

The “Inverted Classroom” as a Writing Lab based on the Course AWO: Academic Writing Online

Petra Hauptfeld¹

Abstract

New teaching and learning designs emerged highlighting the individual learning process of students in the last two decades. This means a redefinition of the traditional roles teachers and students hold in education as well as a remodeling of learning designs. Taking into account environmental changes the University of Applied Sciences Burgenland developed a p.learning strategy shifting the students in the center of education. Based on this strategy combined with the Inverted Classroom Model (ICM) the paper presents a teaching design for a writing class using the Academic Writing Online Course AWO, developed for this purpose. The paper concentrates on the special requirements and steps of implementation when using this course within the ICM and shows a teaching unit considering the three phases of self-study, online learning and work in class. Despite a time-consuming preparation when teaching with the ICM the article should stimulate teachers to engage in this method for a more efficient and satisfactory way of instruction.

1. Reinventing personality in class: p.learning strategy and ICM

We are at a cutting edge of educational transformation. This transformation is promoted by the undoubted use of technology in class, the increase of diverse student groups and internationalisation processes. Moreover information transfer does not naturally mean to generate knowledge. This provokes the question: Who is nowadays creating relevant knowledge in class? Alison King states that “rather, knowledge is a state of understanding and can only exist in the mind of the individual knower; as such, knowledge must be constructed” [1]. If knowledge and meaning are constructed in class, the roles of students and teachers change in the way of a more equal and less hierarchical teaching. Consequently this approach is considering the personality of students as “(...) the constructivist model places students at the center of the process (...)” [2].

Highlighting personality in class requires didactical implications that have been developed and applied at the UAS Burgenland within the p.learning-strategy [3]. This personalized learning strategy combines individual settings of students with innovative methods and technology. All study degree programs include three learning phases that can be linked as needed. A phase is characterised by contact hours, another phase is online and a third phase includes self-study periods. For the presented Academic Writing class (5 ECTS in total) the phases are implemented as following: The contact phase includes 20 hours, the online phase of 10 hours is used for personal feedback from the teacher via the learning platform “factline”. During the self-study phase of 95 hours the students work with the Academic Writing Online course AWO, watching the videos, preparing activities for the contact phase and writing the final assignment. This allows a most flexible arrangement of learning methods and contexts especially favoured by part-time students: “The learners and their individual and professional context are in the centre of the didactical planning” [4].

2. The ICM based on the Academic Writing Online course AWO

For many students writing their Bachelor or Master thesis is a major hurdle, especially when studying part time, abroad or coming from second chance education. In order to support these student groups the UAS Burgenland developed the Academic Writing Online course AWO based on a two years' EU-funded project within the call 2014/Strategic Partnerships [5]. The course includes six modules in seven languages presenting core topics of Academic Writing. Every module includes 15 lectures with text units, activities and instructional videos giving explanatory advices. This allows teaching a kind of bulky subject in a more flexible way.

¹ University of Applied Sciences Burgenland, Austria



2.1. Requirements for implementation

The use of the course AWO within the inverted classroom implies certain requirements, not only for students but for teachers as well. Increased preparation time is needed, especially when the videos have to be produced. Concerning the course AWO the EU funding facilitated this production. In addition, the combination of contact hours and self-study periods needs to be precisely planned. Teachers have to feel comfortable with the new kind of method and the students have to get familiar with this teaching and learning design as well. Personal experiences show that they are not used to a less hierarchical communication in class especially when coming from Eastern Europe where traditional teaching models are favoured. “However, students do not spontaneously engage in active learning; they must be prompted to do so” [6]. Getting students used to the model the teacher has to introduce it at first – “the precise design of learning arrangements for self study is the core process of the Inverted Classroom Model” [7].

The contents and activities have to be provided via the course AWO, not in class, otherwise the students will not use the online course as they rely on the teachers’ instructions. During the self-study periods students may also struggle when not being used to self-directed learning processes. Personal responsibility is required to comply with the tasks. Furthermore watching instructional videos at home may resemble traditional teaching. Lecturers could avoid these obstacles by introducing the method, fostering students, designing interesting tasks and using Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning [8].

2.2. Three steps of implementation

If the course AWO is used within the ICM and if the students are not familiar with the method three steps should be planned to tackle the issue. “For those who accept the challenge, an introduction step by step is recommended”[9]. The length of each step may vary according to the activities that have been selected and the basic conditions of the university class. The ICM allows a most flexible use of parts of the online course AWO. Between the contact hour lessons enough time has to be calculated to give students the chance to prepare the tasks carefully.

The first step includes work with AWO in class. At the beginning of the contact hour the teacher could choose module 1: “Scientific Work – Introduction”, lecture 6 “Preparing the Writing Process”, dealing with the finding of a topic. The activity within the lecture is “Coming up with an actual title and formulating the research question”. The teacher assists the students in finding the topic as students always have problems to narrow down the research question. The teaching yet is more or less traditional but with a higher contribution of the students. Moving forward to the second step means to introduce the topic for the next contact hour in class: The teacher presents the topic in a more general way and instructs the students to prepare it in a detailed way based on the course AWO. To be sure that the task will be done the teacher could hand out core questions on this topic, e.g. for module 1 “Scientific Work – Introduction”, lecture 14 “Accurate Wording” questions like “What is important concerning scientific wording?” or “Give examples of adverbs starting a sentence”, “What should be avoided at all costs?” This ensures that all students in are at the same level of knowledge. Finally the third step represents the inverted classroom itself. The students are working on lectures and activities at home and present the results in class, giving each other feedback according to a structured process.

3. Teaching Academic Writing with the ICM

Taking into account the p.learning strategy of the UAS Burgenland and the ICM based on the online course AWO a teaching unit will be demonstrated in this section, assuming that we have midterm in the Academic Writing university class.

3.1. Self-study phase (8 hours)

Let us assume that the topic of a contact hour is scientific argumentation so the students are told to read AWO module 1/lecture 10 (scientific argumentation) and AWO module 1/lecture 11 (how to structure an argument). The course AWO does not follow the common chapter structure of working manuals or lecture notes and therefore provides the most flexible use. Teachers and students can easily select the topics that should be worked on in class. In this way the course AWO guarantees a maximum of individualized teaching and learning that goes together with the inverted classroom model very well. Students can easily switch between the single modules and lectures in order to repeat or work on the selected material.

Additionally they have to prepare the activity of lecture 11 “Structuring your Argumentation” The video shown in lecture 11 is supporting this activity by explaining an argumentation chain: claim – argument – example – conclusion. The students are told that they can read the lecture and watch the video as



often as they like, which gives weaker students the chance to catch up. The students are asked to answer self-check-questions on the one hand and to pose questions on the videos for the contact phase on the other hand as the videos should be combined with prompting methods to get the students engaged [10]. The instructional videos were not recorded in class but in a studio in order to address the students personally. No video is longer than seven minutes as concentration is decreasing rapidly. Within a defined deadline the students have to upload the activity on the learning platform “factline”.

3.2. Online phase (15-20 minutes per student)

They now get feedback on their argumentation chain from the teacher on “factline”. This is done either in a personalized way or via a discussion forum. If the feedback is delicate, the personal way is recommended. The teacher should try to formulate in an accurate and not offending way which means to be sensitive towards the texts of students. This requires elaborated feedback skills. The discussion forum is an appropriate plenary for debates and questions on the topic that can be started by a general feedback from the teacher on the texts of the students. At the end of this phase the students are obliged to revise their argumentation chains again for the presentation in class.

3.3. Contact phase (4 hours)

In this phase the students present their texts not only to the teacher but to their peers in order to get feedback from them and to improve the text anew. The teacher figures as a moderator or coach assisting the students in this process. Students accept feedback more easily from their peers, they apply the theory to external texts that makes them better understand their own difficulties and they improve their writing by reflecting the texts of others.

Even if the teacher is not in a dominant role some preconditions have to be taken into account, furthermore peer-feedback does not replace the teachers’ professional comments on the texts. The teacher has to instruct the students how to give feedback in a productive way. This reduces stress because writing texts always means personal exposure to students, so the teacher has to develop sensible feedback skills and train students these skills. S/he has to choose an appropriate method, *how* the students should interact during their peer processes, moreover s/he has to take care of this structure and s/he has to develop the criteria on *what* the students should concentrate when giving feedback. King states that “the professor’s role is to facilitate students’ interaction with the material and with each other in their knowledge-producing endeavor” [11].

4. Conclusion

Mazur [12] developed a strategy he called peer instruction, published in 1997 when the ICM emerged. He favored the approach of coaching students in class instead of teaching ex-cathedra. Thus he influenced the development of the inverted classroom in a fundamental way. Peer group learning means for students to take over responsibility for their writing – so one can say that the inverted classroom figures as model for an emancipatory process – empowering students to count on their individual strengths.

References

- [1] King, A. (1993): From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side, *College Teaching*, 41 (1), p. 30 (retrieved: 11 Apr 2016)
- [2] King (1993), p. 30
- [3] FH Burgenland (Hg.): *The p.learning strategy - personalized learning at the University of Applied Sciences Burgenland*, Eisenstadt, Austria, 2015
- [4] *p-learning-strategy of the UAS Burgenland*, p. 1, translation: P. Hauptfeld
- [5] Hauptfeld, P. (2014): *Application Erasmus+/Strategic Partnerships, call 2014 in Austria*
- [6] King (1993), p. 31
- [7] Wagner, H. (2016): *Inverted Classroom in der Hochschuldidaktik*. In: Haag, J., Freisleben-Teutscher, C. F. (Hg.): *Das Inverted Classroom Modell. Begleitband zur 5. Konferenz Inverted Classroom and Beyond 2016*, FH St. Pölten, S. 155, translation: P. Hauptfeld
- [8] King (1993), p. 34
- [9] Morisse, K. (2016): *Inverted Classroom in der Hochschule. Chance, Hemmnisse und Erfolgsfaktoren*. In: Haag, Johann, Freisleben-Teutscher, Christian F. (Hg.): *Das Inverted Classroom Modell. Begleitband zur 5. Konferenz Inverted Classroom and Beyond 2016*, FH St. Pölten, S. 24, translation: P. Hauptfeld



- [10] Fallmann, I.; Reinthaler, P. (2016): Bedeutung und Förderung von selbstreguliertem Lernen im Inverted Classroom. In: Haag, Johann, Freisleben-Teutscher, Christian F. (Hg.): Das Inverted Classroom Modell. Begleitband zur 5. Konferenz Inverted Classroom and Beyond 2016, FH St. Pölten, S. 51, paraphrasing: P. Hauptfeld
- [11] King (1993), p. 30
- [12] Mazur, E. (1997): Peer Instruction. A User's Manual, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Series in Educational Innovation