To Flip or not to Flip? Reflecting on PALPable outcomes of flipping the classroom during the pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The word 'pivot' became the teeth-grinding buzzword of 2020 for academics. The first half of 2020 was fueled by adrenalin, requiring educators to frantically search for new approaches, techniques, and tricks that might work, grabbing at each possible straw, in order to ensure that learning outcomes were achieved despite the largely unknown and unpredictable circumstances. Everyone, especially innovators and early adopters, performed at their best, hoping that the pivot to emergency remote teaching was only a short-term requirement. However, by mid-2020, it had become apparent that these challenges were ongoing and remote teaching was here to stay – Zoom fatigue became obvious, and academics were scared just thinking about the next semester. At the University of Sydney, the partial return to the physical classroom in September 2020, added a new layer of complexity, as educators now needed to plan for both online and face-to-face classes, and find engaging class activities that would work effectively in both formats. Research on student engagement in online and blended learning formats suggested that one way of increasing student engagement in the classroom is through greater student individualisation. In this multimedia publication, we conducted a multidimensional reflective analysis to examine the potential benefits and challenges experienced when tailoring an undergraduate unit of study on organisational communication at the University of Sydney Business School by adopting a 'students as partners' approach and flipping the classroom. Staying true to the transparency of the students as partners approach, this collaborative publication is co-created (co-authored) together with former students. Reflective debriefs held three months after the end of the semester with key stakeholders, including both students and colleagues, highlight a positive outcome, and a benefit of this approach is students taking charge of their own learning during the pandemic.

Keywords: flipped classroom, students-as-partners, co-creation of experience, action learning, innovation

Background and introduction

The pivot to emergency remote teaching in response to COVID-19

The year 2020 was difficult for everyone, bringing about drastic changes to the way people were allowed to work and interact with one another on a daily basis. The higher education sector was not an exception. Educators across the globe were forced to undergo an emergency pivot, rapidly transforming traditional face-to-face programs into remote ones in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Camacho & Legare, 2021; Nordmann, Horlin, Hutchison, Murray, Robson, Seery, & MacKay, 2020). Institutional responses to the global pandemic varied by country and institution, depending in part on both the spread of COVID-19 and the local government response (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020; Nordmann et al., 2020). Most educators, especially innovators and early adopters, rapidly switched to remote teaching despite having little online teaching experience and had to quickly develop the skills necessary to adjust materials and activities to the new format (Camacho & Legare, 2021). Understandably, a key concern and challenge for many educations was how to ensure that students remained engaged and that learning outcomes continued to be met despite the rapid pivot to emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al., 2020). As others have noted before, emergency remote teaching cannot realistically be expected to yield the same high-quality learning experiences as well-planned and well-resourced online programmes, even with the best intentions of individual educators rapidly pivoting to remote teaching (Hodges et al., 2020).

Compared to many countries around the world, Australia was very fortunate and experienced relatively mild workplace and societal disruptions due to the pandemic. As a result, remote teaching was more commonly regarded both by governments and institutions as more of a short-term fix than a radical, new way of teaching in the future. However, many Australian academics were concerned that without sufficient government support, the quality of university courses would drop further with fewer teaching staff available to teach larger numbers of students at the same time, remotely (Zhou, 2020).

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The specific context of the current analysis

According to Benedetti (2015), educators often struggle to engage students in the online classroom, and one way of increasing student engagement in the classroom is through greater student individualisation, which places additional demands on educators to be more proactive and creative in their teaching methods. These challenges were reflected in the results of the latest national Student Experience Survey (SES, 2020), which showed that despite students across all Australian universities reporting similar levels of student support as in 2019, learner engagement dropped 16% from 2019 (SES, 2020). Although the drop in learner engagement was less dramatic than for many other universities, learner engagement at the University of Sydney also fell by 16% from 2019. The slightly more positive SES ratings by University of Sydney students may also have been in part due to the reintroduction of face-to-face classes in September 2020. The reintroduction of face-to-face classes made the situation more complex for academics, because now there was a need to plan each week's lessons in both online and face-to-face delivery modes. By the end of 2020, however, the average overall Unit of Study Survey (USS) score across all university units showed the highest ever semester-on-semester improvement (The University of Sydney, 2021). How can this success be deconstructed at the unit of study (UoS) level? Fortunately, the unit of study that we are reflecting on, WORK3205 Organisational Communication (The University of Sydney, 2020) can be considered one of the *lucky* subjects that had the potential to become even more relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic – though only if the teaching team was agile enough to embrace change and build on it. As the name implies, this unit teaches undergraduate students about the world of work through the lens of organisational communication theory and practice, both of which were significantly disrupted during the pandemic, requiring every worker and every organisation to find new ways to succeed in working and communicating online, or in-person, in a safe, socially distanced way. The transferable communication skills that this unit aims to develop became even more necessary than ever before.

This reflective practice piece uses Brookfield's (2017) four lenses approach, which involves critically reflecting on the different perspectives of the following key stakeholders and co-contributors through a theoretical lens:

- Unit coordinator (autobiographical lens)

- Former students (student lens)

- Tutors and former unit coordinator (colleague lens)

As the unit coordinator, I integrated all the perspectives into one narrative and, unless otherwise specified, this reflection is written in first person. However, the multimedia format of this publication allows us to hear directly from former students themselves through a video debrief that informed this reflective practice piece. Example excerpts of my reflections as the unit coordinator, alongside student and peer perspectives are provided in Appendix 1, to enable interested readers to compare and contrast the different dimensions of our experience both vertically (in-depth individual perspective) and horizontally (cross-perspective).

Methodology: Taking a 'students as partners' approach

As a relatively confident innovator and early adopter, I interpreted this time of ultimate disruption as the perfect opportunity to experiment and reinvent the unit. My main aims in semester 2 (held in the second half of 2020) were to:

1. Keep students engaged, specifically:

    1.1. getting on top of updates to the content of organisational communication research and practice;

    1.2. making learning outcomes personally meaningful; and

    1.3. helping them connect with each other despite challenging circumstances of pandemic;

2. Increase differentiation of this elective unit from another core (required) unit of study; and

3. Ensure that the workload of tutors was manageable.

As a teacher by training and social constructionist in my philosophical stance, I do not find the 'students as customers' (Molesworth, Nixon, & Scullion, 2009; Laing & Laing, 2016) or 'students as clients' (Armstrong, 2003) paradigms to be conducive to student learning, which I view as being the main outcome we all strive for as teachers, even over and above the more popular outcome of student engagement. Echoing the motto adopted by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in response to COVID-19, 'We are all in this together' (Guterres, 2020), it seemed a fair and actionable solution to reinforce the 'students as partners' approach (Cook-Sather, Bovill, Felten, & Cook, 2014; Ferris, 2003; Gravett, Kinchin, & Winstone, 2020) even more than I normally do, and flip the classroom to co-create our teaching and learning experience (Blau & Shamir-Inbal, 2018; Bourke & Loveridge, 2018).

The flipped classroom is a student-centred rather than teacher-directed teaching methodology that inverts and transforms Bloom's learning taxonomy (Bergmann & Sams, 2014; Stapleton, Price, & Sneddon, 2020) giving valuable class time to the more challenging types of learning such as creating, evaluating and analysing, rather than remembering, understanding and applying. Philosophically, the flipped classroom approach is a constructivist approach to learning where the meaning making is shifted to students,

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encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Reidsema, Kavanagh, Hadgraft & Smith, 2017; Strayer, 2012). It was not the first time for the teaching team to deliver this unit, and some elements of the flipped classroom approach were already present in their teaching style.

Class setting and unit structure

Before the first class of the 12-week semester, students were asked to complete a 'Nice to meet you' survey. During the first online lecture, we used Mentimeter (2021) to collaboratively rank and prioritise pre-defined learning objectives in the unit outline. Students were also asked to sign a virtual flipped classroom agreement to ensure that they understood that this approach would work only if everyone were engaged and contribute to the best of their abilities. Based on the results of these interactive and collaborative communications, topics for all student assessments were revised to ensure that they aligned with what students hoped to achieve collectively as well as individually. The idea was to allow high-achieving students to set their own level of challenge to perform at their best without putting unrealistic expectations on those who simply wanted to pass the unit (goal 1.2).

Weekly classes (lectures and tutorials) were scheduled on the same day for all 12 weeks of the semester. Each week, students attended a one-hour interactive online meeting, which replaced the traditional face-to-face lecture, followed by a two-hour tutorial either in the face-to-face format or the online format. Applying the flipped approach to both formats, students were required to engage with the unit materials available online before attending their timetabled tutorial (*N* = 145 students, across three online and two face-to-face tutorials).

The traditional flipped classroom approach of providing pre-recorded lecture videos for students to study before class (Bergmann & Sams, 2014; Stapleton et al., 2020), requires significantly more time and resources than most educators had available in response to the global pandemic. Our version of presenting the teaching material in a flipped classroom had to be 'light'; each week's topic was pre-empted with learning objectives, upcoming 'live' lecture slides, links to the reading list, and videos involving distinguished academics and practitioners (Figure 1). The additional benefit of this 'light touch' was that it allowed me to update materials including very recent publications, and tailor the framing of unit content to the difficulties of organisational communication as they emerged during the pandemic. Originally, the reading list included a well-regarded textbook on theories in organisational communication and a range of academic publications related to each week's topics. However, in addressing goals 1.1, 1.2, and 2, more recent publications were added to the reading list, making it approximately 1.5 times longer than the original reading list for this unit of study. At the same time, as only a few readings overall were labelled as *required*, it was up to students and their desire to go in depth with any particular topic. The reading list specifying set readings (both required and optional) relevant to each week's topic was published in Week 1 of the semester. Although students have always been able to read (or not read) based on their own personal interests and objectives in the subject matter and personal circumstances, this time, the *right* to do so was made explicit: students were told that within each topic they could focus on any readings of their choosing.
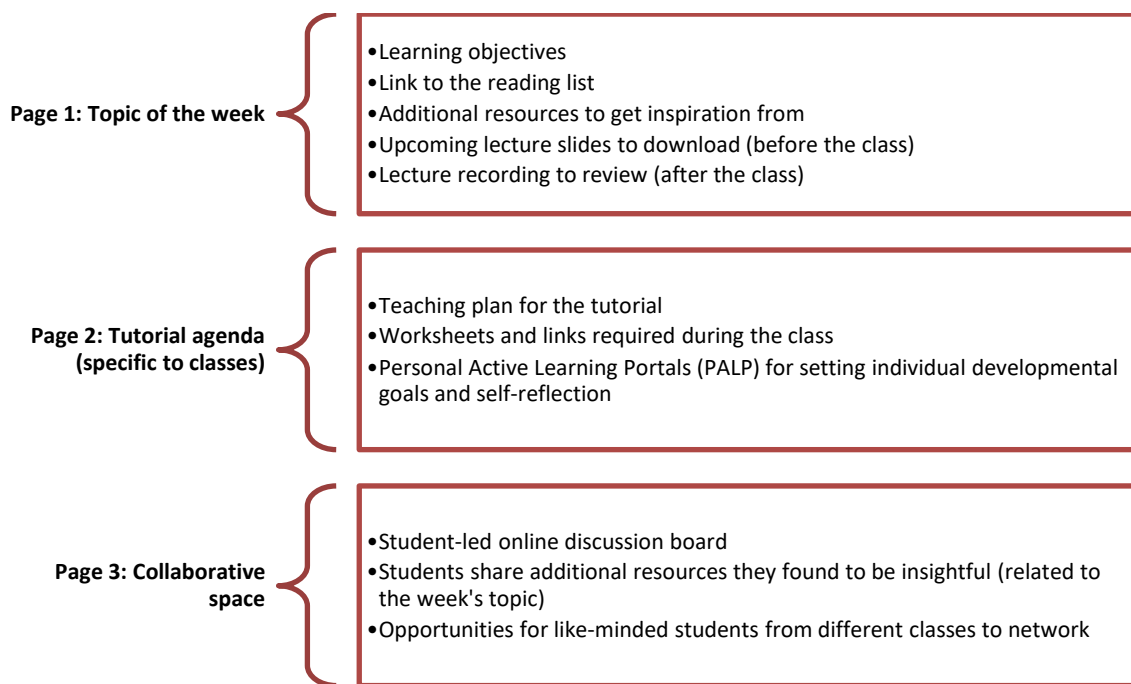

Page 1: Topic of the week
- Learning objectives
- Link to the reading list
- Additional resources to get inspiration from
- Upcoming lecture slides to download (before the class)
- Lecture recording to review (after the class)

Page 2: Tutorial agenda (specific to classes)
- Teaching plan for the tutorial
- Worksheets and links required during the class
- Personal Active Learning Portals (PALP) for setting individual developmental goals and self-reflection

Page 3: Collaborative space
- Student-led online discussion board
- Students share additional resources they found to be insightful (related to the week's topic)
- Opportunities for like-minded students from different classes to network

Figure 1 The weekly structure of WORK3205 Modules in the Learning Management System (LMS, Canvas) for semester 2, 2020

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In line with goal 1.1, we also decided to use breaking news as 'live' case studies. Different industry professionals joined (virtual) classes each week. These industry professionals – many of whom were themselves recent graduates from our business school – developed small projects called 'reality check challenges' (goal 1.3) that students worked on in small teams and presented in tutorials, sometimes bringing several concurrent classes together to provide more opportunities for vicarious learning and connection (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Week 2: LinkedIn post about introducing 'Reality Check Challenges' in response to students' priorities for WORK3205 in semester 2, 2020 (Ishkova, 2020)

To enable students to explore and engage with organisational communication theory and practice via topics they are most passionate about, I replaced a pre-assigned textbook case-study team presentation with more flexible UPSKILL industry video team projects that required students to prepare class content and run class discussions in the second half of the semester. Tutors were tasked to act as observers and intervene only if necessary. The original format of team presentation assessment relied on both an individual mark and a team mark. However, the individual mark was removed to reduce the additional stress students could face presenting in an online environment due to possible internet connectivity issues and larger class sizes. Instead, I introduced and managed a peer assessment component that was designed to keep students more focused during their classmates' presentations.

During the semester, students were asked for feedback on multiple occasions, and teaching team meetings were held regularly to share teaching insights and discuss teaching plans. The brightest highlight of the unit was introduced mid-semester as a result of continuous implementation of Kolb's experiential learning cycle (Yeganeh & Kolb, 2012). We were acting, collecting evidence and feedback, reflecting, looking for theoretical support and best practices, adjusting strategies – and acting again being guided by the principle that continuous improvement is better than delayed perfection. New in-class activities formalised opportunities for students to focus on skills they wanted to develop within each topic and to receive feedback from their 'feedback buddies' on how successful they were (goals 1.2 and 1.3). Part of the inspiration for this innovation came from the great functionality of the award-winning Student Relationship Engagement System (SRES) developed at the University of Sydney, freely available for non-commercial purposes in the education sector (SRES, 2021). Using SRES, a Personal Action Learning Portal (PALP) was created to share and conduct the kinds of feedback-related activities we see as fundamental to building student self-awareness, self-efficacy, general development of transferable skills and simply allowing students to connect with their peers. This tailored approach to teaching meant that students were encouraged to engage with the content, their peers, academics and industry in ways that would not have been possible with more traditional and hierarchical methods of teaching, particularly given the additional challenges of remote learning and the overall gloom and doom many felt during the pandemic.

Reflective Analysis

How this approach contributed to core unit outcomes

Reflecting on the core unit outcomes assessed by the standard end-of-semester Unit of Study Survey (USS) questions (The University of Sydney, 2021), in Video 1 we discussed how our flipped classroom approach succeeded in providing *feedback that is helpful to student learning*. Students suggested that the flipped classroom approach normalised feedback giving and receiving,

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making it more like a conversation between everyone in the online or face-to-face classroom, than in the traditional face-to-face format with just the teacher evaluating (read: judging) students. One factor that often influences student evaluations of feedback received during the semester is their own perception of what the teacher thinks of their work and if the teacher cares for their learning. However, our 'students as partners' approach seemed to result in qualitatively deeper and different student reflections on feedback because they were a crucial part of the feedback loop themselves. For example, students in Video 1 reflected positively on the opportunity to give and receive ongoing peer feedback as very valuable and even enjoyable, opening new horizons for personal growth.

Another core unit evaluation criterion relates to whether the work has been *intellectually rewarding or challenging*. In Video 2, this topic surprisingly turned out to be quite a controversial criterion in our reflective debrief and became a true representation of the principle 'one size does not fit all'. We agreed that some students, especially research-oriented students, might see intellectual challenge as a primary condition for the unit of study to be considered as rewarding, regardless of the mark they receive – because otherwise they are simply bored. On the other hand, other students might take a more pragmatic approach, specifically, the view that if a unit helps them to learn about something that is incredibly relevant to their work-related interests and develops skills required in their chosen industry, then it would be considered as intellectually rewarding. I was impressed with the insight that units which challenged their ability to understand the content might more commonly be evaluated by students as being intellectually rewarding. Students noted that this was quite different compared to other management units that tend to 'make more sense' and seem less rewarding from an intellectual standpoint, but more emotionally rewarding, because students learn to appreciate life, other people, and relationships. Overall, I was very pleased to hear that students really appreciated the fact that I asked them about what they wanted to gain from the unit and genuinely tried to accommodate their interests via different types of activities and assessments. The transparent communication and commitment shown to individualised, student-centred learning experiences in our flipped classroom clearly made the unit more intellectually rewarding for them. We came to conclusion that it would be very beneficial for future reflection and practice to also hear from students who just want to pass the unit with the best possible mark about their views on whether they would consider the unit as intellectually rewarding – and it probably will be one of the first things I will be asking students the next time I run this unit.

Student evaluations of *how well the unit content is structured*, on the contrary, came up in Video 3 as a core criterion that can suffer in the flipped classroom approach. Students felt that when the class is being steered towards agendas and questions that different students have, it is very easy to get lost in the conversation and it can sometimes feel as if not all learning objectives are being met. A suggestion we came up with was the need to very clearly signpost and reference the learning objectives of each class and how each activity contributes to the assignments and examination. That way, students can always refer to the class plan like a map when they are not sure if they are still on the track to their final learning destination. We enjoyed visualising ourselves driving a car to a previously unknown place that we want to get to, without necessarily knowing the exact way there or taking the most efficient turns on the satellite navigation, because we also wanted the freedom to explore different routes and have valuable discussions along the way. In other words, we enjoyed taking the scenic route to our learning destinations.

Both students and colleagues noted that educators who prefer more structure might be less willing to try a flipped classroom approach, because they are more fixed in their teaching style, and potentially less comfortable with uncertainty, ambiguity, and dealing with questions on the spot. Some students suggested that not all educators might be able to let go of the traditional hierarchy of power in the classroom to really embrace a flipped classroom approach. In their words, those who are willing to try flipped classrooms could be portrayed as less structured, and potentially more creative, making them more flexible in adapting their teaching style to different student learning styles, needs and objectives.

Despite providing the learning objectives for the unit of study and each class in multiple places (e.g., in the unit outline, on our LMS, Canvas, and in opening class slides) on a weekly basis, I was perplexed to realise that both students and tutors struggled to see the unit structure. Early in the semester, as we were still adjusting to the flipped classroom approach, we were all a bit concerned about the time it was taking us to get to our set learning destinations. However, further reflecting and building on the metaphor of driving a scenic and previously unknown route to our learning destination, I was reminded of a frazzled learner in the driver's seat who is so busy looking at the satellite navigation and dashboard that they struggle to see the road ahead. It gave me some comfort and confidence to see the evidence in the literature that losing a sense of structure is not unusual for this approach (Strayer, 2012),

In Video 4 we hear how during the first half of the semester weekly 'reality check challenges' from recent graduates and industry partners created a formative playground for students to engage in and practice critical thinking, problem solving, and developing creative solutions, which provided additional insights for students to act as experts leading class activities and discussion in the second half of the semester for summative assessment. They knew that leading the class discussion would involve having people ask questions. It created the extra responsibility and motivation for students to do more extensive research and preparation than would typically occur in a normal class setting adopting either a 'students as customers' (Molesworth et al., 2009; Laing & Laing, 2016) or 'students as clients' (Armstrong, 2003) paradigm. Hence, our flipped classroom approach firmly gave students a clear responsibility as a partner and collaborator to co-design the learning experience both of themselves and their peers. Student and peer collaborators also agreed with my own perspective that it inspired a deeper learning and a thorough understanding of the topic at hand, especially for high-achieving and/or highly motivated students. Students also indicated that it was very valuable for their personal development and self-awareness to hear the different perspectives that their classmates brought to the table, because they are mostly used to just submitting an assignment and getting feedback from one person only – the teacher. Being exposed to class discussion of their projects immediately after presenting them in the video format turned out to be an incredible

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learning opportunity that most students appreciated as challenging in the beginning, but a rewarding and insightful experience overall. Both formative 'reality check challenges' and summative UPSKILL assessments gave students a chance to feel what it would be like to navigate organisational communication during the pandemic (goal 1.1, see Video 4).

Overall, in line with the metaphor of the 'class as an organisation', which often characterises the students as partners approach (Ferris, 2002), students confessed in Video 5 that they experienced the flipped classroom as a flat organisational structure rather than as a hierarchy. This experience made them feel like it was a lot easier for them to learn because it was a safer place to make mistakes and learn both from themselves and each other. Mirroring some best organisational leadership practices of giving away power (Barzun, 2021), students and teachers shared the power, and it redefined the role of lecturers and tutors from instructors to facilitators. This is consistent with Benedetti's (2015) model for online learner adaptation where instructors are encouraged to play the part of a 'thinking advisor', facilitating student realisations of their own individual learning styles, needs, and preferences. As students and teachers adapted to the new model, student learning became more self-directed with students tasked with setting personal goals in relation to the current lecture content at the start of each class and working towards meeting their individually set goal throughout the two-hour session, with the background goal set by the teaching agenda of getting feedback from their peers and instructor. Although it demands a lot more effort from students to challenge themselves and take ownership of their learning, it is a crucial element for the flipped classroom to work, and for us to foster independent, adaptable individuals, which is the primary aim of management education (Forrest & Peterson, 2006).

A potential risk of this approach we identified was that some students might perceive the 'students as partners' and flipped classroom approach as an easier way out for teachers, and thus evaluate the unit negatively. A critical point is that this approach may make it less apparent to students how well teachers actually know the content, and students may fail to appreciate the significant facilitation skills required by instructors to be able to inspire and navigate a free-flowing discussion without prescribing each discussion point or routinely following the same teaching plan every semester, every year.

Key stakeholder perspectives and multiple lenses of reflection

Appendix 1 provides some additional insights into the different perspectives of key stakeholders. Sample excerpts of the written reflections from myself, a former student and tutor are presented in a table to enable interested readers to interpret for themselves the different nuances of the key perspectives on our flipped classroom approach through the autobiographical, student and peer lenses (Brookfield, 2017).

Discussion and recommendations

Upon reflection, I can see how the flipped classroom teaching methodology and 'students as partners' approach I chose were reinforcing, enabling students to put into practice the core skills and content taught in the organisational communication unit. Activities such as the reciprocity ring (Allen-Short, 2020), which we used to get to know each other better in week 1, and our discussion of my expectations in regards to the long reading list, required readings and optional work, inspired students to transform their positioning from passive or even passive-aggressive takers/customers/clients (Nixon & Scullion, 2021) into proactive givers/partners. In future, it certainly will be beneficial to strategically build on this symbiotic relationship and bring it to students' attention from day one to help them get a better understanding of what is expected of them.

My key recommendation to any educators wishing to try a flipped classroom approach is to start with consistently using the wording 'students as partners' and – even more so – the 'co-creation of experience' to frame this approach instead of the 'flipped classroom'. The main logic behind this recommendation is that the technical or physical 'flipping' of classrooms is not really the element that makes this approach effective. Rather, my reflective analysis suggests that the elements of 'students as partners' and co-creating the learning experience together with *all* key stakeholders play a critical role in whether or not the approach will be effective. If you do not feel comfortable with the idea of students and/or tutors as genuine partners and co-creators with the power to shape, influence, and personalise the student learning experience, then this approach is not for you. Reflecting back on what elements could have been improved, I now see the process of co-creation as not only involving collaboration between the unit coordinator and students, but also one that needs the collaboration of the entire teaching team (both lecturers/unit coordinators and tutors) from the beginning, even before students enter into the process of co-creation. Thus, an important lesson learned from this reflective analysis is that I took a leap of faith and made a slightly erroneous assumption that everyone in my teaching team would be comfortable with and great at facilitating this approach, based on my prior experiences working with them in more traditional classroom settings. However, without directly asking them, I assumed that everyone would follow suit and feel comfortable dealing with less structure and more ambiguity while driving along an unknown scenic route. Even though all our tutors were part of the decision-making process, adjusting and even blocking a number of suggested initiatives and activities, for them to achieve their true potential in their new facilitator roles and be their best selves in the classroom, they needed to be true co-creators of this design before the semester started. Unfortunately, significant time and budgeting constraints imposed by the pandemic meant that they did not have such an opportunity.

The design that emerged as a result of our experiment seemed to help increase student engagement (goal 1) and was very different from anything else students experienced (goal 2). By its very nature, this approach naturally leads to very different classroom experiences and places even more importance the teacher's ability to embrace, manage, and respond to change,

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ambiguity and uncertainty. However, this core teaching requirement could have become a serious additional stressor for some tutors more so than others, which no one needed during the already high-stress context brought about by the pandemic. A negative stress response to the increased uncertainty and ambiguity in the flipped classroom could have undermined my otherwise successful plan to make tutor workloads more manageable (goal 3).

Despite being lucky enough to have a very experienced team of passionate educators who were already familiar with my creative style of navigating fast-paced change, my recent experiences illuminate the important point that planning significantly different and innovative educational interventions without having enough resources at hand is an educational and managerial mistake waiting to happen. This, of course, is hard to avoid given the strong demand on educators to innovate and improve student learning outcomes at the same time that the academic workforce in Australia is increasingly being casualised and resources are shrinking under tightening pandemic budgets (Baré, Beard & Tjia, 2020).

A final practical implication relates to the constructivist teaching philosophy of the flipped classroom approach, and empirical findings suggesting that it tends to inhibit student evaluations of course structure (Strayer, 2012). As such, I strongly recommend that educators who prefer tightly organising their teaching should seek the support of institutional academic developers and academic peers for support if they are still interested in trying this approach. We discussed how much structure is (or not) a problem (Video 3) and created a checklist for any educators interested in trying this approach to help them reflect on their personal readiness for what might happen when adopting this approach. The checklist is provided in Appendix 2.

Conclusion

Overall, it is clear to us that partnering with students, co-creating and innovating collaboratively, can be a powerful way of increasing student engagement and building supportive learning communities even under very challenging circumstances presented by the pandemic. We recognise that our approach was not perfect and would benefit from more development and academic scrutiny. As such, we intend to keep exploring the flipped classroom and 'students as partners' approach in upcoming semesters in a more structured way, examining more perspectives, and employing rigorous research methods to triangulate the data. For now, we are very grateful to JPAAP for the formal opportunity to reflect on our experience publicly, because it forced us to engage in a critical process of sensemaking and devising new strategies that most certainly would not have happened in a timely manner otherwise. We see some special beauty and value in the fact that our debrief sessions (Video 1, Video 2, Video 3, Video 4, Video 5) and first rounds of multidimensional and multi-perspective reflection on our flipped classroom experience (Appendix 1) that informed this publication took place when the dust of the semester had already settled, but when the memories and emotions of both negative and positive self-discovery experiences were still fresh in our minds. The raw beauty and timeliness of these reflections also strengthened our desire to share our learnings here and now in this multimedia reflective practice piece, while it can still inform and benefit educators who continue to face the demands of remote teaching during turbulent pandemic times. We take this reflective practice piece as a prelude to our future action research and our public pledge to the scholarship in this area - and we hope that our readers will interpret it in a similar way. Finally, although no two flipped classrooms should be expected to be the same, please feel free to reach out for additional advice and tips – and in the meantime, happy co-creating!

Note: Written consent was provided by all individuals who appear in the screenshots and videos; all perspectives presented in this paper are those of collaborators named as co-authors.

Biographies

Dr Maria Ishkova, PhD, enjoyed an extended successful industry career in communication. As education-focused academic at the University of Sydney Business School since 2018, she received the "Excellence in tutoring" award (2019), the "Wayne Lonergan Award" (2019, team) and the Vice-Chancellor's Award for Outstanding Teaching (2020, team) in recognition for innovation and exceptional practice.

Dr Vanessa Loh, PhD, is a Lecturer in Work and Organisational Studies at the University of Sydney Business School. Vanessa's research on individual differences in learning and training contexts has shaped her teaching philosophy which puts student-centred, research-led at the forefront of her educational contributions.

Georgia White is a future HR leader with an academic background in Psychology, Neuroscience and Human Resource Management. She strives to empower employees and enhance team and leadership effectiveness in organisations. Georgia is particularly interested in the learning and development, organisational culture, and diversity and inclusion functions of HR.

Oliver Lawton, BCom (Liberal studies), Finance USYD, is an innovator and change-maker, believing that minds should be inspired, not filled, and that individuals should be empowered to live their lives to the fullest. The proud founder of the Random Acts of Kindness Society, Oliver now works to help families cure their financial ills.

Jenna Tyson is studying Management and Marketing at the University of Sydney. Working with a social enterprise in Vietnam to improve their sales and marketing activities and volunteering at a global, anti-human trafficking organisation has confirmed that she is highly motivated to turn concepts into action and enjoys using data-driven insights to guide strategic planning.

Herman Fung, BCom (Marketing and Management) University of Sydney, is passionate about empowering others to grow their effectiveness and leadership capabilities. Through this, he hopes to improve corporate culture and contribute to the individual's

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personal development and fulfilment.

Mina Askovic is a behavioural scientist, PhD candidate and a casual academic at the University of Sydney Business School who loves talking to people about their work. She is driven to understand human behaviour and how we can create organisational cultures that allow individuals to thrive.

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Appendix 1: Sample reflections through multiple lenses and different stakeholder perspectives

Table 1 Written reflections from a student (student lens), a tutor (peer lens) and the unit coordinator (autobiographical lens) on their flipped classroom experience in WORK3205 Organisational Communication (University of Sydney, Semester 2 2020)

Student: early adopter and strong supporter of this approach	Tutor: forced adopter but open to this approach	Coordinator: driving force behind this approach
I have long taken issue with the education system. To me, this system is an outdated model where students are taught to memorise and rote learn, to obey structures and processes, and to operate within strict guidelines. We are taught rigidity and discipline, and we are filled with knowledge that is readily available on the internet. Our education system gives us few opportunities to practise cultural intelligence or emotional intelligence. It fails to emphasise the development of interpersonal skills or provide us with the tools for deepening our relationships with those around us. We do not learn to understand ourselves and those around us, just as life skills and financial literacy are neglected topics. I was never taught to question, challenge or reinvent. I had my creativity beaten out of me, my self-expression subdued, and my wit dulled.	The education system based on memorisation needs to be disrupted. Assessments test speed and recall, not necessarily reflecting the learnings in the classroom make students disengage. As courses are starting to be taught online, student disengagement is only rising. As an educator, I feel I am expected to be a Wikipedia collection of theories and knowledge. I enter the classroom with a cheat sheet of answers, and I clarify students' understanding of course content. I enjoy the intellectual challenge that this brings and I enjoy reading broadly to prepare for class, but I can feel uninspired and frustrated after teaching the same content to different tutorial groups multiple times in a week, semester after semester. I have always found it more engaging to make classes interactive and collaborative.	I joined academia after getting a profound education as a high-school teacher, a PhD about motivation, and an extended career in several industries. Key lesson learnt – the world keeps changing while I am writing this sentence, hence my mission as an educator is not to deliver facts and check if students know them, but to teach them how to think critically and inspire life-long learning. I use academic research and literature not as a learning destination, but as its playground and catalyst to my students' critical thinking. And I fit in nicely. My institution aspires to 'unlearn' ways of the world, challenges the status quo and devised a "Business not Usual (2.0)" strategy (The University of Sydney Business School, 2021). I interpret that as an indicator that I am encouraged to be creative and to keep looking for ways to improve students' experience. And I innovate.
I had awesome teachers, but a broken system, and teachers can only push the limits so far. What I learnt in school was how to play the system. I learnt to listen to the subtext of what my teachers said… to reflect their thoughts and attitudes in my essays… to follow structures for achieving top marks, and… to write impressively about topics I knew little about.	Even though I have used these techniques before, the flipped classroom approach took it to another level! It put students in the drivers' seat of their own learning. It gave them autonomy and it redefined my role from 'instructor' to 'facilitator'. The classroom became about applying pre-learnt concepts, problem solving, and extending existing knowledge.	I am stunned by the fact that so many students expect academia to deliver *right* answers to everything even though *something* is yet to be developed by them when they graduate. And I suspect that our worst enemy here is positioning students as customers. Knowledge cannot be bought or presented as a box that should be ticked - it has to be earned!
The flipped classroom approach frustrated the hell out of me!	The flipped classroom approach was initially quite challenging for me.	The flipped classroom approach gave me a paradigm to enact my constructivist teaching philosophy where the experience and meaning are "co-created".
I remember messaging friends each week who had missed the lecture, telling them not to bother with the recording. I remember challenging the lecturer in Week 6 about how I should be measuring my progress in the course because I didn't feel like I was achieving much. I remember being confused about how to	I remember feeling lost in the first four weeks… as I came to terms with an approach that I had previously never even heard of. I remember feeling like I didn't know what the students were reading or doing, since each student was studying content of their choosing beyond the reading list. I remember struggling to identify and communicate a purpose	I remember how shocked my students were to hear that I deny their entitlement to feel like customers and require them to become co-creators of our shared learning experience. I used a myriad of metaphors to explain why it is me who maps the course, but it is they who drive their learning and it is up to them how they connect the dots along the way. If

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prepare for the exam. Where was the system for me to play?	behind each class, because there was no clear structure.	they do nothing – the vehicle of their learning does not move.
Then it hit me… I'm in charge of my learning!	Then it hit me… I was really enjoying the experience!	Then it hit me… I left my tutors behind!
Once I realised what the flipped classroom meant, my experience turned around dramatically. The flipped classroom meant that I could set my own weekly learning goals, develop in the areas where I most needed improvement, and seek support from my peers and from staff. My communication skills improved immensely, and I found the course truly rewarding, unique and fun.	I was surprised to realise that not only were my students more engaged, but so was I. Even my Friday evening classes seemed to fly by. I felt the pressure lift from my shoulders of having to know all the answers. I enjoyed learning alongside students and garnering their unique perspectives, since we were all experts in our own way. The development of the students was remarkable.	Once I realised that I had moved too quickly for the teaching team, I slowed down a little and prepared a variety of 'safety nets' for tutors to use as an 'if-then' escape plan. Though being open to ongoing feedback is a pain, it is also a blessing. I learnt that free choice of focal points within the course outline was often perceived as the absence of structure and guidance.
But it did not stop there.	But it did not stop there.	And I kept experimenting.
The permission and platform to co-create my learning experience did not apply just to me, but to the learning experience for every other student in the course. I was encouraged to give my peers useful feedback and help them to improve in their own development toward achieving their goals. I took every opportunity to do this, and by the end of semester, I was sitting in class long after the tutor had left, writing extensive feedback for my classmates and passionately discussing with them their learning goals.	There were many unexpected benefits of the approach for me as well. I developed as a tutor and as a person. One of the groups brought in a fascinating perspective on the interplay of gender and negotiation. I went away and discussed it with a lot of friends, and it brought out some very personal insights. It wasn't just the students who developed their communication skills either, as I improved my facilitation skills and my soft skills more broadly. I even received my highest ever Unit of Study Survey result as an academic tutor.	I asked students to set up their own personal development goal in line with the weekly topic (e.g., assertive communication) – and invite a 'feedback-buddy' to hold them accountable. I developed Personal Action Learning Portals (PALP) for students to keep track of this feedback and invited them to reflect on lessons learnt. As with any work in progress, it was not consistent across classes, especially in Zoom classes – but as soon as students saw feedback from their peers and were able to check their progress, most embraced it and it allowed me to fine-tune the system.
Could I co-create their learning experience too?	But co-creating experience requires a lot of focus from everyone.	Engagement with the course material in both online and face-to-face classes skyrocketed.
This was the most rewarding part of the course for me. I made it my personal mission to engage and involve the quieter international students in the class activities. I worked with them one-on-one at the back of the room where they sat and otherwise kept to themselves. I helped them prepare discussion points, modelled with them how they might facilitate class debate, encouraged them to speak up during presentations, and designed plans with them for how they might better contribute their skills and talents to the group assignment.	With each student arriving in class having performed different amounts and types of preparation, there wasn't a common baseline for discussions. While this was ultimately a benefit as students could explore topics from multiple perspectives, it required me to complete a temperature check each week. I found myself needing to be very present in class and assess the needs of the class and of individual students, to determine how in-depth our discussions could go. Tutoring in this approach required more of my energy and emotional fortitude.	Prioritising the interests of this semester's cohort, I entirely redesigned the traditional team presentation into the 'UPSKILL' team industry project that led to students self-facilitating tutorials for almost half of the semester. When the first student team presented their project and ran a class discussion, I genuinely thought that the other 30+ students had somehow agreed in advance to support the presenting group… But when the same happened for all following teams, I realised: this is how it looks when they take ownership of co-creating their learning experience.
I was so proud of the progress they made, and I was further delighted by their sincere expression of gratitude for my support. My girlfriend was also ecstatic to	I had trouble answering student questions on the way assessments would be marked and found myself needing to refer them constantly to the coordinator. On top	I was thrilled to see the unit of study statistics! The library views for the same course readings used in previous semesters was often two times better

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have a few more unexpected late contributors to her group's assignment submission, although this was not my primary motivator. When these individuals recognised my care and time as a key driver of their newfound confidence and personal development, it made me reflect on the benefits of a web of ongoing feedback sources, one which can realistically only be woven by the flipped classroom approach.

of that, when requirements were broad and encouraged students to approach the tasks creatively, they were more fascinating to mark, but generated a tension between a creative response and the rigid marking criteria. Indeed, learning in the flipped classroom approach brought out strong personal transformations which are difficult to assess in a formal testing structure.

even though the readings were marked as recommended (but not required). In addition, discussion boards were being used by high achieving students to share insightful additional materials with each other on a weekly basis.

What better opportunity for me to practise cultural intelligence?

I also empathised with the challenges of the less extraverted students.

Building the plane while flying it is never easy – no wonder each victory was a result of blood, sweat and tears…

The flipped classroom approach gave me the platform to work closely with students for whom English is a second language. I felt empowered by understanding their challenges in the classroom, their different methods of learning, and their discomfort with active contribution to class discussions. While the purpose of the course was to develop our practical communication skills, I was also able to develop other important elements of communication such as empathy, patience and understanding. No other course has offered me a similar opportunity to practise my emotional and cultural intelligence, skills that are far more important to me than a mere intelligence quotient.

Soft skills courses are not typically regarded among students as academically rigorous or intellectually stimulating because the content seems self-explanatory and sometimes being referred to as "common sense" or even "wishy-washy" (Personal communication). However, for me, the flipped classroom approach made them intellectually rewarding. By setting my own learning outcomes, being creative, and taking initiative in my activities, I was able to develop crucial life skills and achieve outcomes that I had not thought possible within the bounds of the education system that I have learnt to play. Moreover, I was able to approach the broadly focused assessment tasks in a creative and purposeful way which challenged me to learn.

The students who were introverted or who had limited proficiency in English seemed to have a less positive experience. These students were particularly challenged by the learning style and the need for active participation in the classroom to apply their learnings and develop their skills. They were in classes where the discussions were dominated by extraverted students, who, by the practical nature of the course, were more numerous than their introverted counterparts. Nevertheless, I would like to think that it was these introverted and less confident students who will later reflect and recognise that they were stretched further and developed their communication skills more than their extraverted peers.

Overall, however, the flipped classroom approach challenged students to come out of their shells. It enabled them to co-create their learning experience, focusing on the specific skills and knowledge areas that they wanted to develop in. It also brought more excitement, energy and engagement to the classroom, both to the students and to me as the tutor. Students also enjoyed the opportunity to give each other feedback, and in many cases, found it more beneficial than coming from the tutor. I had some amazing learning moments alongside the students, and like them, found the course to be more intellectually rewarding.

One of the goals I set up for myself was to keep my teaching team's workload manageable. Being talented educators who care a lot, they always help their students feel supported and aim high. We've all taught this content in different undergraduate and postgraduate settings together before. I love my teaching team and it saddens me that while I tried my best to lift them up through the semester, it felt like I dragged them through kicking and screaming.

Was it the pressure and uncertainty of the pandemic coupled with too much change?

Was it because classes were larger than normal and many students hid behind blank screens due to internet issues or Zoom fatigue?

Did they need more opportunities to go through the materials students were engaging with?

Did I expect too much flexibility and agility of the team?

Was the free spirit of the approach too frustrating?

Did I not communicate clearly with them and not referred enough to the structure that – from my perspective – was codified in the UoS outline and LMS Canvas modules?

Would it have helped if attending weekly interactive online meetings/lectures was made part of their contract?

My experience in the flipped classroom approach excites me for the possibilities in reimagining our education system.

I would love to keep using the flipped classroom approach and use these insights to further refine my process. Improvisation can be fun, but only with

My experience in the flipped classroom approach brought me lots of satisfaction because students' personal growth was indeed PALPable. But it also gave me a

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	the right foundation. Successful implementation of the flipped classroom approach requires the right context, adequate support and resources to teaching staff that are experimenting with this new approach to teaching and it would be a good investment for the university.	scare team-wise and I am forcing myself to reflect on it publicly to illicit other perspectives and tips from other educators because I certainly do not intend to give up on such a powerful approach.
Is university not about preparing students for the future, rather than simply learning content?	Is university not about preparing students for the future, rather than simply learning content?	Is university not about developing a growth mindset by both students and academics?

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Appendix 2: Checklist for educators interested in flipping their classroom

Recommendations to coordinators

Have a clear idea of what your approach to the flipped classroom will be.	
Plan enough time for design so it is not ad hoc before starting to teach.	
Make sure the teaching team is involved in designing the flipped classroom, or at least, is fully onboard with this approach, and that you continue to meet/discuss/refine as you go along.	
Balance the freedom and creativity with a clear structure and don't assume everyone follows it because you said so.	
Be prepared to set clear expectations at the very beginning of teaching. This could mean dedicating the entire first lecture/tutorial to explaining what the flipped classroom approach is and how it will be used in the course.	
Be prepared to help students with meaning-making, rather than simply throwing them in the deep end and hoping they will find their way.	
Be willing to seek feedback from students throughout the semester and make changes or at least respond to the feedback.	
Make sure you have enough time and/or resources – it will probably take more time than you think to flip the classroom.	
Let go of the idea that you can get it perfect from the start.	

Additional recommendations to share with tutors

Be mentally prepared to put a lot of energy into work.	
The more you put in, the more you (and students) will get out of it.	
Be prepared to see students become highly engaged.	
Don't pretend you know it all – it's better to adopt a growth mindset and learn alongside your students	
Let go of the idea that you can get it perfect from the start.	