# Don’t be a sage, get off the stage.

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Contemporary business school education which makes an impact on society should be engaging, needs to be engaging and it must have a purpose. That purpose cannot centre solely on the interests and personality of the academic, however charismatic they may be. Business school students must be part of the learning experience; we should be moving towards a space where hierarchical delivery driven by the academic does not dominate the teaching and learning agenda. Long standing empirical and conceptual work tells us that there are many ways to learn, and learning requires engagement, and engagement demands greater involvement than some of the more passive recipient bystander roles allow. If learning is a journey, we need to drive the expansion of opportunities to allow learners to participate in choosing the direction of travel to the end goal?

As educators we need to consider the role of tasks and our expectations of student endeavours. In this ever-evolving learning environment (beyond covid-19), with an ever-increasing emphasis on student experience and engagement, should we now reject assessment of learning the conventional exam, essay, or report format? Amongst the most important future-proof practices in HE is the promotion of active learning and the facilitation of student co-operation in the learning process – a promising practice espoused over 3 decades ago (Chickering and Gamson, 1991). To achieve this, we need to move beyond the traditional lecturer-to-students approach to a more dynamic teaching and learning environments.

It could and should be argued this is what is happening, however in a survey by the Department of business innovation and skills (Department of Business innovation and Skills, 2014), student representatives were asked about the mechanisms by which students can shape their academic experience. Although there was a large majority 64% saying either improved provision or improved for *some* disciplines, 36% said no existing provision or not aware of any steps to improve this. Although this proves change and improvement is happening there is still work to do.

We suggest five elements which may support this cultural change:

1. Expand **co-creation of learning and assessment**

Involving students in owning their route to knowledge through interaction with live events or design of class-based activities allows students the opportunity to apply knowledge and respond to the consequences of the decisions they make. As students interact with the content, they also shape it so the design of content and assessment requires a degree of flexibility to account for diversity of student responses while retaining coherence of final outcomes. The benefits of student expression and voice add behavioural growth to academic knowledge and our question is should academics be more of a knowledgeable facilitator, guiding, signposting along the route to the completion of an assessment task? ([read about inclusive approaches to co-creation here](https://charteredabs.org/adapting-co-creation-for-inclusion-around-business-schools/)).

1. Expand **student-as-partners** and peer-social-learning

Students are successful when they are partners in their own learning journey. Joining a gym won’t result in fitness without regular effort and engagement with exercise. The same principle applies to engagement and involvement in HE. It has been found by practitioners (Cecchinato and Foschi, 2017) that they increased the effectiveness of a course and improvement some of its crucial aspects by discarding frontal teaching in favour of an active and experiential learning strategy inspired by the flipped classroom method. This partnership approach should be highlighted to students as soon as they start their course and reinforced throughout their university journey. Treating students as partners can enable them to take responsibility for their learning, moving them away from reliance on more passive learning models. This is more than just group work, the understanding from students and lecturers that everyone has something they can bring to the party, is an invaluable notion (Wall and Tran, 2016). Social learning, aided by the right technology, can create a fun and interesting environment for students to learn. As well as developing some key social skills, learning takes place in all directions and allows students to be part of a community. It also helps students who are struggling to get going, feel confident and value their ideas as long as they feel safe and supported.

1. Expand multiple **routes** to reach outcomes

If we continue with the concept of a learning journey, we need to consider the route. If we consider the students as partners and co-creators, then understanding that there may be different ways of reaching an end point becomes critical to student responsibility for learning. Academics will have designed the content structure, will know the start and end, but between those two points there are many different paths. The selection of the path should be that of the student, exploring through experimentation and co-creation, using peer learning and being treated as an equal to choose and optimize the best route for them. What is to be optimized is also in the students’ control, be it time, experiences, opportunities, all of these or something else. In theory it may change for the student at each step, producing a richly complex and bespoke experience. The destination may be reached by longer or shorter routes with different pauses for support, additional knowledge or the life needs of differing students. So, if a student has a list of activities and steps required to reach their destination between them, their choice of path be it circuitous, longer or shorter, will own ‘shortest’ path, will result in a more interesting and engaging learning journey.

1. Expand **experimentation – both practices and mindsets**

Creating more fluid routes to achieve outcomes needs those designing educational experiences in business schools to be open and accepting of experimentation. This has been a long-standing idea when teaching science, Solomon (1988) states that for practical work to be convincing it requires that the learner becomes a *'partisan experimenter*'. The introduction of simulations and live events provide students with a safe space to experiment and test different ideas and potential solutions (see [Liliana Neriz and colleagues review of gamification in management education here](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14703297.2019.1631874)). Project based learning can be particularly effective in moving students out of their comfort zones. Learning through trying and succeeding (or not) is a very useful tool, giving students opportunity to critically appraise options and context; in an increasingly complex world, solutions are more likely to be multifaceted (Wheeler et al., 2020). Given the possibility of many different perspectives and routes to problem resolution, academics need to ensure that the learning process remains within the intended boundaries while allowing student freedom to achieve their learning and professional goals in multiple ways.

1. Commit to **equality**

Students should see a lecturer as a guide, not a hierarchal figure dictating the journey. The academic may often have greater knowledge, but the students can bring contextual differences and experience which can test the limits of that knowledge. As such, differing experiences can become learning assets for all to benefit from (Wall and Tran, 2016). The confidence students can gain through having their views respected and validated through their own learning journey and that of others brings a richer dimension to the outcomes of our teaching and learning practice.

As the world faces ongoing challenges, we need more complex knowledge. We send a pedagogical reminder to what we already know: “don’t be a sage, get off the stage”, and let knowledge grow around, in and through the stage, tearing it up for a new platform for socially responsible business and management knowledge.

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