



Refining the traditional flipped-classroom model: Teaching students HOW to think, not WHAT to think

Dan Berger and Charles Wild, University of Hertfordshire

'Flipped-classroom' models invert the student → lecturer face-to-face contact/at home elements, from the traditional 'lecture/homework' method to the 'online lecture/classroom' method. In schools, where content-based learning is an appropriate methodology, this has been proved to be an effective way to improve understanding, increase student engagement and raise academic standards. However, at university level, there is an additional benefit to the flipped-classroom which goes beyond that of merely improving efficiency in dissemination and assimilation of information: it allows and encourages students to develop critical reasoning skills in a way which the traditional method of delivery does not explicitly provide for.

In university legal assessments, students are expected to construct qualitative arguments, supported by quantitative authority. In essence, the symbiosis between quality (subjective argument) and quantity (external authority) is rewarded, where a student has demonstrated that they have deeply considered social, political and economic factors, and then supported their position using appropriate legitimate authority. The crucial difference between university and school, therefore, is that authority can never be used to construct an argument, but merely to support it, as the argument itself must derive from the student. The reason for this, is that states of quality and quantity are not mutually exclusive – meaning that a person's beliefs are informed by the world around him, and a 'leap of faith' is required to believe that the world around him is true. Therefore, at school level, the assumption is that the average pupil does not possess enough quantity to be able to make an unaided qualitative argument, but, at university, a student should have accrued the necessary skills to do so. This stance is supported by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education's aims for a law graduate's attributes, which should include the...:

- *Ability to produce a synthesis of relevant doctrinal and policy issues, presentations of a reasoned choice between alternative solutions and critical judgment of the merits of particular arguments*
- *Ability to apply knowledge and understanding to offer evidenced conclusions, addressing complex actual or hypothetical problems*

...but not in the English school's statutory national curriculum for key stages 3 and 4 framework document, which merely states as its main aim: '*The national curriculum provides pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge that they need to be educated citizens. It introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said; and helps engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement*'.

But how does the university student derive his own qualitative argument? The authors assert that this must come from the student's own experiences and knowledge of the world. Authority can do no more than resonate with the student, and no authority can ever be considered 'right', which is why content-based learning, which might be useful at school - where a pupil's knowledge and experience is unlikely to be sufficiently fully formed – is not appropriate for undergraduate degree assessment, where the better student is expected to bring a novel contribution.

It is this novel contribution, supported with authority, which the authors assert in this paper is at the heart of critical reasoning – a key skill, which when utilised correctly leads to legal assessment success – and which is best developed in the flipped-classroom model. The authors assert that their refinement to the traditional flipped-classroom, by adding a tutor-led skills lecture element, which acts as a mirror to a student-led workshop, provides the optimum framework to allow students to increase their critical reasoning skills, and excel in their assessments.