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Introduction
A more structured student contribution to their own and other students learning proved to be a useful mechanism for generating early engagement with material, as reported in cycle 2. This third teaching innovation is similarly intended to engage students with material, in this case deepening their appreciation of the literature in a module concerned with the stability of the international financial system. Again after Biggs (2001) the emphasis is on fostering an active learning environment with clearly defined goals for the exercise. There is also a more explicit requirement in this cycle for students to work within groups. The students concerned are self motivated and largely as interested in learning as they are in obtaining their certificate at the end of the year\(^1\). Conflating group work and assessment as a motivational mechanism was not therefore thought necessary, especially given the lower intensity of student work intended for this exercise\(^2\).

Description of innovation
Students are asked to work in groups of 3-4 preparing a short presentation summarising an academic paper from the module reading list. Presentations are then made to the relevant seminar group towards the end of the module.

There are several objectives to this innovation

a) Assignments are given relatively early in the semester concerned and relate to topics covered during the first half of the module. This innovation is therefore intended to foster continued engagement with the literature.

b) Group working skills are developed during the course of this non assessed exercise as are presentational skills. Further, within group support and peer teaching are fostered with benefits anticipated for learning across both this and other modules.

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\(^1\) A finding that contrasts that of Colander (2004) who does not find that such students are the norm.

\(^2\) Ruel et al (2003) detail some of the dangers associated with free riding when group work is assessed. The merits of feedback without presentation of formal grades is also discussed by Pirsig (1976).
c) Reading is designed to stretch and further develop the students ability to critically evaluate arguments.

Concerns

The timing of the presentations is such that there is overlap with assessment deadlines, requiring effective time management by the students. The presentations are non-assessed and so priorities may bias against students working effectively together in order to prepare their presentations.

Means to evaluate

Principally the quality of the students presentations will provide a means to evaluate the extent of their engagement with the material and ability to integrate what they have learnt from the papers into the broader module material. Examination performance might also be reflective of the further engagement with the material. My continuing practice is to engage students in discussion as to the merits (or otherwise) of my teaching approach and cycle 3 presents no exception to this.

Report on cycle 3

Implementation

Students were given one months notice of the requirement to present a summary of an article in a specified seminar. Sub groups of 3-4 were arranged with each to present a summary of a separate paper from a collected volume. The seminar leader determined who was in each group, ensuring wherever possible a balance of nationalities, educational background and gender though of course with small groups there were only a few degrees of freedom.

Progress notes / evaluation

Technical questions were raised during my office hours by a small number of students though typically the groups appeared content with the objectives of the exercise and what they were required to do. The quality of presentations varied from good to very good. Only one group had failed to fully prepare though I noted that all members of the group had read the article they were assigned and were able to engage
in discussions during the seminar/plenary session. Both discussions and presentations suggested that the students had integrated their reading into their broader understanding of the module material. With one exception all members of the group were involved in the presentations and had clearly discussed who would present each component. Some groups requested data projection equipment and this was provided. Such presentations were generally very well structured.

When questioned about the tutorials over 80% of respondents stated that these assisted in their understanding of the material and that their participation was encouraged (D11.2). My concern over the possible clash with assignment deadlines appeared to be unfounded as none of the students felt that the amount of time for completion of assessed work was unreasonable (see D11.2). Examination results were encouraging, though with the caveat that the intake for the year seemed particularly strong and so comparison with previous years results may be misleading. Groups worked effectively together to complete the tasks, I had no efforts at group switching nor complaints about students failing to make a useful contribution to any group. De Vita (2001) reported that the allocation of students to groups by the lecturer, together with an explanation of the principles behind group allocation forestalled such problems and led to a richer learning experience. I am able to report the same, though with postgraduate students one might expect a more mature attitude.

Implications for future teaching activities

I am considering making the presentations an assessed component of the module, though it would only comprise a small proportion of the overall marks. The objective is for the exercise to be formative, however the summative element may ensure a more even spread of effort across the sub groups and so prevent any possible free riding in future. The MSc group is typically hard working and involved and consequently the gains from making the work assessed may be more marked if adopted for a undergraduate module.

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3 As noted earlier the assignment for this module was typically on material covered earlier in the term and so the examinations presented a better means to evaluate the success of the innovation.