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A Personal Reflection on the use of Microteaching in Creative Disciplines

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Abstract

As part of 2015’s Unit X Educator project, in which students at MMU explore arts education through placements and teaching workshops, students were required to deliver a microteaching session to a group of their peers. I observed the session and supported unit tutors in offering feedback to students. Coincidentally, the student microteaching session took place in the run up to delivery of my own microteaching session as part of the Teaching and Learning Essentials (TALE) course offered by CELT, which I was studying at the time. This paper examines how my role as observer, in Unit X, and participant, in TALE, allowed me to reflect on the benefits of microteaching for staff and students, as a method for teaching and learning, and professional development.

Unit X is a cross-faculty, interdisciplinary undergraduate unit undertaken by level 4, 5 and 6 students across Manchester School of Art. Launched across level 4 courses in 2011/2012 it has since become compulsory for all level 4 and Department of Design students, and is an option in levels 5 and 6 for the Departments of Media and Art.

Level 5 students select one of four ‘colleges’ to attend, led by teaching staff across the School of Art, reflecting their interests as practitioners. College One: Educator, is a college option focused on experience of art and design in educational settings. Led by the School of Art’s Outreach Support Tutor and external outreach staff the college draws on training and support offered to School of Art Outreach Ambassadors, a team of current students trained to support in the delivery of the School’s outreach program, to develop knowledge of lesson planning, behaviour management and learning styles. This knowledge is then applied by Unit X students in work experience placements at schools and organisations across Manchester.
My role within Unit X, as Research and Evaluation Intern, required me to undertake a series of case studies highlighting the challenges and benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration for students and staff. These case studies included an evaluation of College One: Educator, through which I attended teaching sessions and conducted interviews with staff and students.

During teaching sessions, led by faculty Outreach Manager Clare Knox-Bentham and Outreach Tutor Anna Frew, level 5 students in the Educator college were required to prepare a ten minute microteaching lesson based on a subject of their choosing, delivered to peers and tutors, with feedback given through anonymous evaluation sheets.

![Figure 1 Students take part in a peer's microteaching session](image)

Alongside my role within Unit X I have taken part in a variety of staff development programmes within CELT. After attending CELT’s Greenhouse sessions, monthly sessions during which staff from across the university meet and share innovative ideas for learning and teaching, I took part in the Teaching and Learning Essentials (TALE) course, which included sessions focused on microteaching as a tool for developing practice.

The delivery of these microteaching sessions coincided with my observation of microteaching as a learning tool within Unit X, providing me with an opportunity to consider microteaching as a tool for learning, teaching and staff development.
For Unit X students the inclusion of microteaching in a unit focused on arts education offered an opportunity for them to test out teaching delivery in a supportive environment before they were required to present to a public audience. It also gave them a chance to reflect on each other’s delivery and resources. Below are two examples of student feedback submitted as part of their reflective blogs.

‘During this session I learnt a lot of things about hosting a teaching session. This session didn’t go exactly as I had planned it… I definitely feel as though if I prepared a little more the outcome would have been … better.’

‘I was pleased with my workshop even though we did run out of time… but I did get some good feedback… All these comments will really help me with the planning for the [upcoming work placement] and will help influence other people as well.’

However, as Ralph (2014) demonstrates, microteaching also has its disadvantages within teaching. Apparent among students taking part was the stress of presenting to peers, which may have distracted them from technical aspects of session delivery. The requirement that ‘all participants buy-in’ (Ralph, 2014) also presented problems for some groups, where peers were less enthusiastic or more nervous about taking part. However, both these disadvantages could be addressed using a technique I observed in the TALE course: the implementation of ground rules for microteaching sessions (see Figure 2 below).

Overall I felt that the controlled setting and potential for self-reflection provided by the Unit X microteaching sessions were beneficial to students preparing for their first experience of classroom teaching. Peer evaluation sheets allowed participants to gather ‘in the moment’ feedback on their performance, which they could act on straightaway. Observing peers’ teaching styles heightened their sense of reflection, asking themselves, ‘is that how I’d approach that?’ or ‘do I respond in that way?’

Similarly, the peer assessment aspect of delivering microteaching sessions within TALE was the most valuable aspect of that course, highlighting examples of good and poor practice I had not been aware of. For example, I discovered the need to pay closer attention to inclusive practice, such as facing students when speaking to aid
with lip reading, and ensuring visual resources are clear and appropriate for dyslexic learners. Applying these techniques in subsequent lessons I have been able to embed inclusive practice in lesson plans and develop a more inclusive classroom environment.

Figure 2 Suggestions for microteaching ground rules at the TALE Microteaching session

Attending the Unit X session, and observing how students reacted to their first solo teaching experience, was also valuable in shining a light on my own practice, and highlighting what I’m getting right as well as wrong. I was pleased to reflect on how much my confidence has increased in delivery, allowing me to improvise more in sessions, read the room and respond more directly to the requirements of student groups, and deliver to a wider variety of groups, as well as making my sessions more enjoyable for myself and participants.

However, I also reflected on things I’m less successful at. My background delivering informal sessions means I rarely consider concrete learning outcomes, and even more rarely communicate these during sessions. This was shared by participants in the Educator session, who showed a general vagueness and confusion between learning outcomes and learning activities. With this in mind, in defining learning outcomes for my own microteaching I have found it useful to follow the advice that each outcome should be able to be ‘preced[ed] with something like “Students will be able to…”’ (Iowa
State University, 2015), as well as MMU's own guidance on using a structure of ‘what the student will do… in which context… how well s/he will do it’ (CELT, 2015). I also found it useful to refer to Anderson and Krathwohl’s revision of Bloom’s ‘Taxonomy of Educational Objectives’ (2001) to define the cognitive and knowledge dimensions of the session.

Engaging in microteaching has had two key impacts on my practice: first, a greater appreciation of my own style of delivery and how this matches or differs from colleagues; and second, a greater understanding of the value of inclusive practice in delivery. Within level 5 student microteaching sessions I was able to observe similar outcomes, demonstrating the benefit of microteaching as a learning and teaching tool at a range of educational levels.

References


Further Reading