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A phased implementation of the TRAAC model in an accounting module

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Introduction

The context for this case study is an accounting module at a UK university with a commitment to widening participation in higher education for underrepresented groups. Our students come from a diverse range of backgrounds so within the class we had students from a number of different ethnicities. The class included students who joined the university via one of our extended four year programmes, as well as students who belong to the group which has come to be termed 'commuter students', meaning that they live at home and not in halls of residence. This is so that they can continue with their part-time jobs, or they have other responsibilities to manage outside of the university, at the same time as they are studying. It is extremely important that any attempt to make the curriculum more inclusive considers the needs of these different groups, which, of course, are not mutually exclusive. Whilst the TRAAC model is useful across a range of inclusion issues, its main purpose is to assist in decolonizing the curriculum. The university has a strategic focus on addressing the attainment gap for BAME students and we have started to see some success in this area within the faculty (Warren and Reilly 2019). The TRAAC model has provided a way to operationalize that strategy at the module level in order to contribute to efforts across the faculty and wider institution to shrink and ultimately eliminate the gap.

I have found the TRAAC model to be very useful because it provides prompts in relation to particular areas where the inclusivity of my practice might be enhanced. Although the model highlights four main areas with corresponding questions for consideration, this case study shows how it is not a requirement to review all areas concurrently the first time the model is used in order to start to apply it. I have also learned that it is unnecessary to

make huge changes in order to gain benefits from using the model. Personally, I have found it helpful to focus on two areas initially: Teaching approach; and Activity and Assessment. Having used the model to guide me as I consider the various facets of an inclusive curriculum in these areas, next year I shall concentrate on how the model can help me to improve my practice in relation to the remaining areas of Content and Relationship.

Teaching approach

The technical nature of accounting lends itself to a teaching style where a lecturer explains a topic and demonstrates how to perform a particular calculation in order to answer a question. Therefore, as an accounting lecturer, my favoured teaching approach has been to use a front-led lecture style. However, the TRAAC model highlights the benefit of a participatory learning environment. Therefore, I designed the module's sessions so that a main learning activity was a research project, conducted in groups, enabling students to learn from one another in order to create knowledge together. To introduce this type of activity necessitated arranging for the provision of laptops for students to use because very few bring their own. The provision of laptops in this way made the sessions very inclusive and considered the needs of students who cannot afford to buy a laptop.

I was able to move around the room and sit with students in their groups to discuss their ideas and progress made on the project, thereby using dialogue to alter the perceived imbalance of power between lecturer and student. Many sessions start with a short introductory talk from the lecturer before students work in their research groups which is when I circulate among them. However, an honest application of the model has highlighted a lack of variety in my teaching approach. Next year, we shall use video clips to reinforce some of the module content. We shall look for videos which (a) are short; (b) are on a relevant topic; and, if possible, (c) have a presenter or focus which reflects the diversity of the students in the class. The final point is important because this is a small module with only two people on the teaching team, both of whom are white and female. I hope that we

can use a few videos to provide different voices which more students can identify with in order to enhance the sense of belonging within the academic community for all students.

Activity and Assessment

The TRAAC model points to the importance of considering the needs of the student body in designing assessment because different methods of assessment and support can favour particular groups over others. For example, in a joint research project, the Institute for Policy Studies in Education, and London Metropolitan University (2011) suggest that assessment by examination disadvantages BAME students compared to their white peers. There is no exam in the module being discussed but it remains relevant to consider how we assess and support students. For example, as 'commuter students', many of the class can find it a challenge to set aside time for their studies. Some students lack confidence in asking for feedback, especially if they have not done as much work as they think we are expecting to see ahead of that kind of request. To respond to this, we introduced a comprehensive process of verbal feedback into the module. The assessment structure was set up with a linked series of assignments being an initial individual report, a group presentation and a final individual report.

On reflection, the role which feedforward had in one assignment to help students apply comments in their subsequent assignment was subtle, and I wanted to give more specific feedforward comments ahead of each assignment. At this point, I must say that not everything which we planned was successful. Specifically, I offered written feedback on the draft initial report but very few students engaged with that. Straight away we changed our plans, rather than waiting for the next academic year, and offered dialogic feedback on both the mock presentation and draft final report through conversations at scheduled appointments. There were still some students who did not engage with those meetings, but many did. Some students came with no draft final report but wanted to join in, and a conversation provided an inclusive approach to formative feedback because we could discuss their ideas and I could answer questions.

Content

Looking forward to the coming academic year, I am using the TRAAC model to reflect on the Content of the module and on my Relationship with students. Last year I allowed students to select their own choice of company for the research activity, enabling them to participate in designing their own curriculum. I had intended this to make students feel included and thereby maximise engagement with the research exercise, but their choice of companies had a strong UK focus. This may have been because it is easier to find information on UK companies for students who are doing web-based research in the UK. However, next year I shall try to offer suggestions of companies with boards of directors made up of diverse ethnicities in order to enhance the international perspective on the module and to take the opportunity to provide aspirational role models to our BAME students.

Relationship

Approximately a third to half of the students in the class have been taught by me before through their participation in the initial 'foundation' year of their extended programme. This certainly aids the relationship between the lecturer and some of the students in the class. However, the TRAAC model has caused me to reflect on the alternative perspective which is how the other students view their relationship with me. This is something to be mindful of, especially in the first few weeks of the module when I need to be active in trying to find shared connections with all students.

Conclusion

I have found the TRAAC model to be an extremely useful guide in helping me start to make my module more inclusive both for students with different ethnicities and commuter students. The model has therefore helped me to consider multiple perspectives which have an impact on the experience and attainment of students. In the context of the module in this short case study it has been helpful to use a phased adoption by prioritising Teaching approach, and

Activity and Assessment in the first year and then moving to focus on Content and Relationship for the second year. I also plan to return regularly to the model to undertake an 'inclusivity health check' in the future. Indeed, I have already done so in the area of Teaching approach.

References

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