Introducing Active Learning into Lectures: an example on Plagiarism Regulations

Debbi WEAVER,
Swinburne University of Technology, Lilydale, Australia

ABSTRACT

Academic staff often find it difficult to introduce active learning principles into lectures, where the room design often prohibits movement and focuses attention on the teacher. This paper describes a new interactive quiz on plagiarism, and discusses how this resource was used in a lecture to trigger lively class discussion. The quiz (and how it was incorporated into the lecture format) will be demonstrated at the forum presentation.

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education are increasingly claiming to incorporate active learning strategies in their teaching (as recommended by Biggs, 2003; Chickering & Gamson, 1987), but few academic teachers actually implement active learning into their lectures (Ramsden, 2003).

Many staff (and students) are under the assumption that lectures, being generally conducted in a non-friendly environment for student movement and collaboration, must therefore be didactic presentations, and so leave any collaborative work for practical or tutorial sessions. While there is no doubt that the classic lecture theatre is not the ideal venue for active learning, with a little bit of preparation, activities can be incorporated into classes held in lecture theatres.

It is important to reconsider what the purpose of the lecture is – traditionally, we have intended lectures to be the major information-delivery interaction, and relied on smaller classes (tutorials, practical classes etc) for more interactive learning (eg. practical skills-building, problem-solving, case scenarios etc). However, research over many years has proved that students take in very little information during lectures, and often this is the only source for this crucial information.

“A lecture could hardly be considered successful if it 'covered' the appropriate part of the syllabus and yet students retained little of what was said or were not guided in their private study” (Sloman & Mitchell, 2002, section 1.2).

The technical advances in recent years has meant that students have access to a vast amount of material online, either via open websites, or via online units in learning management systems, as well as any texts proscribed by the teaching staff. By providing guidance to key reading material, and allowing students the opportunity to explore further into areas of interest, we can remove the key information delivery focus from the lecture into personal study time, when students are more able to read at their own pace, check points of interest or confusion, and take notes meaningful to themselves.
This means the lecture can be freed for concentrating on key concepts and undertaking activities designed to explain or apply these concepts.

This paper presents an example of a small lecture given recently at Swinburne University, to introduce the concepts of Copyright and Plagiarism to incoming students. An understanding of this topic is essential to all students studying in Australia, but is usually presented as dry and uninteresting information, focused on the requirements of national legislation and university policy.

**The Plagiarism quiz**

Incoming students are required to develop a basic understanding of the relevant copyright legislation, to recognise plagiarism when it occurs, and to understand that plagiarism is considered cheating and is not tolerated at Swinburne (see [http://www.swinburne.edu.au/ltas/plagiarism/students.html](http://www.swinburne.edu.au/ltas/plagiarism/students.html)). This topic is often presented to students with a focus on the punishment aspects of being caught plagiarising, rather than focussing on identifying and avoiding plagiarism.

To help students understand plagiarism, we have produced an interactive self-assessment quiz, using a comic-book type character to present a series of scenarios. The scenarios are examples where a student has used or quoted information from other sources, and students are asked identify whether or not plagiarism has occurred. Feedback is provided, including the correct way to use the relevant information without committing plagiarism.

A screenshot showing an example scenario is shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Example scenario](image)

The quiz has been designed as both a standalone, web-based self-assessment tool, and also as a resource for triggering discussion in a lecture-type presentation. It is this later function which is the focus of this paper.
The Copyright & Plagiarism lecture

Newly-enrolled students at the Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale are required to attend an induction day, prior to the start of semester, which includes an official welcome from the Dean and a number of presentations or workshops on a range of topics designed to help incoming students get started at University. One of the key presentations is on Copyright & Plagiarism, and this year, we trialled our new plagiarism quiz in this presentation.

The presenter began with a few PowerPoint slides, defining the key terms and concepts in this topic (i.e. information delivery), then used the interactive quiz for the majority of the presentation (i.e. applying the key concepts). A scenario was presented to the class, and students were asked to indicate to the rest of the class whether this was plagiarism or not. A key aspect here was that the presenter moved away from the lectern, and moved up into the lecture theatre, so as to engage more closely with students, and to remove the focus away from the teacher. Once students had decided on their answer, a few students were randomly selected to explain their decision further – with the presenter choosing students who had opposing views. Where possible, the presenter proposed counter-arguments or additional questions, attempting to trigger discussion between different students in the classroom. Students were then asked to again vote whether the example represented plagiarism or not, and the correct answer (and feedback) was then revealed (using the interactive quiz). In most cases, this again triggered further discussion, and the presenter was able to elaborate on any areas of confusion which still existed, before moving on to the next scenario.

Feedback from staff

No feedback was collected from students for this first use of this resource, so the only feedback available is from the staff present. The presenter’s perception was that students seemed to be enjoying the session, and appeared to be engaging with the material. There was a high level of lively discussion and debate across the lecture theatre, and the session raised many issues, of which students were previously unaware.

A colleague who was also present provided the following feedback (by email):
“I was impressed and delighted to see the way in which your interactive plagiarism presentation engaged the students. It was only their first day - but you managed to get them involved in discussion and debate at a deep level. They obviously enjoyed it, and were motivated to continue to explore the issues after class. Thank you!” (Ros Smith, personal communication)

CONCLUSIONS

This paper describes the introduction of a new interactive self-assessment quiz on plagiarism, and the use of this resource in a lecture-type presentation to trigger active discussion among students. The quiz will be demonstrated at the forum, as an example of how to incorporate active learning principles into lectures. The quiz is also available online, at http://www.swinburne.edu.au/ads/showcase/plagiarismQuiz.htm and is supplied free of charge on your Swinburne USB.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Plagiarism quiz was developed by a team from Academic Development & Support, at Swinburne University of Technology. Team members included: Debbi Weaver, Diane Robbie, Evan Menogue, Ying Guo, Joe Malignaggi and Terry Young.

REFERENCES


