting material that were then collated and pulled together into a delegate pack.

Results - The conference was evaluated by means of an exit questionnaire that all 70 students completed detailing their experience and thoughts on the conference as a whole. Various areas were identified for research:

- Teamwork
- Skills development
- Subject knowledge
- Peer assessment
- Conference as a whole

The following brief results have been selected from the research:

Teamwork – 68.6% of students acknowledged that they had worked well together as a team. “Generally we worked well together, but there were a few challenges” was highlighted by 25.7%. Other comments included “We all worked well as a group, we met at least three times, designated tasks and worked well at completing aims etc”.

Skills development - Students were asked if taking part in the project and the conference had improved their transferable skills. The majority of students felt that the experience had been extremely beneficial to their skill development, over 80% said it was beneficial or very beneficial to their presentations skills. 68% of students also felt that their self confidence had improved significantly.

Subject knowledge - 71% of students agreed that the conference “developed greater depth of knowledge in a specialist area (Sport Development).”

Peer assessment - This was an area that the students found a difficult concept to understand and apply. Comments included:

“It isn’t an accurate measure of someone’s contribution since there is a great deal of subjectivity”

“ It is poor as everyone in the group is likely to award the same marks as their mates”

“ It is not suitable because your final mark could be affected by a person who has no expertise.”

Much work needs to be undertaken by the programme team in the implementation of peer assessment especially in level 3. The programme team is revisiting this and intends to make changes throughout the programme on introducing this area of assessment.

Conference as a whole - The students undoubtedly found the conference a positive experience. When asked what they liked most about the conference comments included:

“The food” , “The freedom of speech”, “Feedback”, “Realisation of our ability”, “It was a new experience and the food” , “Well organised/ efficient”, “Relaxed”, “New experience”, “professional”, “The whole experience will be good for us in the future”.

Other comments - As an exercise the whole project proved extremely successful. Not only was the conference an excellent opportunity to assess the students’ knowledge and application of the subject area, it proved very useful in terms of employability. Students acknowledged the benefit of networking with other sport development practitioners, that the conference enhanced their personal skills and that it contributed to preparing them for work after graduation.

It is envisaged that the conference will happen again next year, but the opportunity will be given to invite level 1 and level 2 students to the day as observers, as well as ensure more sport development practitioners can attend.

A cautionary tale, however – this does cost money but we were able to identify funds from a teaching and learning budget. We will need to identify another funding source for the next time. It was also time consuming so plenty of early planning is quite important. The sourcing of the 'sport development problems' also takes time and effort, we were fortunate that we were able to draw on existing partners for contacts and support.

Without doubt however, the students really bought into the process. The student engagement and professionalism exhibited was outstanding.

Further Information - If you wish to discuss any of the research or talk to any of the module team please contact; [Cath Walker](#), Curriculum Leader, Sport Development with PE.