

A PARADIGM SHIFT: INNOVATIVE TEACHING IN SPORT MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Aim of paper

The paper outlines the application of constructive alignment principles in the design and delivery of a first year undergraduate sport management subject in an undergraduate sport management degree. The aim of the paper is to illustrate the application of constructive alignment in the design of subject learning outcomes, creation of resources, development of classroom-based teaching and learning activities and the design of assessment tasks. The paper draws on the foundational theories of experiential learning and a multi-linear model of adult development (Kolb, 1984). The theory defines learning as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience' (Kolb, 2001, pg 230). The principles of constructive alignment seek to link all the processes that contribute to effective experiential learning in a logical and systematic fashion, specifically learning objectives, resources, activities and assessment.

Organisational context

The subject is titled "Sport Management" and is a first year subject in the Bachelor of Business (Sport management) degree at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia. The subject has been designed to ensure that students learn within a framework of clearly-defined outcomes. As a result, each topic within the subject has a clear learning outcome, supported by appropriate resources. These resources provide the foundation for a variety of learning activities, which are translated into assessment tasks; tasks that are used to indicate the quality of learning which took place and reveal the extent to which the learning outcome has been realised. Learning is optimised when each stage (learning/subject outcome, resources, teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks) is aligned, integrated, mutually reinforced and attended to in detail.

The subject's resources include a textbook, linked to a USB learning tool designed to engage students with the theory and practice of sport management. The USB contains a series of digital videos that introduce students to key sport management principles delivered by academics, and a related set of videos of interviews with high profile managers within the Australian sport industry. Other resources include case study activities in every tutorial to support the application of theory, previews activities and quizzes on-line to review students' understanding, and weekly assessment.

Educational issues, experiences

Many students enter higher education conditioned by their previous educational experiences to be passive recipients of what they are taught. Making space for students to take responsibility for their learning can greatly enhance their ability to learn from the experience. Some authors describe this process, whereby students construct one's own knowledge versus passively receiving knowledge from others as self-authorship (Kegan 1994; King, 2003). The nature of this subject is quite different from traditional classroom-based learning where students attend class one to two times per week. Here, students are expected to continually engage with the assigned readings and assessment via online resources and discussion. It is easy for students to fall off the pace, and often the subject coordinator needs to intervene through general feedback or private correspondence to encourage the group as a whole, or individuals who are not performing to expectations, to actively participate. The design and delivery of this subject is a shift from the traditional method of undergraduate education whereby traditional methods are called the 'instruction paradigm' (Barr & Tagg, 1995), where universities have complex structures to provide for an activity of teaching conceived primarily as delivering 50-minute lectures or tutorials. Now, however, we recognise that the instruction paradigm is mistaken as a means to an end whereby teaching becomes the university's end or purpose (i.e. how many students are enrolled, or pass the subject), rather than the means of instruction. According to Barr and Tagg (1995), the shift to a learning paradigm liberates institutions from a set of traditional methods and allows experiential learning to occur.

Implications for sport and sport management

For sport management academics seeking to use the principles of constructive alignment for curricula development and delivery this paper will assist them to:

1. Engage students within an e-learning environment by integrating the study of theoretical concepts with real-world scenarios.
2. Combine theory with practice by using a sequence of (a) individual self-study documents and resources related to real-world cases (b) large group discussion of theoretical and practical issues, and (c) collaboration via small group creation of fictional organisations.
3. Engage students and encourage them to study by including a variety of activities. This paper will assist academics to understand the process of designing a range of core and supplementary documents and multimedia resources to compliment theoretical readings and introduce students to core concepts.

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