

Recipes for Passing:

The Balance between Student Support and Academic Development

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Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; International Student and Scholar Services; Student Learning and Development; Student Services; University/Higher Education

Setting

This case is set in a tertiary institution in Australia, relating to the teaching of an introductory course in one of the institution's undergraduate degree programs. Classes average between 20-30 students of diverse nationalities. During the course, students needing additional academic support are identified. A defining pillar of the institution is its student support and provision of assistance to students.

Given the diversity of the student population, the academic levels and English competencies are highly varied, with classroom participation affected by cultural conditioning and language proficiency. Additionally, students often lack understanding of how to include references in their work, resulting in violations of academic integrity.

Case

The lecturer has been teaching this subject for numerous years and has observed that even when provided with clear guidelines and rubrics, many of the students do not understand the assessment guidelines nor reference their work in a way that meets requirements. In-class workshops about references and research skills are regularly provided by the academic support services staff and students can seek additional academic support by appointment. Individual lecturer consultation times are also scheduled. These initiatives aim to develop the skills students need to succeed.

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However, notwithstanding these interventions, the submissions of approximately 30% of the students still display some lack of understanding. After marking hundreds of assessments and observing that the pattern is repeated, the lecturer decides to incorporate regular presentations and coaching activities on this subject during class time.

The following activities were incorporated: at the beginning of the class, after the day's objectives were set, the students were asked to read the assignment guidelines highlighting key aspects they thought needed clarification. The lecturer then facilitated the students understanding by making the links between the class content and the assignment explicit. This was achieved through using leading questions during key points in the content, highlighting the relevance and eliciting students' participation and engagement with the topic. Revision questions posed at the beginning of each class were also linked to the presentations and coaching activities such as paragraph drafting, feedback provision and research on specific points were undertaken. This was repeated every class prior to the submission of the assignment, requiring the dedication of segments of the class to the process.

The submissions improved. It was clear when marking that the students understood the assignment requirements and followed the guidelines for references. It became easier to identify earlier students in need of additional support. The student feedback also indicated they were satisfied with their understanding of the assignment. This was all positive.

However, the assignments tended to be rather mechanical - the students understood what they needed to do and followed the instructions provided to pass, but there was little creativity in their submissions. Therefore, a new challenge emerged for the lecturer. By emphasising activities aimed at achieving high scores in the assignments, the students' creativity seemed to be constrained. While they demonstrated an understanding of the assignment and of what they needed to do to pass, they seemed reluctant to be more creative in the way they approached their submissions, clouding their academic potential.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What are the lecturer's objectives in this case?
- What may be the specific benefits to the students in following this approach?
- How could this approach diminish students' creativity and potentially higher-level analysis?
- What other activities could have been conducted in this case?
- Should creativity be sacrificed in favour of successfully completing the assignment?
- What pedagogical interventions be implemented to foster creativity and should these be part of the assessment?
- Are there any cross-cultural issues in this case?

- This case was related to an introductory level undergraduate subject. Would it be advisable to use a similar approach in advanced or postgraduate subjects?